
Zane Mellepe: Orchestrating Light

Artist/photographer **Zane Mellepe**, currently artistic director at **island6 Arts Center**, traverses a rather sensitive frontier in her documentary photography with luminous, clear definitions of light and line, and compositions that seem to agitate the observer rather than acquaint the spectator with the life experience or unique character of the subjects. Recent series reveal a kaleidoscopic panorama of life in Asia as she frequents remote monasteries and night markets, capturing the pulse of dense commuter traffic and throughout, yielding a highly saturated color field. The diversity and visual noise of Asia is captured somewhere between social document and aesthetic temporal moment, an unusual if not exceptional vantage point in the PRC where contemporary documentary photography pales in practice in comparison with international standards. Her explorations in photography and new media found fertile ground in **island6** where she has been engaged for more than a year as artistic director, curator and as a central artist in the **island6 Lab** (Art collective Liu Dao).

Employing diverse media, lambda prints, LED technology and more traditional formats in the application of photo/visual presentation, Zane has proven adept in experimental art and collective collaborations, yet I believe that apart from her involvement in the 2007 multi-media exhibition "*Made in China*", her series "*Shanghai Light*" is the most significant key qualifier of her unique talent. The metropolis of Shanghai with its notorious and epic urban change and its mode of existence and experience in the visual sphere challenges individuals and collective enterprises alike: "unprecedented", "brutal" and "momentous" are the ascribed adjectives for the city. Zane counters with a body of work that renders the experience somewhat abstract, a lyrical and evocative portrait of movement not without painterly qualities. The highly accentuated aesthete of her images and graphic strength of color obscures individual instances: the neon veneer appeals to something more unconscious, a fluidity of light and movement as the artist orchestrates sporadic moments within an artistic subjectivity. The prints scintillate with life, pageantry and vanity, as the collective impact is one that is visceral, void of narrative structure and seemingly without answer.

Urban reality and the question of documentary practice are further juxtaposed in her direct cooperation with Thomas Charvériat in the 2008 "*Clouds of Crowds*" creations. Lambda prints, LEDs and mirrors are bound within each work: cityscapes and industrial horizons are fragmented by intermittent lights, signals that refract and deter ones attention to the photographic plane of each work. Zane cites the experience as being transitional, an anomaly of her partnership with the **island6 Lab**. In contrast is the "*Found Family*" series, where the audience is confronted with large scale portraits which are intentionally "scarred": the fixed countenance of average souls having sat for portrait are given an uncomplimentary touch, the prints seem aged or damaged by time, creating a fallacy. The moment as document, the urban environment in documentation, the portrait as testament to an individual moment in time as the artist appears to distort practice. The concepts behind the different series differ greatly, yet she offers no easy answers nor raises any abject prejudice or limitations in practice. Zane challenges, and continues...

In an era of technological advance, the hyper-extenuation of the senses as experienced by those who live today in the megacities of Asia and China, the artist documents the intrinsic aspects of life, day and night. There are no definitive zones, no safe houses within the dialectics of visual culture. Zane Mellepe conceives series, which both independently alternate between and deconstruct preconceptions of documentary practice. While her methodology is not uniquely original, the

pertinence of her work reveals a dramatic and remarkable aesthetic at work: she denotes undercurrents and achieves coherence in a non-narrative body of work, which the majority of conceptual photographers would admire, if not envy. She has caught the sense of dislocation, discordance and insurgence, which are the living truths of Asia in a torrent of commercialization, individualism and re-identification. The chaotic noise of Shanghai, in particular, is imbued with a stillness that each citizen misses amidst the barrage of traffic, "Blade Runner" eavesdrops and cataclysmic rupture. Her work is an affirmation of the evolution of documentary work as being constituent with the human experience, and perhaps, one inseparable from the advent of a rampant atrophy of the senses. Zane bathes the city in light, and calms us to reflect once again.

R A Suri - 05.23.2008