



What is it to be Chinese?

CURATED BY Katerina Valdivia Bruch

WITH Kyungwoo Chun, FX Harsono, Truong Ngu, Tintin Wulia, David Zink Yi

OPENING: October 12, 7-10 pm

EXHIBITION: October 12 - November 18, 2012

Wed.-Sun. 14-19 h.

Fichtestrasse. 2, 10967 Berlin

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With the kind support of: **ARNOT**

The exhibition *What is it to be Chinese?* sets up a framework to start thinking about Chinese belonging, but also to reflect about global migration movements and contemporary Chinese culture. In fact, Chinese migration movements have been happening during a fairly long time and all around the globe. Chinese diaspora has enriched countries with new cultural backgrounds, but also resulted in discrimination and marginalisation. In general, migration reflects a global turn mediated by economical, cultural or religious motifs, in search for new opportunities other than the one offered in the place of origin. In the show, five artists of mixed Chinese origins address in their work what they associate to their Chinese roots. However, these artists were not raised up in China nor speak Chinese language.

Chinese people came to Indonesia in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. During the Dutch colonisation (1603-1949), Chinese were prioritised by the Dutch for trading purposes. Since then, a long history of discrimination started and still continues. For a period of time, Chinese in Indonesia were not allowed to perform their traditions, nor use their language or even give Chinese names to their children. In conflict situations, they were targets of a series of riots and massacres. Yet some positive turns have happened after the fall of Suharto in 1998, such as the possibility to learn Chinese language in schools, to be able to perform Chinese traditions and even to celebrate Chinese New Year. However, there is still a lot of work to do about this topic, not only regarding Chinese-Indonesian, but also concerning other Indonesian ethnicities and religious beliefs.

One of the artists that has been researching about this subject matter throughout his artistic career is **FX Harsono**. The artist takes as an example his personal and family history to reflect about some dire episodes in Indonesian history. He documents through installations, paintings, videos, performances, photographs and testimonials what Chinese-Indonesians have been suffering during the last decades. His latest body of work is about learning to write his Chinese name, exemplified in the installation *Writing in the Rain* (2011). The piece refers to the ethnic law applied only to Chinese-Indonesians (Presidential Decree no. 127/U/Kep/12/1966), a law that constrained them to

change their Chinese names to Indonesian sounding names. In fact, the artist did not learn to write his Chinese name until a few years ago.

Tintin Wulia's art practice is about borders, often including the audience as part of her works. In *Study for Wanton* (2008), Tintin questions the concept of "identity" in general by referring to her imposed "Chinese-Indonesian identity", using elements such as national anthems of the nations that occupied Indonesia (such as the Netherlands and Japan) and the arbitrariness of "Chinese" fortune cookies (that are actually an American invention). In the four-channel video installation, she implies her movement across the screens through spatial, virtual and time-based modes, singing to the karaoke pointers, showing what it is to be a wanton, a metaphor for a border-crosser.

Although the majority of the Chinese population in Korea came mainly from Shandong, there are individual stories of Chinese who came already in the early 13th century to the Korean peninsula. Tracing Chinese-Korean history is part of the work of Korean artist **Kyungwoo Chun**, who explores his Chinese origin through his family name. The artist travelled to the village of Zhengzhou in China in search for people with the family name Chun. Since 2006, the artist has done 1000 portraits of people with the family name Chun (Chun means in Chinese thousand). The installation *Thousands* (2006-2008) is a living archive of photographs that includes the name, birthplace and date of birth of the people portrayed. It also recalls the history of his family name through the Chinese military general Chun, who was sent to Korea in 1592.

