

Zhang Ding

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Pry, 2005, Film still from the video installation

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Unapologetically touching upon the notion of voyeuristic spectatorship, Zhang Ding's filmic installation *Pry* (2005 ongoing) seem to probe the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, superiority and inferiority, and exploiter and the exploited. But this is done with a seldom sensitivity and un-judgmental loyalty towards the featured destinies, all of which share a common denominator of being different. These differences are manifested sexually, religiously, and politically, and often with severe consequences to the protagonists. The installation – that also entails photographic footage – participates in the tradition of socially conscious documentary film. Most touching and thought provoking is the story of a middle-aged transvestite unraveling burlesque anecdotes of his homoerotic, at times excessive, experiences. A life that by society at large is characterized as degenerated, however, a life lived with both joy and downfall. The featured person's narratives speak for themselves without stereotypical and condescending meta-comments. Zhang Ding's intention is almost celebratory in allowing the audience a rare glimpse into lives of human beings that have against all odds, managed to keep their pride and self-respect. The tone of the different films differ slightly, some more reflective than others, but what they all have in common is a stigmatized identity that have finally been given a voice equal to the vast majority. The series will eventually consist of seven films whereof three has been realized so far.

Zhang Ding's interest in personal stories of un-known identities is like-wise approached in his archival project on missing persons. Here, he appropriates the visual imagery of people gone missing. He photographs these notes so often seen at public places thereby, at the same time, paradoxically stressing the fact of uncertainty but also manifesting the image of the lost person through second representation. It is an archival impulse that reveals an interest in memory, loss, and personal narratives.

Zhang Ding was born in 1980 in Gan Su. Today he lives and works in Shanghai. He graduated from the North West Minority University in 2003 with a major in Oil Painting. Additionally he studied New Media Art at the China Academy of Fine Arts in 2003/2004. Recent exhibitions include *Big City* and *A Lot of Ash – A Lot of Dust*, BizArt Center, Shanghai, China (2005) and *MC1, The First International Biennale of Contemporary Chinese Art*, Montpellier, France (2005).

