

Life and Dreams

Contemporary Chinese Photography and Media Art

May 13 – November 18, 2018

Press Kit



Rong Rong. *Untitled*, from *East Village*, 1993–98. © The Artist. Courtesy the artist and Three Shadows Photography Art Center, Beijing.

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Dates

May 13 – November 18, 2018

Press Conference

May 11, 2018 at 2pm

Curator

Christopher Phillips

Photography and Media Art by Ai Weiwei, Cang Xin, Cao Fei, Chen Lingyang, Chen Shaoxiong, Cheng Ran, Hai Bo, Hao Jingban, Hong Hao, Hong Lei, Huang Yan, Jiang Zhi, Sze Tsung Nicolás Leong, Lin Tianmiao, Liu Chuang, Lu Yang, Luo Yongjin, Ma Liuming, Miao Xiaochun, Mo Yi, Mu Chen, Rong Rong, Shao Yinong, Sheng Qi, Song Dong, Sun Xun, Bo Wang, Wang Gongxin, Wang Jinsong, Wang Qingsong, Weng Fen, Xiang Liqing, Xu Yong, Yang Fudong, Yang Yong, Zhang Dali, Zhang Hai'er, Zhang Huan, Zhang Peili, Zheng Guogu, Zhou Tao, Zhou Tiehai, and Zhuang Hui

Opening Hours

Thursday–Sunday, 2–5pm

Guided Tours

Public guided tours every Friday, 5pm and first Sunday of every month, 3pm.
Private guided tours by appointment. Contact: info@walthercollection.com

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Life and Dreams

Contemporary Chinese Photography and Media Art

The Walther Collection presents *Life and Dreams: Contemporary Chinese Photography and Media Art*, the first extensive exhibition of works by Chinese artists represented in The Walther Collection. Featuring forty-three artists, *Life and Dreams* showcases a wide range of groundbreaking photography and media art produced by internationally recognized figures such as Yang Fudong, Zhang Peili, Ai Weiwei, Song Dong, Cao Fei, and Zhang Huan during an era of momentous social and economic change. It also incorporates new acquisitions and selected loans of significant media art by innovative younger artists such as Sun Xun, Lu Yang, and Cheng Ran to provide an up-to-the-minute account of the main directions and key achievements in contemporary Chinese photography and media art during the past three decades.

Curated by Christopher Phillips, *Life and Dreams* will open at The Walther Collection in Neu-Ulm, Germany on May 13, 2018, and is accompanied by a catalogue edited by Christopher Phillips and Wu Hung, co-published by Steidl / The Walther Collection.

Showing visually inventive and emotionally compelling artworks, the exhibition demonstrates the remarkable speed with which photography and media art have occupied important positions within the field of experimental Chinese art since the early 1990s. Throughout *Life and Dreams*, photographic works register artists' responses to the sweeping social and economic changes that have fundamentally altered the face of China's cities and transformed the fabric of everyday life. Featured selections of media art often evoke an ambiguous world of technological fantasy, suggesting where these changes may be leading the country and its inhabitants.

To highlight the underlying currents in contemporary Chinese artistic production, *Life and Dreams* contains five modular themes, which unfold throughout the three exhibition buildings of The Walther Collection. Together, these topics constitute an informal network of ideas and associations that link the works within the exhibition together.

Taking the Beijing East Village as its impetus, the White Cube demonstrates how Chinese artists and photographers intensely and collectively explored the multiple expressive possibilities of photography. One of the most radical innovations of photography in the early 1990s was an aggressive emphasis on the nude human body, a motif rarely found in traditional Chinese art. "The Body as Language" articulates the ways that artists such as Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming deployed the camera to document performances that tested the limits of the body, explored the changing sense of self in modern China, and

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confronted aspects of the country's history and culture. The symbolic power of the nude body continues to surface in surprising ways, as in Lu Yang's *Delusional Mandala* (2015), Chen Lingyang's *25:00, No. 2* (2002), or Lin Tianmiao's *Go?* (2001). Such works underscore Zhang Huan's belief that "the body is the only direct way through which I come to know society and society can come to know me. The body is the proof of identity. The body is language."

