

BIRDHEAD

ShanghART
香 格 纳 画 廊

About ShanghART Gallery

Founded in 1996, ShanghART Gallery is one of the first contemporary art galleries established in China. With spaces in Shanghai, Beijing and Singapore, ShanghART has been a driving force of the development of Chinese contemporary art for the past twenty years. Working closely together with over 40 artists, ShanghART regularly participates in the major international art fairs and collaborates with important art institutions in China and from all over the world. ShanghART has Asian artists like Apichatpong WEERASETHAKUL and Robert Zhao Renhui, etc., and also has presented projects with artists Jason Lim, Joo Choon Lin and Vincent Leow.



ShanghART Singapore

ShanghART Gallery's first overseas gallery, ShanghART Singapore, was opened in 2012 in the city's vibrant art zone in Gillman Barracks. ShanghART Singapore is dedicated to better serve the artists, as well as encourage enlightening exhibitions and spiritual and aesthetic dialogues.

About Birdhead

Founded in 2004 (Song Tao was born in 1979 and Ji Weiyu was born in 1980). They both work and live in Shanghai.

Birdhead is the duo (Song Tao & Ji Weiyu) focused on photography, whose oeuvre consists of photographic images of daily life, personal hobbies and traveling. After developing, arranging and mounting, the snap-shot aesthetic of their extensive and accumulative photos constitute Birdhead World-series. Birdhead World exists as exhibitions and also catalogues.

ArtReview Asia



Birdhead

The Great Divide in Thai Art

ArtReview Asia, Winter 2016

Book and Press

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. Friday • Sunday, November 9 - 11, 2012 | W5

CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT

From Shanghai, a Snapshot That Winks

[The Moment]
By JAMES T. AREDDY
Shanghai

Male partnerships are easy to find in the worlds of boy bands and comic-book duos, but the two photographers who make up Birdhead are showing how two guys and a camera can make art in a fast-changing city.

For the past eight years, Ji Weiyou, a 32-year-old trained in graphic design, and Song Tao, a 33-year-old who once made money sculpting five-meter tigers for China's nouveau riche, have been documenting the ordinariness of Shanghai, their hometown.

There's a Shanghai free of superlatives, a rough and dusty Pearl of the Orient often shot in black and white. The architecture is so out of vogue that sometimes all that's left is rubble. No one eats fancier than KFC.

But this isn't gloom—these two are jokers, and their photos are glimpses at the unremarkable. The effect is urban surfing, along banal city streets, into the subway and eventually home to a messy apartment. As Mr. Song puts it, Shanghai itself is riding "a wave."

Friends from high school, Messrs. Song and Ji began collaborating in 2004 with a book of self-portraits that they produced in just a month (the name Birdhead, they say, was suggested by a computer while saving photos). Mr. Song was already a photographer with gallery representation, and the book was meant to commemorate Mr. Ji's return home from a British university program. They printed two copies, and, according to Mr. Ji, lost one of them.

Today, Birdhead's work is much easier to find. They are part of the Museum of Modern Art's "New Photography 2012" exhibition in

The duo behind Birdhead appear in a photo from "The Song of Early Spring" (2012).



Journal's James T. Areddy about their hometown, photography and the Facebook generation. Here is an edited transcript.

The Wall Street Journal: As you call it, "the question everyone asks". What's up with the computer-generated name?

Mr. Ji: We think it's good. Not "Birdhead."

How do you plan your shots?

Mr. Ji: Our plan is always very stupid, so we don't plan.

Mr. Song: Plans have no point.

Your work has been described as speaking to "the obsessive documentation of the Facebook generation." Do you agree?

Mr. Ji: You know, in China we can't use Facebook. The Facebook generation is everyone taking pictures and uploading to Facebook. Of course we are the Facebook generation.

Mr. Song: We haven't a website. We don't like uploading. We like printing books.

Why books?

Mr. Song: Every photographer

Are you showing the ugly side of the city?

Mr. Ji: We don't think we make Shanghai look bad. Shanghai is our home. We don't think our home is ugly.

But your photos deviate from the modern look the government prefers to show.

Mr. Ji: The government already has people to do these things. We don't need to do these things.

Are you nostalgic for Shanghai's past?

