

THE
WALTHER COLLECTION

East of Que Village The Ends of Nature
Yang Fudong

October 6–November 25, 2017



Yang Fudong, from *East of Que Village*, 2007

Opening Reception: Friday, October 6, from 6pm – 8pm

The Walther Collection Project Space

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The third installment of a yearlong series of exhibitions devoted to contemporary photography and video art from Asia, The Walther Collection is pleased to present *East of Que Village: The Ends of Nature*, a site-specific installation of the emotionally powerful multi-screen video work by the Chinese artist Yang Fudong. Shot in a documentary style in the farming village where Yang spent his early childhood, the work provides an unsparing look at the grim everyday reality of life in rural China. The exhibition opens on Thursday, October 5, 2017, and continues through November 25. It is organized by guest curator Christopher Phillips, with curatorial coordination from Oluremi C. Onabanjo and support from Felix Ho Yuen Chan.

Yang Fudong made *East of Que Village* in 2007, while he was preparing to shoot the final section of his five-part film *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (2003–07). Seized by the urge to make a work based on his childhood memories of the isolated village in Hebei province, he decided to travel there with a small crew and a single video camera. Proceeding without a script and improvising from the visual materials he found at hand, Yang completed the shoot in less than two weeks. Only later did he decide to edit the resulting footage into six sections that would be projected simultaneously as a video installation.

The startling impact of *East of Que Village* is based on its unflinching portrayal of the harshness of rural existence. This reality is not presented through the eyes of the village's mostly elderly inhabitants, however. It is conveyed in harrowing close-ups from the vantage point of a pack of ravenous, half-wild dogs, which the camera accompanies as they prowl restlessly along the outskirts of the village, hoping to encounter a vulnerable stray sheep, goat, or cow. The viewer eventually comes to sympathize with these surly, desperately hungry canines, who spend much of their time pacing throughout the barren, sand-covered wasteland. Some of the most affecting moments in *East of Que Village* show individual dogs in states of trembling exhaustion, physical collapse, or death. The work casts a gloomy light on the decline of China's farming villages, which in recent decades have seen a steady exodus of young people heading to the country's fast-growing cities. Yet there are larger and more fundamental issues being raised as well, in Yang Fudong's typically oblique way. As he puts it, "The dogs' living conditions in the film can also be seen as the conditions of human existence."

In addition to its compelling subject matter, *East of Que Village* is also a remarkable example of what Yang Fudong calls his "spatial films"—works meant to be displayed on multiple screens within gallery or museum spaces. By arranging the screens so that it is impossible to see all of them at once, he forces viewers to move around the exhibition space, shaping their own unique experience of the work. This kind of active, mobile viewer becomes what Yang calls the work's "second director."

One of the most acclaimed Chinese artists of his generation, **Yang Fudong** (b. 1971, Beijing) studied oil painting at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, graduated in 1995, and since 1998 has lived and worked in Shanghai. From the late 1990s to the present, Yang has concentrated almost exclusively on making film and video works. He won international attention in 2002 with his first film, *An Estranged Paradise* (1997–2002), which was shown at Documenta XI. His ambitious five-part work *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (2003–07) was presented at the Venice Biennale in 2007. In addition to these single-channel works, Yang has regularly produced expansive multi-screen installations, of which the best known are *No Snow on the Broken Bridge* (2006), *East of Que Village* (2007), *The Fifth Night* (2010), and *New Women II: Under the Colored Sky* (2014). His works can be

found in numerous public collections around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Boijmans Museum, Rotterdam; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; and Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama.

The Walther Collection is dedicated to researching, collecting, exhibiting, and publishing photography and video art. Since opening to the public in 2010, the collection has grown to become one of the most important holdings of modern and contemporary African and Asian photography and video art, American vernacular imagery, and nineteenth century photographs and books from Europe and Africa. The collection presents exhibitions and public programs at a three-gallery museum campus in Neu-Ulm, Germany, and a Project Space in New York City, USA. Organized by leading international curators, the exhibitions from the collection endeavor to create dynamic juxtapositions by artists whose contributions to photography significantly expand the history of the medium. The collection's established publishing series with Steidl, complementing the exhibitions program with extensive catalogues and monographs, is informed by comprehensive research by acclaimed writers, critics, and art historians. Recognized as a leading institution in the study and presentation of African photography, The Walther Collection presents new exhibitions annually in Germany and New York, as well as traveling exhibitions around the world.