

Exhibition "Gen" Catalogue Interview by Francesca La Vigna

The exhibition "Gen" centers on the search of your own roots. What did drive you to undertake this journey?

I've always been intrigued by my grandfather's story. Travelling is always one of my goals, and I got the opportunity to go to China to finish my master thesis. I went there to get to know my family, and see the house where he was born. My grandfather at the age of 12 traveled on a fishing boat to Panama to work with his uncle who had business there. Going to China 80 years later was a way for me to pay a tribute to his memory.

How did this experience change you, your way of perceiving and living your identity?

Identity is a complex issue but also one of my favorite topics. On my first work "Foreign yet Familiar" for example, I created a visual diary entirely shot in Panama where I talk about the difficulties of being in Germany and away from Panama.

When I was in Panama, I always thought I was Chinese, I felt like belonging to China. Most of the things I knew about the Chinese culture were filtered through my grandfather. Obviously during my stay in China my perspective changed. First of all, you cannot talk about China as a homogeneous entity, it's too complex and diverse, there are many countries within one. My grandfather was from the south, and I lived in the Jiangsu region, where Shanghai is geographically located. People there speak a different language, eat other food, and have different traditions. And I needed to live there to be able to see and understand these differences within China and between China and Panama. My time in China was a great time for personal discovery, family encounters and pride for my family in Panama. With this experience of having managed to find the place where my grandfather was born not only my childhood dream and the family collective desire of finding this place was fulfilled, but also I came to know more about myself and my identity. To finally understand better who I am, where I come from and where I am going to. I guess in China at the end I went to find out I am neither Chinese, nor Hispanic, nor European, none and all. Fortunately, I am a kind of a new breed from the Era of Diversity. Now, all the stereotypes I grew up with are just disappearing. I am finally very proud of being who I am. I just needed to get to know China to realize it. I didn't only discover the Chinese roots of my ancestors but my own. The ones that grow beneath my feet.

Would you say now that you closed the circle, would you consider this project finished?

Yes and no. The project started as a personal romantic idea, and through it, I explored the social-cultural dynamics of China. It's already the third time I do an exhibition on this topic, I was in China for one year and a half, shooting every day, so you can imagine the amount of footage I have. For the exhibition at Vesselroom Project I am showing old and new material. Eventhough I will be working on new projects in 2015, I can still imagine this footage morphing abundantly in other ways, in time and space.

How would you define your practice?

I am going through a release process of the old, strict and standardized film and video editing techniques and in most cases "rules" I learnt in film school and in my daily practice of over a decade of professional work. While living in China I started to experiment with "trial an error". Perhaps unconsciously I was trying to break free from all the rules of film making or perhaps I was slowly marinating the idea of a conceptual style of video editing, which I call 'anti-editing', 'anti-

editing' is simply a break, the opposite, the contradiction of the expected editing rules that are applied in conventional visual narratives. It's more about being able to say a story in a non-conventional, and creative way. It's an arbitrary combination between storytelling, anthropology, and art.

Finding a balance between aesthetics, and content is very hard for me. I still don't know if I achieve it. My aim is to combine the aesthetic of an artist with the stories of a filmmaker. I also want to take movies out of the cinema space to place them somewhere else, in a gallery, on the street or in a club. Like the Expanded Cinema movement that was born in the 60's.

Do you work alone or with a team?

A film is a collective work. I am not against it, I have worked on teams before and will definitely do it again, but this intimate project about China I basically did on my own. It would have been weird to ask another person to capture these very personal aspects of my life for me.

How do you expect the exhibition to be perceived by the public?

This is my first solo show. I hope people understand the exhibition as it's shown. But it's also not the crucial point, that they get the full story. It's way too complex. I like to play with chances, destiny; the ability to create different languages to approach these things. I love to keep the interpretation open, so people can make their own ones. Once the art is shown, it doesn't belong to the author anymore, therefore I don't want to put a description to lead people. I just want to create an atmosphere, keeping a memory alive and pay a tribute, and let everybody experience it in their own way.

What are your future projects?

I will for sure continue with videos, this is my medium and the topic must be connected to myself, in a way. The next project will be about Berlin, like the sequel or second part of "Foreign yet Familiar", but now the German version of it. It will also be my first project about Berlin after being here all together on and off for seven years. I also have other projects cooking in the Panamanian oven but it's too soon now to be talking about them.