Mr. Ji: The past is always better

But we also like to shoot the Dongfang Mingzhu (Pudong's modernist Oriental Pearl TV Tower) and the Jin Mao Tower. We like these two buildings, even though Dongfang Mingzhu is very ugly.

What impression do you want people to come away with?

Mr. Ji: We can't control what people think. If people see these pictures and think, "You make very beautiful Shanghai," it's good for Shanghai. If you think, "It's very ugly Shanghai," then it's ugly Shanghai. It's not our business.

Why film instead of digital? How did that make sense for two guys starting out with no money?

Mr. Ji: At that time, digital was the more expensive, film was cheaper.

Mr. Song: The [digital] camera design for us was very ugly, not beautiful. In the 1960s, the 1980s, the camera factories, they designed a lot of very beautiful cameras.

Mr. Ji: The only cameras we use are used. We only have two or three new cameras.

Why do you put the date on many photos but not provide other information, like the location?

Mr. Ji: The date for a photo is a good idea, because the photo captures the time.

We don't want naked. We just want to wear underwear. [Location] takes away all the clothes.

Mr. Song: If the picture also tells you "where"—too much.

"When" is OK. The time is OK. The address is too much. It's stupid. The feeling will change to very, very boring.

Mr. Ji: It's not a picture. Too cold. Not warm.

Mr. Song: Another reason: Here is where. The picture tells you where. It's totally enough. It's why, in our books, we haven't written too much text. In a lot of tradi-

ARTIST FILE 2011

The NACT Annual Show of Contemporary Art

026
BIRDHEAD



shanghai.com

The Wall Street Journal, Nov 14th 2012

Artist File 2011
The NACT Annual Show of Contemporary Art



Flash Art, 2016 March/April



The Brooklyn Rail, Dec 2012/Jan 2013

installation view from previous exhibition



In terms of curating and displaying, the gallery decides to create a yard-like space with 'three jins' ('jin' in Chinese means 'enter, progress and forward'). 'The first jin' is designed to present 370 photographs that were shot in recent years. The Chinese character '妙' on the wall, which constitutes two Chinese characters – '女' (female) and '少' (little or few; young), is the highlight in that space. 'The second jin' exhibits the latest work For a Bigger Photo that is framed by traditional lacquer. The collection in this space is the extract of the theme. Visiting the world of Birdhead is a process of transformation from being open to being private. When you expect to see something more exciting in 'the third jin' , the artists suddenly define all the chaotic images and ingeniously configuration as 'the world of Birdhead' which seems like a puzzle but tells everything.



installation view of exhibition
*Welcome to Birdhead World Again -
Shanghai, 2015*

Birdheads' Artwork

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graph TD; A[Birdheads' Artwork] --- B[Darkroom technique]; A --- C[Wet mounting technique of traditional Chinese painting]; A --- D[Chinese lacquer];
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Darkroom technique

Wet mounting technique
of traditional Chinese
painting

Chinese lacquer

Darkroom technique

Birdhead's method is to scan the films and create digital files in which Birdhead refines the tones before laying out the images in a photo-editing application to make the big picture. So the photomatrices work is not just a group of smaller pictures, but also one big picture.

In Chinese, shanshui literally means mountain and water; in the tradition of Chinese scholar painting, a landscape doesn't necessarily involve the actual recording of mountains and water (generally in the form of a river) and their special relation: the artist can conceptually invent his own shanshui on paper. Therefore, Birdhead's art at its first level is very close to the making of conceptual shanshui, and also, considering their emphasis on photographic tones, very close to Chinese classical calligraphy art in cao (cursive script) or xing (semicursive script) style, normally considered to articulate an expressionist consciousness.



Passions Bloom Ambitions from Vagina – 23 (detail)
2016,

photo collage

Tilia plywood, grass cloth, traditional lacquer, gold foil, traditional Chinese wet-mounting technique, 502 × 1502 cm (in 138 pieces)

Wet mounting technique of traditional Chinese painting

Wet mounting is a traditional technique used for Chinese classical ink art and calligraphy; *when used by Birdhead on photography, it has the effect of flattening the printing paper*, and involves the use of materials such as precious wood, handmade paper and silk, not only to protect the work but also to give it a particular aesthetic (and, by virtue of its connection to historically precious objects, economic) value.

