

Ran Huang - An Experience I Never Experienced - And The Tragedy Of Meaning



Simon Lee Gallery presents 'An Experience Shaped by An Experience I Never Experienced' - Ran Huang's first solo exhibition in London. The show by the Chinese artist includes an extensive body of new work, and the artist's most recent film, 'The Administration of Glory'. The film was nominated in 2014 for the Short Film Palme d'Or at the 67th Festival de Cannes.

Huang employs strategies that are highly diverse, the works in the exhibition share a dialectic that is playful - and express an interest in the notion and mechanisms of history, as the artist states - the sublimation of violence and the expression of a creative anxiety.

The artist reflects on the creation of invented history. The exhibition is an existential comedy of objects - a humour that also extends to Huang's film 'The Administration of Glory' which follows a number of characters who seemingly invent their own meaning from randomly generated decisions and head off into the wasteland of their lives.

Huang brings together five parallel narratives involving themes of deception, theft and the random nature of the world that we refuse to see objectively. The artist has worked from personal and autobiographical perspectives, and the films surreal humour and sweeping vistas become a façade for Huang's interrogation of the possibility of historical credibility in a world of generated realities.

In the midst of this short film there is a story surrounding an experiment with a group of monkeys and a banana, the story illustrates the notion of a social defence mechanism where the group authority overrides what it perceives as unacceptable impulses or idealisations - and are consciously transformed into socially acceptable actions or behaviour - even through violence. The Monkeys are slowly replaced until the initial cause of the social structure and its rules are no longer known to the group; who continue to repeat the process like Sisyphus rolling his bolder into eternity.

The artist's humour goes a little way to soften the condemnation of existential emptiness; often examined in the frames of Huang's film, through great landscapes of wasteland and desert, being traversed by a tiny figure, or a car. The shuddering of the camera leaves an uneasy feeling of anxiousness - as if shaking us from the contrived meaning of our lives.

Simon Lee's main gallery is filled with the artist's painting and sculpture; for 'An Experience Shaped by An Experience I Never Experienced', Huang has created a series of "self-portrait" paintings depicting Guinness World Record holders at their most famous events. The paintings draw on traditional concepts of figuration with each painting re-imagining individual histories. The artist's paintings are a form of fictive historical document revealed as false by the act of 'self-portraiture'. The series of paintings portray the 'record breaking' individuals, often with a darkly humorous bent. Huang's characters are 'invented identities' - meanings to lives created from meaningless activities. How many hot dog's can you eat? Does it matter; only if we decide that it does.

The exhibition's humour steadily gives way to a feeling of unease at the sheer quantity of existential contrivance surrounding us, the viewer - the creation of ideas and objects given meaning through entirely subjective invention; in an attempt to support meaning and therefore social order.

If ever art asked the grand cliché 'what does it all mean?' - this exhibition succeeds with a dose humour belying the depression of a great comedian involved in the act of mastering self-denial.

Ran Huang - 'An Experience Shaped by An Experience I Never Experienced' - Simon Lee Gallery until October 5

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