



INK STUDIO | BEIJING

Seeing Mountain As Mountain

Jennifer Wen Ma

Luminous Shadows, Ink Studio

Materials: Hand-crafted glass, lights, ink, pool, infrared sensor, sound system

A series of handcrafted glass pieces hang in the gallery space in an abstract cloud formation, while brightening and dimming lights on the glass cast changing shadows on the gallery walls. Below the glass lies a reflecting pool filled with Chinese ink. When viewed from a certain point, the chandelier's reflection in the ink aligns to reveal mountain forms, evoking a landscape painting rendered through illusion. Drops of ink fall from the ceiling, disrupting the reflected image, and their sound reverberates through the space.

This work is a visual, aural and olfactory interpretation of a well-known Zen koan, in which the inherent nature of a mountain is observed, questioned, and finally, understood and accepted. Using sight, sound and smell to create a multi-dimensional installation, the work engages the audience's senses and stimulates the imagination into observing a mountain range that is abstract, ancient, futuristic, underwater, outer space or imaginary. Whether or not the viewer even sees the mountain at all depends on his or her state of mind.

This work is a continuation of the artist's exploration into the examination of traditional Chinese aesthetics and philosophy, extracting, exploring and extending these core elements within a contemporary discourse without being bound by the formal restraints of tradition.

About the exhibition: *Luminous Shadows*

November 18, 2017 - January 19, 2018

INK studio, Beijing

Michael Cherney, Huang Zhiyang, Hung Fai, Hung Keung, Li Huasheng, Li Jin, Cindy Ng

Curator: Alan Yeung

A painted rock bleeds as living flesh across sheets of paper. A quivering line gives form to the nuances of meditative experience. The veiled light of an icon radiates through the near-instantaneous marks by a pilgrim's hand. The group exhibition *Luminous Shadows* explores spirituality and transcendence in the sensory engagement with the material world. Each of the eight participating artists calls attention to the embodied experience of space and time, recuperating dimensions of art repressed by a modern aesthetics of detached contemplation. The work of art is here ritualized anew as a vehicle for salvation and awakening, a self-conscious theatrical illusion, a sensuous body of pleasure and pain, and an object of pious devotion and yearning.



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Organized as a series of shrine-like enclosures, *Luminous Shadows* is inspired by the cave as a primordial site of image-making and beholding. At once concrete and ethereal, the cave both heightens interiority and encourages dream-like wanderings into worlds beyond. It is an archetypal space of the Buddhist icon: Shakyamuni once miraculously imprinted his own “shadow image” in a cliff-side grotto. Radiant and reflective like a mirror from afar, this image would disappear into the blank rocky surface upon approach. Encompassing rubbing, wall painting, soundscape, and manipulations of perspective and light, the works in *Luminous Shadows* draw on the physical, sensorial, and conceptual ambiguities of the cave.

Hung Fai (b. 1988, Hong Kong) ritually enacts and dissolves the violence of patriarchal authority in his laborious stippling of a rock painted by his father. Li Jin (b. 1958, Tianjin) reproduces a Dunhuang mural depicting compassionate self-sacrifice, expressing his own piety through utmost faithfulness to its weathered surface and faded pigments. The pilgrim-painter Hung Keung (b. 1970, Kunming) captures his fleeting encounters with enshrined icons with ink-stained fingers. Here presented as an immersive installation, Michael Cherney’s (b. 1969, New York) photographs reconstruct auratic ruins of Buddhist grottos through the material artifacts of film and xuan paper.

In Jennifer Ma’s (b. 1973, Beijing) installation, light and glass repeatedly coalesce into an illusionary landscape before dissolving in a reflective ink pool. Cindy Ng’s (b. 1966, Macau) video presents a theater of liquid traces, inviting and frustrating the desire for narrative and character. A shamanistic connoisseur of archaic stone and jade artifacts, Huang Zhiyang (b. 1965, Taipei) channels in painting and sculpture their mystical energies. Inspired by the landscape and religiosity of Tibet, Li Huasheng’s (b. 1944, Yibin, Sichuan) vast hand-drawn grids and lines oscillate between surface and depth, the infinite and the infinitesimal.

Accompanied by video and material documentation of the artists’ processes, *Luminous Shadows* presses on the question of agency and medium at the heart of the Shadow Cave lore. Does the power of images derive from material constitution, spatial and ritual context, the object of representation, or the devotion of the maker or beholder? Or is it precisely the indeterminacy between them?

About the artist Jennifer Wen Ma

Jennifer Wen Ma (1973, Beijing, China) is a visual artist who moved to the United States in 1986, and received her Master of Fine Art degree in 1999 from Pratt Institute, New York. Ma works and lives between New York and Beijing. Ma’s interdisciplinary practice bridges varied media such as installation, drawing, video, public art, design, performance, and theatre; often bringing together unlikely elements in a single piece, creating sensitive, poetic and poignant works.



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Projects with international institutions include: A Beautiful Disorder at Cass Sculpture Foundation, 2016; What About the Art? at Qatar Museums, 2016; installation opera Paradise Interrupted, commissioned by Spoleto USA Festival, Lincoln Center Festival, and National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts, 2015, also previewed in the Temple of Dendur, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Flux Projects, Atlanta; Market Square Public Art Program, Pittsburgh, 2015; 5x5 Nonument Park, Washington DC; Vancouver Art Gallery, 2014; Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, New York, 2013; Cambio Cultural, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2013; Performa 13, New York, 2013; The Republic of China Centennial Grand Countdown, Taipei, 2010; Biennale of Sydney, 2010; Echigo-Tsumari Triennial, Japan, 2009; Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain, 2009; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2008; and the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, 2008, among others.

Solo exhibitions include: Sandra Gering Inc, New York, 2017; Art021, Shanghai, 2016; Hanart Square, Hong Kong, 2013; Ullens Center For Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2012; Eslite Gallery, Taipei, 2012; and The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, 2009. Permanent public installations include: Nature and Man in Rhapsody of Light at the Water Cube, The National Aquatic Center, Beijing, 2013; In-Between World—Daydream Nation, Digital Beijing Building, 2008; Aeolian Garden, city of Colle di Val d'Elsa, Italy, 2005, among others.

In 2008, Ma was one of the seven members on the core creative team for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics, and the chief designer for visual and special effects. She received an Emmy for the US broadcast of the ceremony. More info: www.littlemeat.net

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