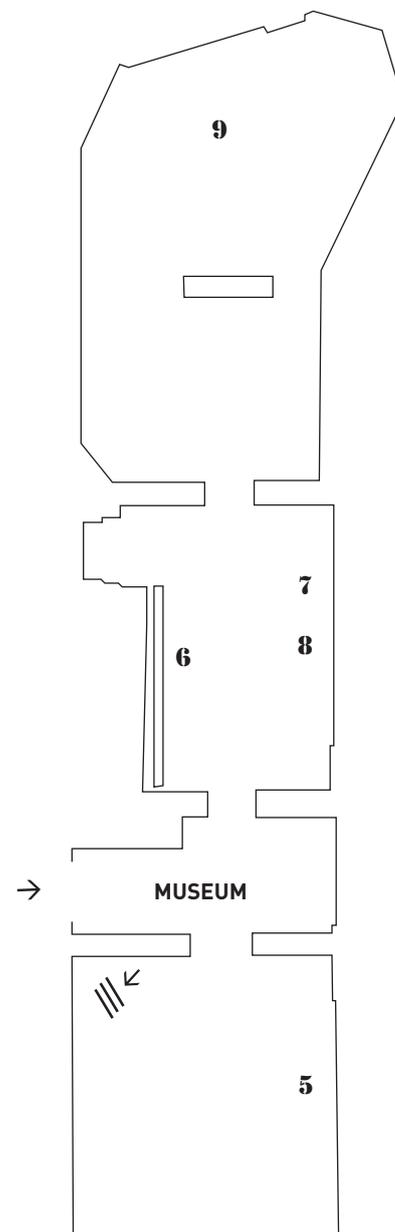
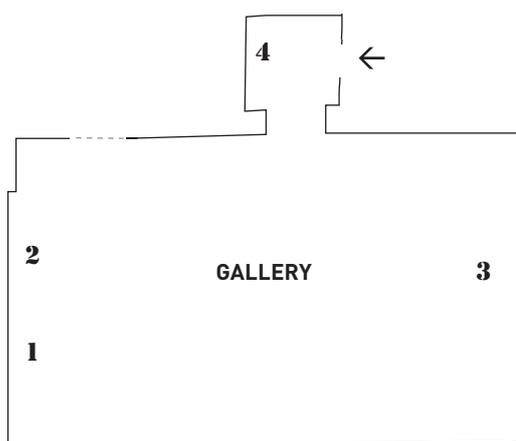
Another point of view is the one given by Peruvian-German-Chinese artist **David Zink Yi**, born in Peru to German-Chinese parents. In the video installation *El Festejo* (2001), the artist plays with the hybridity of his own cultural background and reflects on the cultural environment of Peruvian post-colonial society. In Peru, African people were brought to Peru as slaves during the 16th century settling down in the coastal areas to work in the plantations. Similarly to it, Chinese came to Peru as semi-slaves in the late 19th century replacing the African slaves that were working in the manors or *haciendas*.

The video installation recreates the story of a Chinese-African-Peruvian woman, connecting her mixed cultural background with the rhythm of African-Peruvian music and the Chinese decoration of her family house. It is a story of two migration groups that mingled together, depicting a long history of *mestizo* (mixblood) heritage in Peruvian culture.

Chinese and Vietnamese relations have a long history of tensions between borders, occupations and exchanges. For instance, in the seventies, when Vietnam became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam after the Vietnam war, Chinese-Vietnamese were victims of social discrimination. Many Chinese of Vietnamese origin fled by sea and asked for political asylum, such as the case of the so-called 'boat people'. An example of this is present in the work of **Truong Ngu**, born in

Hanoi to Chinese-Vietnamese parents. Being a minority in Vietnam, part of his family left the country as boat people and established in former West Germany, where the artist grew up since he was eight years old. In his performance *Glücklicher Stern* (Lucky Star) (2010), he narrates the migration moves of his family playing a game similar to Monopoly, for which the numbers of the dice will influence his family destiny.

What is it to be Chinese? is about Chinese diaspora, but also about how people address their belonging to a place in which they have barely lived nor know the language. It is more about what might be called 'Chinese'. The way these artists address Chinese belonging could give us a clue on how much we do share and incorporate various cultural backgrounds in our lives.



1, 2, 4, 7, 8
KYUNGWOO CHUN
1592 #1

2007, C-Print on Diasec,
165 x 126 x 3 cm
Courtesy the artist and Bernhard
Knaus Fine Art

1592 #2

2007, C-Print on Diasec,
165 x 126 x 3 cm
Courtesy the artist and Bernhard
Knaus Fine Art

Departure Songs

2008, Video, 6:41 min., PAL, 4:3
colour, sound
Courtesy the artist

Thousands

2008, Edition #1, C-Print,
52 x 68 cm
Courtesy the artist and Bernhard
Knaus Fine Art

Thousands

2008, Edition #3, C-Print,
52 x 68 cm
Courtesy the artist and Bernhard
Knaus Fine Art

3

FX HARSONO

Writing in the Rain

2011, Installation with video performance, wooden desk & chair,, acrylic sheet, 24 inch TV monitor, number 1 from an edition of 3
Courtesy the artist and ARNDT Berlin

5

DAVID ZINK YI

El Festejo

2001, Video HD, 9 min., PAL, 4:3, colour, sound, Two-channel video installation
30 x 20 x 15 cm
Courtesy the artist

6

TRUONG NGU

Glücklicher Stern

2010, Game and performance game board 60 x 40 cm packing material 36 x 23 x 2 cm 9 playing cards, 1 die 5 colourful figures
Courtesy the artist

9

TINTIN WULIA

Study for Wanton

2008, Video DVD, 6 min. each, PAL, 4:3, colour, sound, Four channel video installation
Courtesy the artist and Osage gallery



KYUNGWOO CHUN

Born 1969 in Seoul, South Korea. Lives and works in Bremen and Seoul.

