

Li Ran's recent productions manifests a shift of perspective. Although he hasn't given up the self-reflexive approach that characterizes his research, he seemed to have moved from the analysis (through his own direct involvement) of the "pantomime" of art, cultural conventions and the ways art these are simplistically converted into knowledge, to the process underlying the formation of what we call "art": not only the arrangement of contents, but the very mechanism through which they are produced and staged. To achieve this, he captured or re-enacted the crucial moment when ideas are generated and converted them into images, temporarily abandoning his usual personation of different characters and entrusting other people the duty of creating their own "meanings", which eventually become signifiers of his own work. In this way, art is truly converted into a social practice.

Li Ran's works inside this exhibition deal with that slippery ground language is. The artist has solicited a verbal intervention from different people, recorded their (and his own) voices and faces, together with scraps of memories, impressions and ideals.

In the video *Before Indulgence, After Freedom* (2013), the narrations delivered by five "ordinary" men (only one man is a professional actor) gathered on a stage, are assembled as a coherent unity. Sitting in a real studio with professional lights and chairs, they were asked to tell a story that had been given to them, or could invent their own at that very moment. No script was given, only names of philosopher should be inserted into the narrations at random. The editing breaks them into incoherent narrative shreds, so that we can only vaguely guess what every man is talking about. One tells us about a long-lost romantic love, another about trampled rights; one tells a Kung-Fu story; a middle-aged man talks about his family and politics ... the speech of the professional actor is even more erratic and inconsistent. As a result of the editing, the viewer's attention is focused on the affects of his voice and gestures. Despite the intended fragmentation of the narratives, the work conjures an impression of unity, as if every piece is part of the same story. What lies in *Before Indulgence, After Freedom* is the description of the "grey zone" in the artist's own creation. For Li Ran, we have to face the fact that there is something beyond description in the process of artistic production, like the fragmented contexts, the unique knowledge and experiences, impromptu actions...all of these elements act as a "veil" and obstacle to interpret and confront different types of creation; or they can be interpreted, but only out of context. For him, this is what makes the artists "untouchable". Li explains 'when we discuss art and social issues, it is not the lacking of philosophical basis, but, it's the body language that really counts. What I want to show with this video is the tip of the iceberg in artistic practice, which reveals a variety of components, such as words, confessions, repentance, retrospection, appeals, deductions, and etc. All of them are included in this fragmented, broken and partial scenery. All of these expressions seem to lack objects, responses and the spirit of reciprocity. It is somewhat embarrassing that we are standing on a seemingly open

stage, and repeating the social events that took place again and again, they have been translated into a repertoire of behaviors mixed with emotional expressions that recur consistently, but are in fact, discontinuous'. "How do we deal with the pauses during our conversation?"; "How do we share the forms of our thoughts?"; "What are we producing?": all of these questions are drawn from a twist in my creation'.

Like *Before Indulgence, After Freedom, Escape from the Scene* (2014) explores the range of styles and conventions in the transmission of contents. It consists of a five-channel video, some archival documents and ready-mades. The work was shot in five site-specific environments such as "Lab 1", "The Land of Mystery", "MULTI-EGO", "Birds Paradise" and "Untitled". For piece, a mixture of documentary recordings and virtual images was modified through cutting, blending, switching, re-editing and re-assembling of heterogeneous materials. In the first four "chapters", the live footage and the voices of interviewees are mixed with footage downloaded from the Internet. They can be footage of old TV shows, various archival videos, rather literal ways to certain words or topics mentioned by the voiceovers, making psychological hints. From the first to the fifth channel, we experience a gradual shortening of the video length, to suggest a form of visual "decanting", and the reduction to an essence. On the exhibition site, besides the videos, the artist has put on display various archival documents and ready-mades, as the visible and tangible evidences that reveal the problems he has encountered during the creative process. At the same time, they are also clues hinting to the context of the first two channels, in which a group of youths are filmed inside a "mystery house", they are supposed to escape from. The text related to "MULTI-EGO" reads: "My work is often placed into an exhibition site that is not essential, not fixed, but in a changing and confused situation. At the first sight, these things may seem absolutely irrelevant to me": the theoretical stage the artist has set up here turns into a backstage charged with religious paranoia and cliché rock music, where the members of a rock band reply to the artist's unheard questions as they talk about random topics. In "Birds Paradise", featuring a park of wild birds, the artist uses human voiceover (his own) to mimic wild birds speaking, contemplating, thinking and playing in cages. Through Li Ran's own voice, the birds talk about their condition of imprisonment, this allegorical expression aims implicitly at the confusion he confronted with during the making of this work. At the same time, it also indicates the artist's desires to escape and transcend the contingent reality, teeming with changes. The last part "Untitled" shows the artist's filming while walking inside the building he lived in. Its footage includes, for example, the artist stood beside the dustbin at the end of the corridor and peeping into a family through the window.