Chinese mounting is a traditional craft and it is believed to have developed around 2,000 years ago. This craft is considered an art onto itself. Careful attention was and still is paid to ensure the quality and variety of the silk and paper to protect and properly fit the artwork onto the mounting, as it gives form to the art.



Section of a painting displaying a hanging scroll
unknown painter from the Ming dynasty



A man doing wet mounting,
Photo taken in Old Peking by Hedda Morrison,
Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 1985, p.176



using acid-free paste (ingredients:
water and flour, as a basic adhesive in
traditional wet mounting.)

The photo paper on the plywood will
experience a growing period from
expanding and then tightening, until it
is perfectly adhered to the plywood.
The consistency of paste will affect the
flatness of work's surface, besides,
bubbles and wrinkles have to be taken
care of as well.



a short clip of wet mounting process
in Birdhead's studio



pushing out the bubbles

Chinese lacquer

Lacquer was used in ancient China and Japan to protect precious interior items such as furniture and tableware by sealing them off from the air. Over time, the colourless coat of lacquer may turn yellow, which adds a further aesthetic layer, particularly in China and Japan, where traces of time are considered to be of great aesthetic value.

When exposed to oxygen and humidity, lacquer hardens or polymerizes, becoming a natural plastic and an ideal protective covering for screens, trays, and other implements. Mixed with pigments, particularly cinnabar (red) and carbon (black), lacquer has been also used as an artistic media for millennia.



南宋 黑漆葵口盤
Dish with Petal Border

Period: Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279)

Date: 13th century

Culture: China

Medium: Black lacquer with gilding

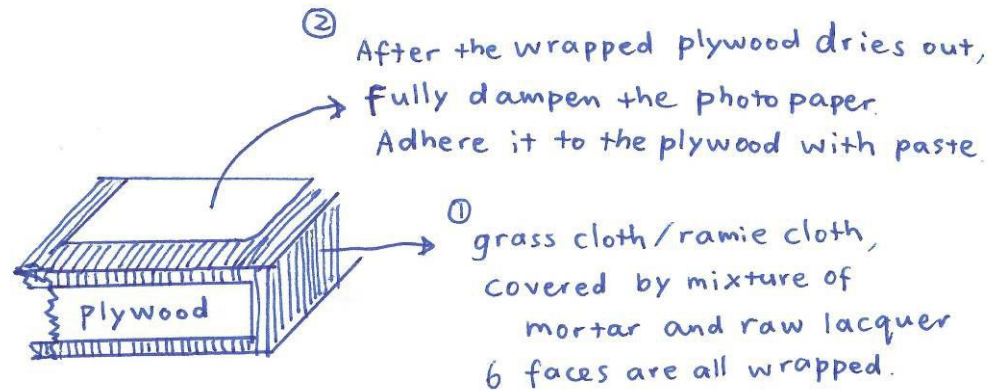
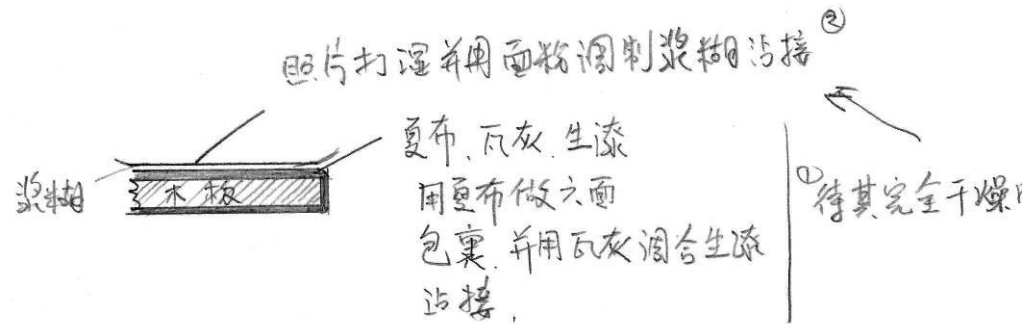
Dimensions: H. 1 1/2 in. (3.8 cm); Diam. 7 1/8 in. (18 cm); Diam. of foot 4 3/8 in. (11.1 cm)

Exhibited in '*Chinese Lacquer: Treasures from the Irving Collection, 12th–18th Century*',
at The Met Fifth Avenue
AUGUST 15, 2015–JUNE 19, 2016



Gelatin silver print on plywood adhered by traditional Chinese wet mounting technique, sealed with Chinese lacquer. The texture of frame is made visible because of grass cloth.