Some of the works exhibited in the White Cube refer to historic artworks and artifacts from China's 2000-year cultural heritage. Through expansive and sprawling compositions, the artists in "Revisiting and Recasting the Classics" update and synthesize classical, historical imagery to comment on contemporary issues. Ai Weiwei's triptych *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995) depicts the calculated destruction of a centuries-old urn. Wang Qingsong's *Night Revels of Lao Li* (2000) is an ironic updating of a celebrated, thousand-year-old scroll painting. Hong Lei's diptych *Autumn in the Forbidden City* (1997) alludes to the delicate bird-and-flower paintings of the Song Dynasty and mourns the passing of an era of high artistic sophistication.

Surveying, examining, and intervening upon the architectural and built environment, the artists in "Urban Utopias and Dystopias"—also shown in the White Cube—present a variety of ways to consider the tensions embedded within the physical structures of urban China. Works by Zhang Dali, Luo Yongjin, Xiang Liqing, and Sze Tsung Nicolás Leong reflect the demolition of long-established urban neighborhoods in Beijing and Shanghai, in order to make way for high-rise developments. The emptying out of rural villages by migration to the cities forms the backdrop of Yang Fudong's stark video installation *East of Que Village* (2007). Employing six video screens, the artist provides a grim, but engrossing tour of his desolate childhood village.

While many aspects of daily life have undergone tremendous changes since the country officially launched its reform and opening policy in 1978, the Chinese Communist Party has been able to maintain its monopoly of power through authoritarian-dictatorial style of government. Producing artworks that offer explicit political commentary continues to be dangerous in China, but such works are still being made (if not shown) there as the Black House documents. Mo Yi's *5.16 Notice: It's Been 49 Years* (2014) is a large-scale grid of found photographic images of Mao Zedong during the years of China's devastating Cultural Revolution; the images are covered with the artist's hand-annotations in red paint. Using a casual, essayistic style, Bo Wang's video *China Concerto* (2012) explores the effort by the Chongqing city government

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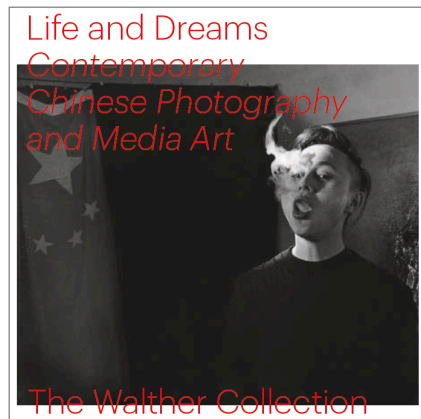
to revive and update Mao-era propaganda practices in the early 2000s. Sheng Qi's *Memories (Me)* (2000) shows a close-up of the artist's hand cradling a tiny photographic portrait of himself as a child. It's impossible not to notice that his little finger has been cut off—an act of self-mutilation carried out, purportedly in response to the 1989 bloodshed in Tiananmen Square.

In the early decades of the People's Republic, China's social structure officially consisted of a solid core of workers, peasants, and soldiers. The more fluid and transient social formations that define contemporary China are reflected in the Green House in "New Personal and Collective Identities," with the emergence of various forms of individual and collective identity based on gender or sexual orientation. Xu Yong's serial photographic work *This Face* (2011) traces the repeated changes in self-presentation carried out by a female sex worker over the course of one day, as she carefully fashions a new persona for each of her clients. Zheng Guogu's *The Life and Dreams of Yangjiang Youth* (1999), which inspires the title for this exhibition, depicts the artist's close circle of friends playfully reenacted scenes inspired by Hong Kong TV and movies that had just become available in the small Southern coastal city of Yangjiang. In an immersive, dazzling video accompanied by an anime- and sci-fi-influenced soundtrack, Lu Yang's *Delusional Mandala* (2015) narrates the hyper-realistic journey of Lu's 3-D counterpart, an asexual avatar going through the processes of enlightenment, brain surgery, and a funeral procession in free-floating cyberspace.