After studying Photography in South Korea (1992) the artist moved to Germany, where he studied and started to work in different art projects in Europe. Kyungwoo Chun is known for his poetically blurred photographic portraits that deal with time and space in a very unconventional way. He has been doing participatory performances and collaborations in cities like Düsseldorf, Barcelona, Seoul, Berlin, Prague, Liverpool, Lisbon and Copenhagen. His work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions in Europe and South Korea. He was recipient of the Danish Art Council grant DIVA (2007), the Art Council Korea grant, the grant by Ivory Press, UK, and was the winner of the Hanmi Photography Award from the Museum of Photography Seoul (2007) and the Public Art Competition in Bremen (2008). The artist's work is represented in major museum collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; Museet for Fotokunst Odense (DK); the Museum of Photography, Seoul; the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, amongst others.

www.kyungwoochun.de

FX HARSONO

Born 1949 in Blitar, East-Java, Indonesia. Lives and works in Jakarta.

FX Harsono studied painting at STSRI "ASRI", Yogyakarta (Indonesia) from 1969-74 and at IKJ (Jakarta Art Institute) from 1987-91. Since 2005 he is lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Design, Pelita Harapan University, Tangerang (West Java). Recent solo exhibitions include *Testimonies* at the Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2010), and *The Erased Time* at the National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta (2009). Recent group exhibitions include the *Fourth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art* in Moscow, Russia (2011), *Edge of Elsewhere* at 4A, Sydney, Australia (2011), *Recent Art From Indonesia: Contemporary Art-Turn* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai (2010), *Beyond The Dutch* at the Centraal Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands (2009), and *Highlight* at ISI, Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2008). Harsono is also an active art critic, regularly writing about social issues and the development of contemporary art.

www.fxharsono.com

TRUONG NGU

Born 1974 in Hanoi, Vietnam. Lives and works in Berlin.

Truong Ngu is a German-Vietnamese artist. He fled with his entire family during the Vietnam War, because of their Chinese ancestry. He studied at the UdK Berlin (University of the Fine Arts Berlin), and works in the fields of multi-media, film and performance.

www.truongngu.com

TINTIN WULIA

Born 1972 in Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia. Lives and works in Melbourne.

Tintin Wulia is an artist, whose work is a reflection about borders in a wider sense. She is interested in the different qualities of borders, such as spatial-geographical borders or cultural-ethnic borders, and its connection to mechanisms of power. Accordingly, she also explores the subject of migration in geopolitical terms. The artist works with objects, such as maps, passports or official family documents. She creates interactive installations that comprise a variety of media, such as videos, murals, texts, objects and performances, and encourages the audience to take active part in them.

Tintin's work has been presented in a number of international exhibitions, such as the Gwangju and Istanbul biennials, the Yokohama Triennial, the Jakarta Biennale, and the 4th Moscow Biennial. Her work has been exhibited at ZKM-Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, the Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo (MARCO) in Vigo, Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton in Paris, Institute of Contemporary Art London, FACT at Liverpool Biennial, amongst others. She has participated in a number of festivals, such as the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival or the International Film Festival Rotterdam.

www.tintinwulia.com

DAVID ZINK YI

Born 1973 in Lima, Peru. Lives and works in Berlin.

David Zink Yi produces videos that explore how national identity results from a hybrid history - one that arrives out of the juxtaposition and interweaving of indigenous traditions, colonialism, and international migration. His research focuses on local knowledge and tradition of a particular culture, using music and food as receptacles

for legends, myths, collective narrations and private languages.

After graduating from the master class of Lothar Baumgarten at the Universität der Künste Berlin (2003), he was awarded the Schmidt-Rottluff scholarship, the Ars-Viva Prize (both in 2004) and the MAK-Schindler scholarship (2005). His works are represented in public and private collections around the world, including Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and Museo de Arte, Lima, amongst others.

www.davidzinkyi.net

About the curator:

KATERINA VALDIVIA BRUCH is a Berlin-based independent curator. She has curated exhibitions for a number of institutions, including ZKM - Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe (Germany), CCCB (Barcelona, Spain), Instituto Cervantes (Berlin and Munich), Instituto Cultural de Leon (Mexico), Para/Site Art Space (Hong Kong), and the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts. In 2008, she was co-curator of the Prague Triennale at the National Gallery in Prague. Besides her work as a curator, she contributes with essays and articles for art publications and magazines. Her focus as a curator is on international emerging artists and artists' collectives.

www.artatak.net



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