



ren hang's new photo exhibit is a punk protest to censorship

Beijing's photography antagonist marks his first solo show in Los Angeles with the exquisite "What We Do Is Secret."

Hannah Ongley 15 June, 2016

Beijing's Ren Hang is considered the most provocative young photographer in China today. But in sunny Los Angeles, where Hang will stage his first solo exhibition with MAMA Gallery this weekend, his snapshots of uninhibited physical liberty have found a more welcoming home. Hang's swelling number of stateside fans will find plenty of familiar themes in *What We Do Is Secret*, the latest in a string of attempts by the photographer to tackle censorship and social restraints by shooting his friends at their most carefree. Hang's work is typically not safe for scrolling through at your own place of employment, but his subjects don't just exude freedom by casting off their clothing. Here they have flour thrown in their faces and do dive bombs into the ocean — all while retaining their characteristically stoic expressions.

It's not just the political climate of China — where art world antagonists like Ai Weiwei have also been punished for making work — that informs Hang's process. In fact the photographer told us when we spoke to him last year that there were many similarities between Chinese and American perspectives. "To me, [the issue of censorship is] almost the same [in both places]," he said following a shoot in Manhattan's most famous park. "Because when I was taking photos at Central Park, I was still worried that cops might show up and stop me." The irreverence that his subjects convey also challenges issues of identity that are more universal, such as heteronormativity, as they appear to inhabit spaces that are almost otherworldly.

*What We Do Is Secret* runs from June 18 through July 23, 2016, at MAMA Gallery in Los Angeles.