

Dinu Li: *The Anatomy of Place*



Dinu Li, *Nation Family* (video still), 2017, single channel video installation with sound, 14 minutes & 16 seconds (looped)

23 June - 14 July 2018

Private view: Friday 22 June 6 - 9pm

Dinu Li's second solo exhibition at Danielle Arnaud brings together for the first time a newly completed trilogy of films entitled, *The Anatomy of Place* (2018). Shot over a ten-year period, the trilogy includes: *Ancestral Nation* (2007), *Family Village* (2009) and *Nation Family* (2017). The films amalgamate Li's research from the past ten years, combining Super 8 footage, video, animation, performance, found images and personal archives. They are geographically specific to China, and invite questions relating to conflating histories and the essence of place.

***Ancestral Nation* (2007)**

Part one, *Ancestral Nation* (2007) is a three-channel video work that explores gesture and rhythm through juxtaposing footage of different groupings and crowds of people. Filmed outside Guangzhou train station, commuters carrying an assortment of bags avoid human collisions, as they await to embark on journeys near or far. Almost two thousand kilometres away, in Confucius's hometown Qufu, China, the philosopher's diasporic descendants return home to a state orchestrated celebration, marking the great thinker's birthday. *Ancestral Nation* is played out against the oscillating sound of prayer sticks rattling.

Realised as a non-verbal lexicon, *Ancestral Nation* traces the physical manifestation of embodied knowledge. The video shows the unfettered movement of individual people carrying out day to day activities, in contrast to the collective manner of rehearsed processions. *Ancestral Nation* observes the transformation of people and objects after China's open-door policy from the late 1970's onwards. It reflects upon place as being bound by time, yet impermanent, measured by both closeness and remoteness.

***Family Village* (2009)**

Architecture and the vernacular are the subjects of *Family Village* (2009), Li's second instalment in his trilogy, as he considers the duality between the local and the global. Interweaving video footages of Sichuan's ancient forests with an animated narrative of a boy on his raft collecting bamboo. The story unravels in bewilderment and disorientation as the boy returns home to discover it had been usurped, transformed beyond recognition, and replaced by an idyllic English village. Throughout the entire video a Chinese translated version of *Pure Imagination*, from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, can be heard ceaselessly recited by children as a beckoning mantra.

Danielle Arnaud

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Opening times: Thursday to Saturday 2-6 pm and by appointment

Family Village was inspired by a local newspaper article about a Christmas card sent from a British master planner in Dorset, to his counterpart in Sichuan, China. Upon receiving the card, the Chinese planner was enchanted by the front cover image of Dorchester, replete with traditional English architectural details, giving birth to a duplication in housing some 7775 kilometres away. *Family Village* elicits discourses surrounding economic, social and political contexts associated with place. Li's resulting video sits at the intersection of cultural anthropology, presenting place as an 'incompletion', constantly in a state of emergence.

***Nation Family* (2017)**

Li's trilogy concludes with *Nation Family*, a film the artist made in collaboration with his cousin over a seven-year period. The film revisits a former labour camp where Li's relative was sent as a nineteen-year-old to work on a rubber plantation, that is now one of the most popular holiday destinations for China's booming domestic tourist industry. The cousin's past life is recounted by a former comrade and a female peasant. Shifting through fragmented time zones, various renditions of Doctor Zhivago's theme tune haunts the woodlands and vacant hotel rooms, building to an illogical grand finale of a disco dance routine.

Filmed in unnamed destinations, *Nation Family* examines the complexities of individual and collective identities as lived experiences. It meanders through a web of contradictions and figments of the imagination. Anecdotes of a cousin's toil, dedication and unstinting loyalty to the party line are jettisoned by conflicting accounts of his regular escapades and unique idiosyncrasies, allowing him to imagine music from a make-believe radio self-made out of brick and bamboo shoot. *Nation Family* considers the potential for place to accumulate dormant histories, awaiting evocation.

Ancestral Nation, *Nation Family* and *Family Village* in their Chinese written form share the same meaning as the word for 'country.'

An accompanying interpretation essay by artist, writer and academic **Peter Ainsworth** will be available as part of the exhibition.

Dinu Li was born in Hong Kong and currently lives and works in Cornwall, UK, where he is Senior Lecturer in Photography at Falmouth University. Li is an interdisciplinary artist working with the moving image, photography, installation and performance. In his practice, Li examines the manifestation of culture in the everyday, finding new meaning to the familiar, making visible the seemingly invisible. Archives play an active role in Li's work, and they are often used as points of departure for his projects. His methodology is research based, with an emphasis on appropriation and reconfiguration. Li's work is often characterised by problematising the document as part of the *modus operandi*.

Li has exhibited both nationally and internationally, including the 53rd Venice Biennale; the 3rd Bucharest Biennale; Tashkent Biennale 2007, Uzbekistan; Tatton Park Biennial 2012; EVA 2005; Contact FotoFest 05, Toronto; PHotoEspana 13, Madrid; Bildmuseet, Umea, Sweden; Oldenburger Kunstverein, Germany; the Irish Museum of Contemporary Art, Dublin; White Space 798, Beijing; the V&A, London; OCT Loft, Shenzhen; Konsthall C, Farsta, Sweden; Chalk Horse, Sydney; San Antonio Art Gallery, Texas; and Alternative Space Loop, Seoul. His works are held in private collections in Berlin, London, St Gallen and Zurich. He has undertaken international artist residencies for ArtSway in Sichuan; OCAT in Shenzhen; an Artists Exchange Residency in Central Asia through the British Council, Space and Cornerhouse. Li's work has been in several publications as well as his own monographs and is featured in Phaidon's 2013 survey book 'The Chinese Art Book' showcasing artworks by two hundred significant Chinese artists

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since the Shang Dynasty. He has presented papers in many conferences including Urban Encounters at Tate Britain in 2017.

Part three of Li's trilogy *Nation Family*, will be on show at the 2018 *Oriel Davies Open* (23 June - 5 September 2018).

Peter Ainsworth lives and works in London. He is a Senior Lecturer in Photography at University of Portsmouth and is currently undertaking a PhD in the Visual Cultures Department at Goldsmiths University, London with a working title to his thesis as, *Allure, Reception and Affect of the Contemporary Photographic*. His work has been exhibited internationally and is held in the collection of the Museum of Fine Art Houston. He has been awarded a Pavilion Commission, Flash Forward Award, and was the recipient of the inaugural Dazed and Confused Emerging Artist Award.

NEXT:

Nicky Coutts

Private view: Friday 14 September 6 - 9pm

15 September - 13 October 2018

For more information and images please contact us.