Section Sketchup

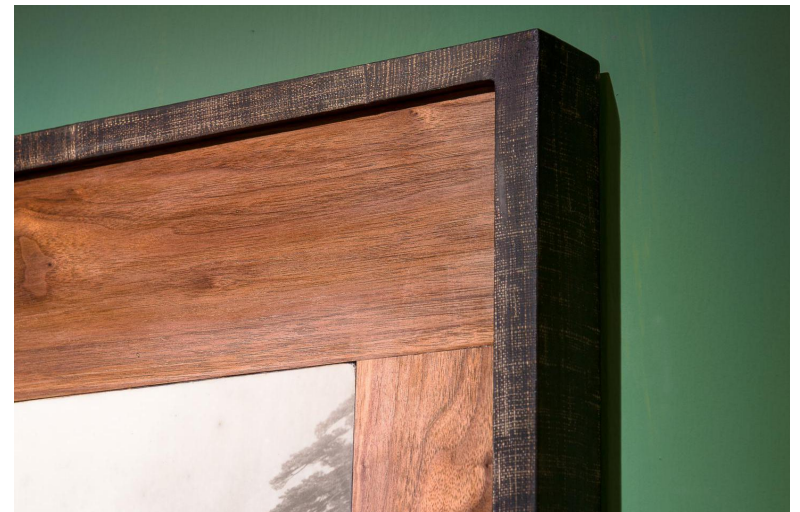


The work of Birdhead is essentially introspective. We introspect in our growth and cooperation that drives us to mature and to keep on our cooperation. Those tens-of-thousands photos we shot annually reflect our love, hate, passion and sadness in our era like a mirror. Eventually, those hundreds arrayed photos or the few photos overlaid and collaged were picked up and edited by us, which are the results of our self-exploration and our real and perceivable affections.

More precisely, every photo simultaneously cuts out a space and a time, after two or more photos are arrayed or overlaid, the new visual connections among different spaces and times are emerged. Therefore, the affects of the imagery will reach one plus one is greater than two.

Chinese traditional lacquer techniques for the works' mounting and framing came from our thinking for human being. Artworks as the proofs of reification of human civilization already exist more than ten thousand years, but the photography as the vehicle of art kept on paper only has a history less than 200 years. The question of how to conserve those photos leads to the exploration of mounting and framing techniques. No matter what techniques they are, essentially it's how to conserve the "art" conveyed through the images.

With the deepening of such practices, for those peoples who have such needs, the parts originally only for the physical protection such as the frame strip, glass, hooks and so on are inevitably related, from senses to mentality, to its protected photos. Eventually, those parts also become the part of artworks, in another word, they are the strong technical sustainment for art.





In fact, no matter in the history of oriental and western art practices or in the modern art history, the techniques are applied everywhere in art production, inseparably with art such as classic western oil painting or Chinese traditional calligraphy and painting.

Birdhead' s exploration of the mounting and framing of photos is exactly a starting based on the above understanding. With the elaborate fine handmade producing, the works of Birdhead embody our endeavours that how we use the experience of oriental mounting tradition, and using modern materials and technologies how we work with and overcome the fragility of photos. We think that using such methods, photos are more materialized.



However, without any doubt, any human attempts to challenge time will eventually be destroyed by time. We deeply understand just like Sisyphus rolls a huge boulder to the top of a steep hill in Greek legend. Exactly at this point, such behaviour is matched with our understanding of human being.

***Extracted from Birdhead's quotation**

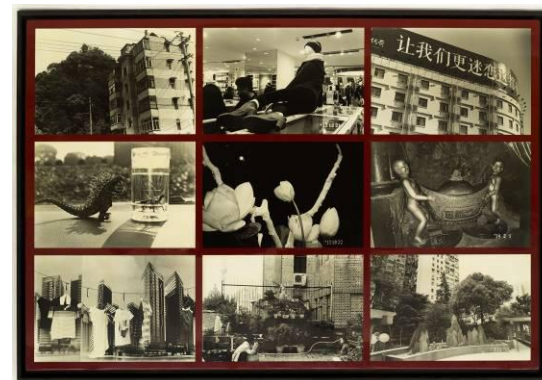
For a Bigger Photo



For a Bigger Photo-1 2015
(INVOICED)



