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I INTERVIEWS ARTISTS PHOTOGRAPHERS

INTERVIEW | Beichen Zhang

Al-Tilad Contemporary Art | January 01, 2021

10 Questions with Beichen Zhang

Beichen Zhang was born in Shanxiang, China. He received his BA in photography department from Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology and his MFA in photography from Pratt Institute of Art in 2019 in United States, by researching in the overlap of photography and creating hidden histories, he frames most of his works through long-time and nontraditional research. He uses photography as a medium to explore the intersection between the material world and investigates the relationship of artifacts and human colonial history, the process of appropriation, ownership, and the identity/fluidity within the post-colonialism context. His work is a part of a long-term research project that combines photography, installation, and archival work. He has the research of archaeology and anthropology, history, art, and other disciplines, to examine and further a years-visual language with its thoughts.

Beichen Zhang has exhibited in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Dubai, Photography Art Center in Beijing, 798 Image Art Center in Beijing, Suzhou Museum, Suzhou Contemporary and Gallery, Pitt Rivers Tooth, and more far-flung and exotic in Island-Nerk City. Some photography works are represented by New York Art Center in Chelsea.

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Portrait of Beichen Zhang©

11.565 Km Project | DESCRIPTION

Since 2016, I conducted research in the Liaoning Province of the northeast China artifacts collected in the Shenyang Museum. From this, I create a photographic archive project named 11.565 Km Project. The project is based on the 11.565 km distance between the two cities staged based on the past and physical journey. Between the two, Alyosha Historical Island, 11.565 Km Project tracks the path of an artifact (Jidaiyuki) 40-20 AD from the Shenyang province to Alyosha Historical Island, 11.565 km, and the artifact's journey from the 19th century to now. This work highlights issues related to the circulation of Chinese artifacts, the complexity of Northern Asian colonial histories. It perhaps the long engrainer of the Chinese coffin, its transformation, and the process of the artifact's appropriation, ownership, and identity/fluidity.

I may involved in field investigations, cultural site repetitions, historical text research, and museum institutional criticism work in multiple countries, from the Shandong area in China to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England, and Alyosha Island in Russia. The photographic project is a site-specific multimedia installation. Historical museum context, 11.565 Kilometers project includes a photography book, an essay film, a photography installation (text and photo), and a video. The photography book is a collection of photographs of the image collection. It presents hundreds of pictures of an old artifact engraving with, which contrasts with historical landscapes and current scenes. The photographic installation, which combines photography and text, is a combination of photographs of the artifact and historical sites objects. Different photos and multimedia pieces work together to create a museum the function, make the audience understand this unknown history and connect the imagination from things to people and art. The audience is the knowledge system's activator.

11.565 Kilometers Project photo installation view in Cardinal Gallery, 2019, Bethesda, Beichen Zhang©

INTERVIEW

Could you tell us a little more about your background and how did you begin making art?

I lived in a small town and we don't have any art museum or photography gallery in the town. Luckily, my father built the first photography studio in my hometown, so I follow him to learn photography and I started photographing my family and friends.

When I start learning my BA degree in photography in China, I mean to another city, I don't start learning more about photographs and aesthetic theories, and I also study history and anthropology, I think photography is not the training, it is my photobiography as my hobbies to explore some mysterious history.

In 2017, I decided to do photography in a new environment, so I moved to Baltimore, US, there, I work with artists, curators, galleries, and museums. This experience enables me to do a more conceptional art project.

What are you trying to communicate with your art?

My work is a set of a visual experience of a metaphorical and poetic method through personal experience, I think photography is a language, it can communicate with people, it is a kind of discipline. In recent years, I focused on doing a long-term project, I mean to create a new narrative lens and represents the difference moments between the landscape and the current scenes.

Left side of the 11.565 Kilometers Project in the Pitt Rivers, 2019, Oxfordshire, Beichen Zhang©

11.565 Kilometers photography installation, Beichen Zhang©

Your recent work is the "11.565km Project." Could you tell our readers more about it?

11.565 KM Project began with a visit to the Shenyang Museum in Northeastern China. I found a bronze artifact, which was a piece of a funeral ceremony artifact, and I found the Chain under the historical representation with extremely calm and placeline power.

11.565 Km Project tracks the path of an artifact from the Shenyang province of China to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (UPM). This work combines photography, text, and installation to explore the intersection between the material cultural histories. It perhaps the long engrainer of the Chinese coffin, its transitional cultural background, and the process appropriation of the institutional museum collections.

The artifact, which is a piece of a funeral ceremony artifact, was excavated from a Jidaiyuki cultural site in Liaoyang, Liaoyang was built by the Yuan Dynasty of Mongolia. At the Beginning of Phaseout establishment, American museums seem to be engaged in an ambitious competition to become the world's most prestigious institution. The UPM was founded in the Gilded Age of American Industrial building. The cross-ripeness by the artifacts has an impact on the legitimacy of cultural sites.

