

FREE EXHIBITION

Tours offered weekly starting June 9.

Yang Fudong: *New Women*

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新女性

The new project by celebrated Chinese visual artist and filmmaker Yang Fudong draws inspiration from the decadent aura of Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s. As immortalized in the racier films and literature of the era, Shanghai was an uneasy mixture of Chinese and foreign influence, of corruption and religious rectitude, of poets and policemen, and of the numerous types of “women of the night,” from streetwalkers to “sing-song” girls. All of this came to an end with the Japanese occupation of the city, but it left an indelible mark on succeeding generations of Chinese artists, and Chinese filmmakers especially. Shanghai’s creative energy, sexual charge and political ferment were a crucible of change for a society tentatively emerging from the stagnation and humiliations of the imperial era. Its key stylistic ideas, a particular blend of East and West known as *hai pai* (in contrast to the more traditional, Beijing-centred *jing pai*), finds no finer expression than in the city’s freewheeling filmmaking during the Art Deco age, always circumscribed by Guomindang censorship, impacted by war and its privations, and loathed and unrevived by China’s new rulers after 1949.

New Women locates *hai pai* in the female nude, a form considered the height of Western pollution by traditionalists at the time, but of course prevalent in private Chinese art from its earliest expressions. Yang Fudong seeks to resurrect a possibly invented form of decadent Shanghai storytelling: the erotic memoir. Actresses, each depicted on a large screen, move in an ephemeral world where architectural elements both within the film frame and physically in the gallery create tri-dimensional, highly staged and narratively rich situations. Five iterations appear in the gallery space, slightly tilted to echo the screen positions in the earliest movie theatres—a reminder that the boldest of these new women were to be found in the cinema, both on screen and in the audience, hungry for the arrival of the modern world.

The work serves not only as an evocation of an improbably remembered creative past, but also functions as an admission of how important women—and, more, ideas about women—were to China’s transition to modernity over the past century. Yang Fudong cleverly situates this discourse in an “in-between” space—part photography, part cinema, part painting, part sculpture—that mirrors the difficulty of deploying women as icons of progress. Existing in total silence, these women are restless ghosts of a past truncated by history.

Yang Fudong is himself a fascinating *hai pai* artist, gleefully mixing cinema and visual art practice, European art cinema with Chinese painterly compositions. The artist will underline these connections with a screening of his early film work, *An Estranged Paradise*, which he describes as an early precursor to *New Women*. The film took over four years to complete and holds the key to Fudong’s particular poetics. The first scenes contend with the principles and complications of Chinese painting history, its rules revealed in a meditative voiceover narration, followed by a manifesto for transposing those rules to the contemporary moment.

—Davide Quadrio & Noah Cowan

Yang Fudong appears
in person to present
An Estranged Paradise on
Wednesday, June 5 at 7:00 pm,
as part of our experimental
film and video series
The Free Screen.

Christopher Doyle Du Ke Feng is best known as one of the world’s great cinematographers for his work on such films as *The Peach Blossom Land*, *Chungking Express*, *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*, *In the Mood for Love* and *Hero*. He is also an accomplished author, actor, filmmaker and visual artist. His most recent work *Away With Words* (a continuation of a long-term project which began as a remarkable feature film of the same name in 1999) seeks to explore the nature of how “non-lexical” (no words!) language might look and feel—a pertinent question for an artist who has often spoken of living between cultures, between a language of science (English) and a language of concepts (Chinese), between art forms dependent on words (scripts, books) and those based on images (films, photography).

Doyle’s new project at TIFF is comprised of two multi-channel installations in complex dialogue with one another. According to Doyle, this new work seeks “to get away with and from words to explore the elemental nature of image-making and the personal nature of films and the film experience.” It also functions as a fragmentary and succinct history of Chinese (especially Hong Kong) cinema, and his own role within it.

The first installation is comprised of five monitors, each channel representing one of the five Chinese elements—fire, earth, air, water and wood—and featuring imagery drawn from footage shot by Doyle himself (outtakes, home movies, test footage, film scenes, etc.); so, for example, the sublime rooftop closing sequence from *Infernal Affairs* is among the images evoking the element of air. Each of the units are looped at lengths resembling a film trailer and feature unrelated soundtracks. In Doyle’s words, these representations are “refracted and condensed into thematic units that assess what the elements are, what is elemental to the ideas of the work [itself], the process and the commitment that is a film,” but also constitute a larger project to “condense a life view, visual process and film experience.”

The second installation, on three monitors, allows Doyle to critique his own internal conflicts as an artist existing “between” language and image. He transposes images, borrowed in part from the first installation, to one central screen, and then positions two screens on either side, one featuring himself (perhaps) being interviewed, the other featuring his alter ego Du Ke Feng (Doyle’s Chinese name, meaning “like the wind”) haranguing Doyle, their debate focusing on biography and the authorship of the images in question. According to Doyle, it is “a kind of Cinematographer’s Fight Club in which Du Ke Feng assaults all [the] values that Chris thinks he holds dear ... and Chris doesn’t bat an eye.”

Doyle will also present a unique live presentation of *Away With Words* that extends his “self-self” dialogue into a triadic discourse/literary lecture/multimedia presentation that probes ideas of location, image and language throughout Doyle’s outrageous, thoughtful and fiercely creative oeuvre.

—Noah Cowan

Christopher Doyle Du Ke Feng: *Away With Words*

杜可風
離言萬語

Christopher Doyle Du Ke Feng
presents a free live
performance of
Away With Words on
Monday, June 10 at 10:00 pm.

Co-presented by