For a Bigger Photo-2 2015



For a Bigger Photo-3 2015



DETAILS

For a Bigger Photo



For a Bigger Photo 2015-5
2015
250*120*5cm (98"*47"*2")
Photograph | Installation
Wood, British ILFORD archival
fiber warm cotton gloss
photographic paper 335gsm
Chinese lacquer, wet mounting
technique of traditional Chinese
painting, Epson UltraGiclee

(INVOICED)



For a Bigger Photo 2015-4
2015
220*120*5cm (87"*47"*2")
Photograph | Installation
Wood, British ILFORD archival
fiber warm cotton gloss
photographic paper 335gsm
Chinese lacquer, wet mounting
technique of traditional Chinese
painting, Epson UltraGiclee

(INVOICED)



"FOR A BIGGER PHOTO 2015-4, FOR A BIGGER PHOTO 2015-5"
DETAIL



For a Bigger Photo-7,
2015
209*232*6cm | EACH 209*116*6cm (x 2 pieces)
Gelatin silver print on tilia plywood processed by
traditional Chinese wet mounting technique
sealed with traditional lacquer

(INVOICED)



Chan Tui Long Bian
2015
66*88*5cm
Photograph | Installation
Black Walnut , Python Skin
Chinese lacquer, wet mounting technique of traditional Chinese
painting, handmade silver salt photo
code: BH_3214

(INVOICED)



'CHAN TUI LONG BIAN' DETAIL



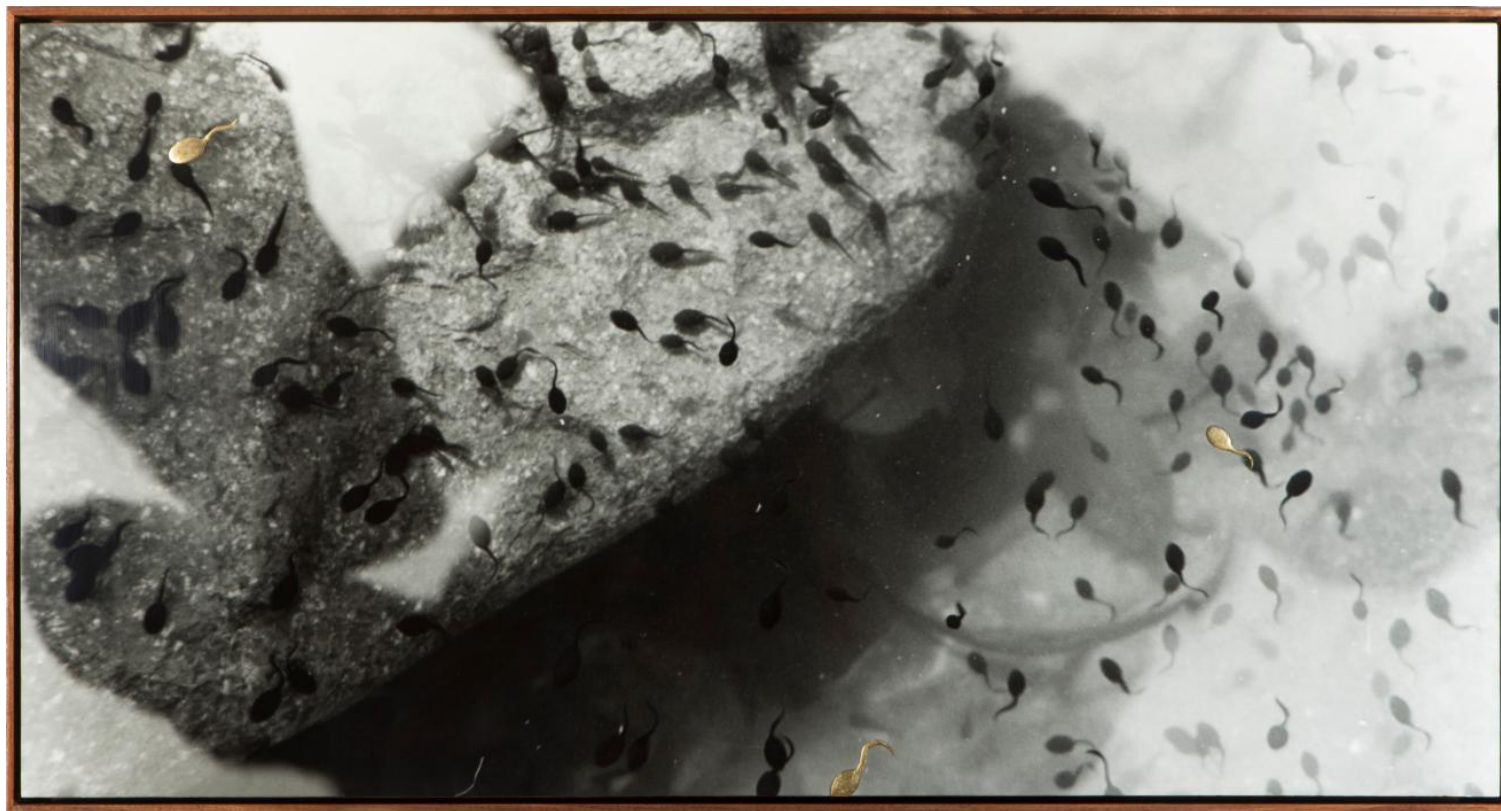
The Chinese character '妙' on the wall is constituted of two Chinese characters – '女' (female) and '少' (little or few; young).