Life and Dreams does not set out to provide a full account of the many facets of Chinese photography and media art that have developed over the last three decades. Instead, it offers a selection of works that represent diverse, challenging, and complex individual perspectives. Although its core consists of the extraordinary photographic works made during the 1990s, the exhibition goes beyond offering a fixed view of that crucial chapter in the development of photography and media art in China. The simple passage of time has a remarkable power to throw older works into new relief, bringing out qualities that would have been imperceptible at earlier moments. In addition, placing earlier photographic works in the company of recent examples of Chinese media art allows for surprising echoes, affinities, and continuities to be revealed.

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Catalogue



Life and Dreams: Contemporary Chinese Photography and Media Art
Edited by Christopher Phillips and Wu Hung

Since the early 1990s, photography and media art have rapidly come to occupy significant positions in Chinese contemporary art. *Life and Dreams: Contemporary Chinese Photography and Media Art* shows the widespread adoption of photography, video, and digital imaging by successive generations of Chinese artists, as seen in a range of visually inventive and emotionally charged works. Many of them reflect the artists' immediate responses to the unprecedented changes that have swept through China in recent decades, transforming not just the urban landscape, but also key aspects of social relations and everyday life. Some of the most recent media works employ elaborately imaginative and fantasy-driven means to suggest where those changes may ultimately lead the country and its inhabitants. *Life and Dreams* features contributions by Christopher Phillips and Wu Hung (eds.), Lu Yang, James D. Poborsa, Stephanie H. Tung, and Xin Wang; a conversation between Christopher Phillips, Artur Walther, and Wu Hung; and a selection of seminal early writings and conversations on Chinese photography and media art by Sze Tsung Nicolás Leong, Rong Rong, Karen Smith, Wu Hung, and Yang Fudong.

384 pages, 643 images
25 x 25 cm
Cloth-bound hardcover with dust jacket
Published by Steidl / The Walther Collection

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About The Walther Collection

The Walther Collection is an art foundation dedicated to the critical understanding of historical and contemporary photography and related media. Through a program of international exhibitions, in-depth collecting, original research, and scholarly publications, The Walther Collection aims to highlight the social uses of photography and to expand the history of the medium worldwide. At its three-building campus in Neu-Ulm, Germany, its Project Space in New York City, and with traveling installations worldwide, The Walther Collection presents thematic and monographic exhibitions drawn from its expansive range of photography and media art from the collection's African, Chinese, Japanese, and European holdings of modern and contemporary works, nineteenth-century photography from Europe and Africa, and vernacular lens-based imagery from across the globe. The collection's educational program is complemented by public lectures and screenings, international scholarly symposia, and a critically acclaimed series of catalogues and monographs co-published by Steidl.

EXHIBITIONS

Exhibitions: Neu-Ulm, Germany

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 2010 – 2011 | Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity |
| 2011 – 2013 | Appropriated Landscapes |
| 2013 – 2015 | Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive |
| 2015 – 2016 | The Order of Things |
| 2017 | Recent Histories: Contemporary African Photography and Video Art |
| 2018 | Life and Dreams: Contemporary Chinese Photography and Media Art |

Exhibitions: Project Space, New York

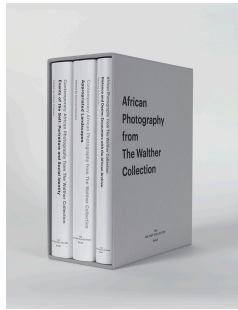
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| April – Aug. 2011 | Jo Ractliffe: As Terras do Fim do Mundo |
| Sept. 2011 – March 2012 | August Sander and Seydou Keïta |
| April – July 2012 | Rotimi Fani-Kayode: Nothing to Lose |
| Sept. 2012 – May 2013 | Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive (Parts I–III) |
| Sept. 2013 – Feb. 2014 | Martina Bacigalupo: Gulu Real Art Studio |
| Feb. – May 2014 | Christine Meisner: Disquieting Nature |
| Sept. 2015 – Jan. 2016 | The Lay of the Land: New Photography from Africa |
| Feb. – April 2016 | Close to Home: New Photography from Africa |

