

Geng Jianyi

耿建翌



Water, 2001, Photo, 26x21 cm

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Two Heads, 1987
Oil/acrylic on canvas
130x196 cm

Visible Face, Photo, 2001
61x51 cm

A main focus of the extensive oeuvre of the artist Geng Jianyi is the issue of individual identity, that is, his own personal position in the context of the collective. Despite his highly diverse use of aesthetic and artistic media (ranging from activist street art, oil painting, installation art to ink drawing) the artist never ceases to explore the questions of the 'self' in the world of today. His work can be described as 'after-images' that, continuously, veils and unveils fragments of the individual. Geng Jianyi demonstrates an intense concern about self-awareness, and the multitude of forms in which the individuality is expressed and represented. In a series of portraits entitled *Face* (2001), the artist uses photographic prints of portraits that he almost entirely covers with ink. Using a traditional Chinese brush technique, Geng Jianyi only lets spots of light shine through. The semi-transparency of the portraits corresponds to a notion of withdrawal or abandonment of individuality. These images oscillate between total abstractness and recognizable facial features. A similar approach is undertaken in an earlier series of portraits titled *Impossible to Name*. Here, the artist combines oil on canvas and paper-cuts to signify the diverse layers that constitute our beings, and the shifting ground that threatens our existence into dissolution. Other suggestive titles of work evolving around themes of existential identity include *Who is He* (1994) and *Proving the Existence* (1994).

Correspondingly, in the exquisite series *Water* the artist is concerned with a phenomenon that appears and disappears. The pictures are composed by using light-sensitive paper to experiment with ways of directly capturing images from natural forms without using the lens of a camera. The black and white photos resemble the meta-physical abstractions of traditional ink and wash. Here, nature evolves around notions of pantheism and the sublime as understood by Kant. In Kant "the mind feels itself set in motion in representation of the sublime in nature. The point of excess for the imagination is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself."

Geng Jianyi was born in Zhenzhou, Henan Province, China in 1962. He graduated from Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Oil Painting Department. Today he lives and works in Hangzhou. Geng Jianyi has exhibited widely since his inaugural show in 1989. Exhibitions include *Zooming into Focus*, Beijing National Museum of Art, Beijing, China (2005), *Techniques of the Visible*, 5th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2004), *Geng Jianyi - Useless*, BizART, Shanghai, China (2004), 4th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2002), *Living in Time - Contemporary Artists from China*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany (2001), *Inside Out: New Chinese Art Exhibition*, Touring Exhibition China-Taiwan-Hong Kong (1998), and *Cities on the Move*, Secession Vienna, Austria (among other places) (1997).