Based on pictographs, Chinese characters combine shapes with sounds and connotations to form unique, block-shaped characters that carry meaning.

Shao Nu
2015
240 x 97 x 5 cm
Wood, Python Skin, 24k Golden Foil, British ILFORD Archival
Photographic Paper
Chinese Lacquer, traditional Chinese wet mounting
technique, Epson UltraGiclee
code: BH_9225



'SHAO NV'DETAIL



Passions Bloom Ambitions from Vagina-27
2016
63.5*118*5cm
Gelatin silver print on tilia plywood processed by
traditional Chinese wet mounting technique
black walnut wood frame
sealed with traditional lacquer
code: BH_7971



For a Bigger Photo-16
2016
98*185*5.5cm
Gelatin silver print on tilia plywood processed by
traditional Chinese wet mounting technique
teak frame
sealed with traditional lacquer
code: BH_8044



Birdhead's World
2015

500*170*9cm

Photograph | Installation

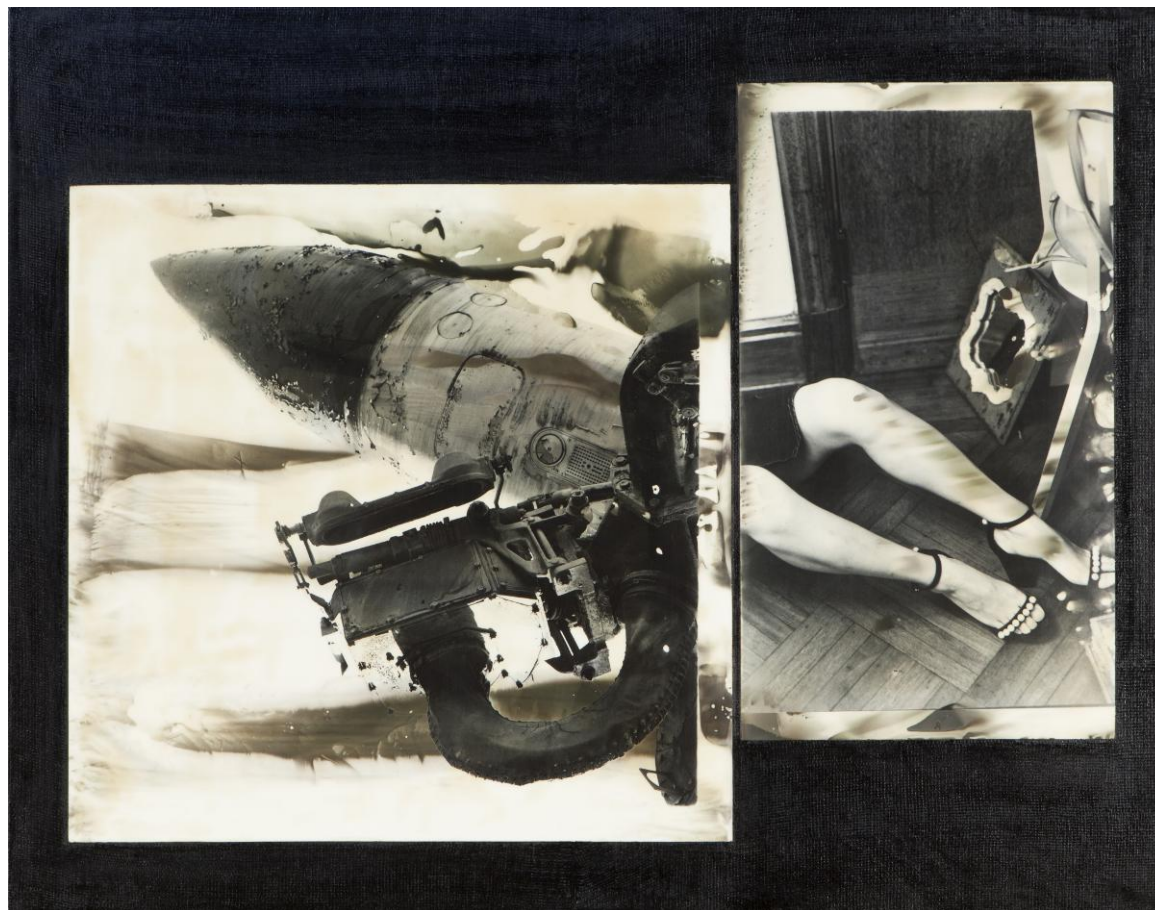
Wood, British ILFORD archival fiber warm cotton

