

Review | Shen Xin

Visual Art

by /Dan Munn, translated by / LB Li



巨人的肩膀，(c) 沈莘，摄影：CCVA，2015

Shen Xin is a London based artist whose films interpose her own personal and professional experiences with wider artistic and political narratives from China and internationally. In *Records of Rites* (2014) Shen presented her experience as a guest at Christmas dinner in Norway alongside Chinese billionaire and art collector Ni Zhaoxing's controversial redevelopment of London's Crystal Palace. Placing Boris Johnson's grandiose introduction to Ni's project against a choreography of the guest-host exchange described in the Confucian *Book of Rites*, the film comes to the somewhat paradoxical conclusion that a guest can only retain their character by celebrating mistranslation and unanticipated consequences. *Counting Blessings* (2014) explores the artistic practice of Shen's father, who produces realist ink drawings of rural Tibetans. Working under his instruction while at home in Chengdu as a means of economic survival, Shen documents him as he photographs Tibetans in traditional dress (wearing a Philadelphia 76ers sweater himself) against the majestic plateau. The film shows how each negotiates the transaction involved in bringing their subject's red skin and 'close to nature' lifestyle under the fetishizing gaze of painterly critique.

The artist's most recent project, *Shoulders of Giants* (2015), employs live motion capture to extend the format of the symposium. The artists and theorists participating animated creatures from the *Shan Hai Jing*, a classic 4th century Chinese text as they spoke on natural, social and technological mechanisms of power. The footage recorded will be adapted into a new film, to be shown later this year at OCAT Shanghai's *Folklore of the Cyber World* curated by Zhang Ga.

Bearing a transparency in its installation, the projection screen sitting in front of each speaker stood out sharply against the Senate House's period features and walnut panelled recesses. The animations were not immune to glitches and disappearances, the character's wide eyes and broad smiles caricaturing the presenter's nuanced expressions and loudly broadcasting the reflective postures of those waiting to speak. Appropriately then, topics ranged from the exoticisation of art criticism to a debate over the artistic and political potential of tech titan platforms. Exactly how Shen's take up a position as editor in regard to these technological peculiarities and problematics in her upcoming film is worth following closely.

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