

## **Wang Dongma 王东马: Spiritus Animus**

**Wang Dongma's** creative discourse fuses sound, spatial interaction and physical objects which are subtly suggestive of the interaction of the individual self with sensory perception and implicitly returns to themes of ephemerality, nostalgia and transience.

The re-invention of massive wooden counters, mirrors, tables and wardrobes as animated entities with which the individual interacts by way of physical and sensory tracking of movement, replicates a Spiritus Animus: lost objects which evoke the passage of time yet offer a revisitation to the actual state of things, the present of today where holography, monitors, plasma screens and other technical apparatus of the everyday are part of our collective waking experience.

One peers into the scratched and tarnished face of a turn-of-the-century mirror, as a transparent image is brought to surface: we see not our own countenance but are confronted with a fictional creation, the Ghost in the Machine. We pass in close proximity to a freestanding cabinet, rustic and reminiscent of antiquity as drawers open in a random sequence and poetic script appears on the looking glass, an object of the quotidian having undergone the transformation of technology. Sounds emit in mimetic play to gestures and footsteps, the artistry of sound entirely imperceptible by visual means ascends to surprise and seduce the audience.

Wang Dongma's achievements are the direct result of experimentation with poets, sound artists, technicians and their impact on his own creative instinct. While little of the body of work would be at first identifiable as either Chinese or Oriental, the fluidity of the concealed imagery and rather obscure poetic references suggest a spiritual inclination not born in the Occident: it seems incognitive and obscure rather than determined or intentional. His creations address childhood reminiscence with "MeiMei"; questions of the aesthetics of light surface and refract with "Japanese Porn", and the dichotomy of female/male interaction is a pivotal signature of "What He Wants" and "What She Needs". Beings and intimacy are parabout in artworks housed in material creations, which incorporate original and replica furniture as we are led to question our own perception of time against these fabrications of time.

Shanghai holds a plethora of histories imagined, real and unreal. Warehouses once lined the shores of the Suzhou River and the early influence of Western culture created an aristocratic elite amongst the Eurocentric affluent classes. The pervasive influence is a living history architecturally, and the manufacture of antique objects has been an incessant course in the artisan shops and hidden factories that eschew endless replications of their authentic ancestors. Wang Dongma's trajectory is hence all the more poignant and pertinent given the constant demolition and engendered loss and change experienced in the psyche of Shanghai.

The artist seems to re-interpret our sense of the beauty of nostalgia, the

romanticization of an era of international legend deconstructed, giving it an electronic life that runs counter-current to the course of time. If the spiritual is present, it is a presence of fleeting apparitions rather than ecstasy or enlightened beings which are commonly depicted in the traditional representation of the "other" world. They appear tormented, inarticulate, mute...the passage of transmitted words adopted from poets by the artist invoke an atmosphere of ambiguity, one is disarmed rather than shocked. The first silent sentinels appear and re-appear in response to our own initial gestures of vanity with clothes and physical language of our own times, yet ensnared in the antique cage of dubious origins.

What, then, is of the East and what of the West? A direct relation to nostalgia and the intimacy of common everyday objects bridge together in his work...How shall one respond to spacio-temporal creations which graft experiences and articulations of others in one artistic voice, that of Wang Dongma, in direct counter-point with myths of history, perception & time?

*R A Suri – 04.04.2008*