gloss photographic paper 335gsm

Chinese lacquer, traditional Chinese wet

mounting technique, Epson UltraGiclee

code: BH_3328



Today-2016-01
2016
90*70*5cm
Gelatin silver print on tilia plywood processed by
traditional Chinese wet mounting technique
sealed with traditional lacquer
code: BH_0051



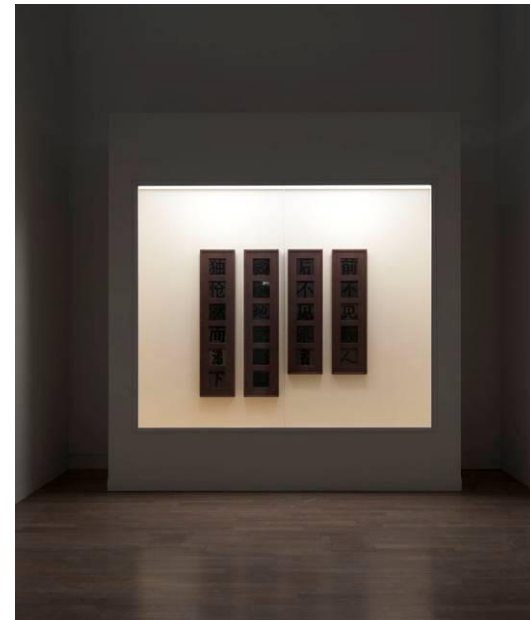
For a Bigger Photo 15
2015
200*100*5cm
Gelatin silver print on tilia plywood processed by
traditional Chinese wet mounting technique
teak frame
sealed with traditional lacquer
code: BH_6125

Tang Shi and Song Ci

In this project Birhead shot photos of stores signs. They shot each character separately from different signs, only one Chinese character per negative. These black and white negatives are framed and rearranged into a classical Chinese Poem.



2011 Welcome to Birdhead World
— Venice Biennale project



2011 Artist File 2011 The NACT Annual Show of Contemporary Art,
National Art Center, Tokyo, Japan



Youth does not know how sorrow tastes
 But loves to haunt autumnal glades
 And pen new verses
 forcing out the melancholy

But now I know all right how sorrow tastes
 And when about to mention it
 I just say Steady
 Steady that's all I say
 Or maybe Nice weather
 Cool autumn

Youth Does Not Know How Sorrow Tastes by
 Xin Qiji (Song Dynasty)
 2011
 Installation
 Edition of 6
 code: BHU436



Poem from the Han Dynasty
2011
Installation
b&w inkjet photo, frame
Edition of 7
code: BH_8351



Witness not the sages of the past,
Perceive not the wise of the future,
Reflecting on heaven and earth eternal,
Tears flowing down I lament in loneliness.

