

PRESENT TENSE SERIES I

Yingmei Duan, Performing Communication.
About participation, collaboration, dependency, the performer and the other

Friday, Jan. 24, 2014, 7pm
Performance Evening

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2014, 7pm
Artist Talk "Performance Art and the Practice of Collaboration"

Curator: Chiara Cartuccia
SAVVY Contemporary I Richardstraße 20 I 12043 Berlin-Neukölln



(c) Alexander Newton

"The self is a sub-jectum: it is under the weight of the universe ... the unity of the universe is not what my gaze embraces in its unity of apperception, but what is incumbent upon me from all sides, regards me, is my affair"
Emmanuel Levinas¹

Yingmei Duan has broadly investigated the concepts of dependency and freedom, using as a starting point the little, voluntary slavery that collaborative work implies. In this respect, the reciprocal limitation of desires and intentions, which two (or more) creative subjects would impose one upon another during the execution of a co-operative work, might reveal itself to be a tool to reach a bigger pleasure and a greater freedom—both from the aesthetic and ethic points of view.

¹ Levinas, E, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981, p.140

This is due to the fact that only honestly facing others and communicating with them, the artist can constitute herself as a social subject or, as the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas defines it, a subject that actually *is for-the-other*. The *otherness* in this sense has to be intended as the very source of the self-awareness of an individual, since the consciousness of one's subjectivity always stems from confrontation with an extraneous object/subject. Paying attention to others, creating a constant condition of proximity to them and opening up a dialogue allows the artist to define her position in this world as well as the socio-political possibilities of her artistic practice.

In the course of her artistic career, Yingmei Duan produced a large number of participative works, involving a vast and heterogeneous audience of children and adults, women and men in her creative research. In most of her performances, either when she works in collaboration with another creative subject, or when she interacts with more or less unaware spectators, Duan attempts to give life to an expanded subject, elaborating a conceptual unity and, eventually, a total confusion between the artist and the audience, erasing any role distinction. Duan's approach to performance very closely recalls Umberto Eco's words about the theatrical performance: "[T]he elementary mechanisms of human interaction and the elementary mechanisms of dramatic fiction are the same... This finally explains why aesthetics and criticism have always suspected that theatrical performances were instances of everyday life. It is not theatre that is able to imitate life; it is social life that is designed as a continuous performance and, because of this, there is a link between theatre and life"².

The body of the performance artist, her gestures, voice and gazes foster communication and exchange between singularities, the Self and the Other, the artist and her audience, and between the members of the audience themselves. If everything works in the right way the artist will find, in the middle of the action, a moment to stand still, enjoying the condition of conscious spectator she built up for herself and all the participants to the performance event. In her performances Yingmei Duan operates in such a way to conquer the full normalization of the artistic act, bringing the artworks she conceives and performs on the very same level of the casual actions that take place in everyday life, and saving for herself, as artist, the position of one among the others who are *under the weight of the universe*.

On **Friday, January 24**, within the frame of Present Tense Series, the performance art program of SAVVY Contemporary for 2014, Yingmei Duan will present two site-specific, participatory performances, focused on the concepts of communication, interrelation, networking and sharing. The artist will involve the audience into an active, physical and conceptual dialog, and the usage of her body and voice as well as the bodies and voices of spectators as creative tools.

On **Saturday, January 25**, Duan will lead a lecture on "Performance Art and the Practice of Collaboration". Presenting some of her collaborative projects, Duan will expand on the pivotal role of collaborations in her artistic practice and research.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yingmei Duan was born 1969 in Daqing, Heilongjiang Province in Northern China. She currently lives and works in Braunschweig, Germany.

² Eco, U, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance", in *The Drama Review TDR* 21, 1 (1977), p. 113.

Duan was part of the Chinese avant-garde and used to live in the art district of Beijing's East Village in the 1990s. In 1995 she participated in the performance *To add one meter to an anonymous mountain*, considered to be one of the classics of Chinese modern art. Under the influence of Marina Abramović, her fellow-student at the HBK Braunschweig in Germany between 2000 and 2004, she continued with performance art as a principal medium of her artwork. In 2005, she started a collaboration with the filmmaker and action artist Christoph Schlingensief.

Duan's performances are part of many major international exhibitions, among which are: 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014), '24 SPACES- A Cacophony', Malmö Konsthall (2013), 'Art of Change: New Directions from China', Hayward Gallery, London (2012); 'Non-Aligned', Marina Abramović Institute West, San Francisco (2010); Manchester International Festival (2009); 're.act.feminism-performance art of the 1960s and 70s today', Kunsthaus Erfurt (2009), City of Women International Festival of Contemporary Arts, Ljubana (2009), and Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2008); 6th DaDao Live Art Festival, China (2008), and 52nd Venice Biennale (2007).

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