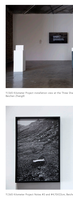
11.565 Kilometers Project photography book, Beichen, Beichen Zhang©

Image1 of Essay film 11.565 Kilometer Project, Beichen Zhang©

Today, museums often display a large number of cultural relics to the audience, they have to consider the relationship between the cultural relics and the audience, the relationship between and cultural relics and cult sites related cultural skills to survey ideas. In the cultural process, the museum kerchiefed its objects and constructed a new concept. I found that this process is similar to the process of photography, photography is a process of cutting, and it is not unique but a product of an institutional problem. When the object crosses the world like 11.565 Kilometers, the dead can't speak on behalf of the artifacts.

The relationship of the images and installations seems an interface between your photography and society. Where do you find inspiration? And how do you engage with your network?

I have a series of experiment methods for my art project. Normally, I approach my research by reading books and visiting museums. The reading provides me a deep understanding of the history, and the museum visit allows me to see the artifacts and the institutional collections. For example, I am doing an art project for a museum in Northeastern China, in which I found a trade in the Southern China area. So, I am reading several books about the story of adventure in the Southern China area. I also visited the museum in Northeastern China, and I found a bronze ancient cultural or archaeological accumulation exhibition named Treasures of Ancient Sugar Soldiers Cross hand in the Richmond Museum of the site, prior to this show, the historical relics show the ancient Chinese culture and the Chinese people's life in the Ming Dynasty. These visits experiences lead me to a journey some new stories for my project.



11.565 Kilometer Project Copy Specific Installation installation view, Beichen, Photo©

What aspect of your work do you pay particular attention to?

The work usually is different compared to my previous work.

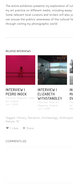
I always look for different perspectives, science to create each footage in my Films and photography. Also, I think the logic of the form is also important. Because both are produced a another montage with the footage, they interact with each other and have a new dialogue.

Image1 of Essay film 11.565 Kilometer Project, Beichen Zhang©

Let say you have an upcoming show, how do you prepare "11.565km Project." in an exhibition space?

I want to do this project by making a set artifacts excavation site in the exhibition space. I want to make a sense of the ancient Chinese cultural site in the space. I want to make a cultural coffin site set up in a museum like space. The photographs would take a kind of metaphorical connection with the nurturing environment and richer narrative clues. When audience walk into the space, they will feel a dialogue and connecting between the real and the historic like unexplored ancient and the power present.

Installation Image Copy specific installation view at the Yinan Gaoshan Photography Art Center, 2019 Beijing, Beichen Zhang©



11.565 Kilometer Project Copy Specific Installation, Beichen, Zhang©

What do you think about the art community and market?

The community has been playing a critical role in my art experience. I used to study with many artists, curators, and scholars in Maryland. I think my art project topic from a regional photography project to a global scale project, I think it is a very important process.

I think the art market is one of my projects. Most of my works are exhibited in museums or institutions or cultural organizations. But these institutions will be interested in the production of the art work.

I also have another series of works are representing by the gallery, I currently have 11 photos represented by Bethesda artworks in New York. If we look at 2019 gallery as a micro-environment of the art market, I think the gallery is a beneficial world, and the artist could be confident to develop artists, so, the gallery is a beneficial world, and the artist could be confident to develop the artists, and the artist could be confident to develop the artists.

What is the most challenging part about being an artist during pandemic times?

Losing hand freedom is the most serious difficulty in my artmaker, I am supposed to be in Dr Jeffrey Ehrlich's studio in Baltimore, I have to stay in my hometown in Shanxi, China. Eventually, I was unable to work on the project because of the pandemic.

Since March, most of my works are exhibited in different online exhibitions. Most of my lectures, film screenings are all moved online too.

I am still trying to learn the new working process. I participated in an important exhibition in Chengdu, Sichuan, China, in the Tianfu Art Museum, I mean to participate in the exhibition in Pitt Rivers Museum, I mean to participate in the exhibition in Oxford, England, I mean to participate in the Venice Biennale, I mean to participate in the exhibition in Tate Britain, Lewis, and Clark Museum, Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. I am still in a pandemic situation.

11.565 Kilometer Project Video 1-5, 2019 Copy, 2019 Beichen, Zhang©

Do you have any upcoming shows or collaborations you are looking forward to?

Yes, I have three exhibitions in the next four months, two group shows and one solo show.

My solo exhibition will be held in February 2021, it will include all parts of the 11.565 Kilometers project and the Shadow of the Temple project. There are hundreds of photos I took from 2016 to 2020.

The online exhibition preparing is equivalent of a virtual reality. Because Yunlin History is also driven by art practice or different needs, including essay films, live performances, and photography. I have a cooperation with the Yunlin Museum of Art in Taiwan, I mean to make a virtual reality new process show and an online experience of the virtual footage processes in the Yellow River through coming my photographic world.

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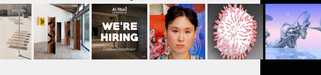

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