Ballad On Climbing Youzhou Tower
2011
(in 4 pieces)
Installation
Edition of 5
code: BHU141

Main Exhibitions

Solo Exhibitions

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2016 | Welcome to Birdhead World Again - Singapore 2016, ShanghART, Singapore
Welcome to Birdhead World Again - Shanghai 2016, FAB-UNION SPACE on the West Bund, Shanghai
Birdhead-Art Unlimited Art Basel 2016, Booth Nr. U46, Basel, Switzerland |
| 2015 | Welcome to the World of Bird Head Again, ShanghART H-Space, Shanghai |
| 2014 | Birdhead Solo Exhibition, Yifeng Galleria (Bottega Veneta), Shanghai |
| 2012 | Welcome to the World of Birdhead Again-London, Paradise Row Gallery, London, U.K. |
| 2011 | Birdhead: New Village , EX3 Centro per l'arte Contemporanea Firenze, Florence, Italy
Artist File 2011 The NACT Annual Show of Contemporary Art , National Art Center, Tokyo, Japan |
| 2010 | Welcome to the World of Birdhead Again-2010, Guangzhou; Lianzhou |
| 2009 | Birdhead: Ji Weiyu & Song Tao, Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, U.K. |
| 2008 | Landscape,ShanghART F-Space, Shanghai |
| 2007 | Birdhead 2006+2007, BizArt, Shanghai |
| 2005 | Welcome to Bird Head World, ShanghART H-Space, Shanghai |

Group Exhibitions

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2015 | The 6th Moscow Biennale, How to gather? Acting in a city in the heart of the island of Eurasia, Moscow, Russia
Shanghai Ever, MOCA, Shanghai
Jing Shen , The Act of Painting in Contemporary China, PAC - Milan museum of contemporary art, Italy |
| 2014 | Performance and Imaginations: Photography from China 1911-2014,Museum Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway
My Generation: Young Chinese Artists,Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL. and Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida, U.S.A. |

- 2013 The 1st Beijing Photo Biennale, Aura and Post-Aura, The China Millennium Monument, Beijing
Hugo Boss Asia Art Award, Exhibition of Finalist Artists, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai
Portrait of the Times, 30 Years of Chinese Contemporary Art, Power Station of Art, Shanghai
Shanghai Surprise, A Group Show on Contemporary Art in Shanghai, K11 Art Mall, Shanghai
ON|OFF, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing
- 2012 New Photography 2012, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, U.S.A.
9th Shanghai Biennale, Reactivation, Power Station of Art, Shanghai
Architectural Photography—Made in China, Guest Exhibition of the International Photography Scene in Koeln,
Museum of Applied Arts, MAKK, Cologne, Germany
- 2011 The 54th Venice Biennale—ILLUMInations, Venice, Italy
- 2010 Focus Shanghai, Lu Chunsheng and Birdhead, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, U.S.A.
China Power Station: Part IV, Pinacoteca Agnelli, Torino, Italy
- 2009 Emporium, A New Common Sense of Space, The National Museum of Science and Technology "Leonardo da Vinci",
Milano, Italy
Reversed Image, Representations of Shanghai and its Contemporary Material Culture,
Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, U.S.A.
Shanghai History in Making from 1979 Till 2009, Shanghai
Up Close, Far Away, Kunstverein, Heidelberg, Germany
- 2008 The World of Other's, A Contemporary Art Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai
New Photography in China, One of the Largest Surveys of Emerging Photography Talent from China, Hong Kong
Fringe Club; Hong Kong Art Center, Hong Kong
- 2007 China Power Station: Part II, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway
- 2005 The 1st Lianzhou International Photo Festival, Double Vision, Culture Square Lianzhou, Lianzhou, Guangdong

Projects

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2016 | BIRDHEAD: Southeast Asia Residency Program, ShanghART Gallery, Singapore
Welcome to Birdhead World Again, Gluck50 Residency Project, Gluck50, Milano |
| 2013 | Art on the Way, Hugo Boss Asia Art Award, Subway Stations, Shanghai |
| 2012 | Xin Cun, The Swatch Art Peace Hotel, Shanghai |

Collections

Tate, London, U.K.
Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo, Norway
MOMA New York, New York, U.S.A
Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, Switzerland