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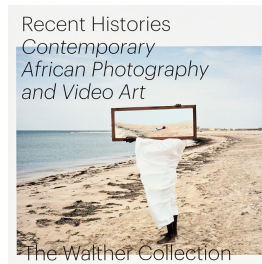
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| June – Sept. 2016 | Who I Am: Rediscovered Portraits from Apartheid South Africa |
| Sept. – Dec. 2016 | Recent Histories: New Photography from Africa |
| Jan. – April 2017 | Acts of Intimacy: The Erotic Gaze in Japanese Photography |
| April – Sept. 2017 | Body, Self, Society: Chinese Performance Photography of the 1990s |
| Oct. – Nov. 2017 | East of Que Village: The Ends of Nature |
| Dec. 2017 – Mar. 2018 | The Shadow Archive: An Investigation into Vernacular Portrait Photography |
| Traveling Exhibitions | |
| Nov. 2011 | Paris Photo, France |
| July – Sept. 2014 | Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity Les Rencontres d'Arles, France |
| April – July 2015 | Typology, Taxonomy and Seriality C/O Berlin, Germany |
| Oct. 2015 – Jan. 2016 | Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive La Maison Rouge, France |
| Feb. – May 2016 | After Eden: Photography from The Walther Collection Fotografiska, Sweden |
| Mar. – April 2017 | Time and Again: Photography from The Walther Collection The Photography Show Presented by AIPAD, USA |
| Oct. – Nov. 2017 | Structures of Identity: Photography from The Walther Collection Biennale Foto/Industria, Italy |
| Oct. 2017 – Feb. 2018 | Landscapes of American Power: Photography from The Walther Collection Museo Amparo, Mexico |
| Dec. 2017 – Jan. 2018 | Structures of Identity: Photography from The Walther Collection Les Rencontres de Bamako, Biennale Africaine de la Photographie, Mali |
| Feb. – June 2018 | Recent Histories: Deconstructed Spaces, Surveyed Memories Museo MARCO, Mexico |
| June – Sept. 2018 | Structures of Identity: Photography from The Walther Collection FOAM, The Netherlands |
| | Structures of Identity: Photography from The Walther Collection |

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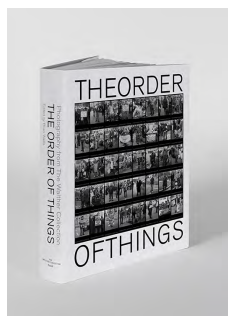
Publications by Steidl/The Walther Collection



African Photography from The Walther Collection (2010–13), a three-volume work representing the collection's multi-year exhibition and publishing program, investigates African photography and video through the themes of portraiture, landscape, and the historic archive. Including *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*, *Appropriated Landscapes*, and *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, housed in a slipcase. Edited by Okwui Enwezor, Corinne Diserens, and Tamar Garb.



Recent Histories: Contemporary African Photography and Video Art (2017) unites the perspectives of 14 artists of African descent, who investigate social identity, questions of belonging, and an array of sociopolitical concerns. Providing a point of entry to engage critically with current practices and the frameworks of contemporary African photography and video art, *Recent Histories* features contributions by Daniela Baumann, Joshua Chuang, and Oluremi C. Onabanjo (eds.), Antawan I. Byrd, Emmanuel Iduma, M. Neelika Jayawardane, Allison Moore, Moses Serubiri, Mikhael Subotzky, and Drew Thompson.



The Order of Things: Photography from The Walther Collection (2015) explores the production and uses of typological sequences, serial imagery, conceptual portraiture, archival imagery, and time-based performance in photography from the 1880s to the present, considering works by artists from Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. *The Order of Things* features contributions by Geoffrey Batchen, Tina M. Campt, and Christopher Phillips; a conversation between Brian Wallis and Artur Walther; and a selection of seminal writings on photograph and seriality by George Baker, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Ulrike Schneider, Allan Sekula, and Joel Smith.

Additional monographs and artist books include **Santu Mofokeng**, *The Black Photo Album* (2013), **Martina Bacigalupo**, *Gulu Real Art Studio* (2013), **Zanele Muholi**, *Faces and Phases: 2006–14* (2014), **Mikhael Subotzky & Patrick Waterhouse**, *Ponte City* (2014), and **Guy Tillim**, *O Futuro Certo* (2015).