

David Cotterrell: Eastern Standard: Western Artists in China

Venue: MASS MoCA, Massachusetts

Curators: Susan Cross

Date: 1st February 2008

Co-exhibitors:

Tobias Bernstrup, Annika Larsson, David Thomas, Patty Chang and David Kelley, Roma Pas, Lucy Raven, Oliver Lyons and Alexis Raskin, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Jules de Balincourt, Sarah Beddington, Edward Burtynsky, Lana Lin, Walter McConnell, Michael Wolf, and Catherine Yass.

Eastern Standard Offers Western Artists Perspective on China

(North Adams, Mass.) Like a surging tide, China's manufacturing boom and explosive urban development inspire both awe and anxiety. For most Americans, our view of China is shaped by the homogenizing forces of the news media, but *Eastern Standard: Western Artists in China*, opened on February 2, 2008, at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts, presenting a nuanced, individualized perspectives from more than twenty artists and filmmakers who offer up a fresh look at this rapidly changing nation. The artists both established and emerging, from Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Sweden, and the United States are engaged with China on a variety of levels. Many have had lengthy residencies, some have permanent studios there, others have made multi-ple visits; but they all look with new eyes at a country that remains somewhat enigmatic even as it sets new standards across many economic, environmental, cultural and geopolitical arenas.

The exhibition includes three new commissions by Roma Pas, Lucy Raven, and collaborators Oliver Lyons and Alexis Raskin. Major works by Tobias Bernstrup, David Cotterrell, Annika Larsson, David Thomas and the team of Patty Chang and David Kelley will all make their U.S. debut at MASS MoCA. Additional works by Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Jules de Balincourt, Sarah Beddington Edward Burtynsky, Lana Lin, Walter McConnell, Michael Wolf, and Catherine Yass are included. Out of the twenty-one works on view, twelve are video installations. A portable medium, it is both practical for nomadic artists, and captures something of the pace and scope of the China spectacle. An extensive documentary film program will be presented in the galleries in conjunction with the show.

The works in the exhibition provide personal glimpses at the astounding changes happening in China, explains the exhibition's curator, Susan Cross. The artists varied visions include a rich mix of the critical and the poetic, the fictional and the real, the past and the present. Seen together they offer a multivalent view of China, and one that acknowledges that as Westerners we may never fully understand this vast, complex country. While many of the artists address the social and environmental conditions that have aroused international concern, they also impart the incredible feeling of potential and possibility that characterizes contemporary China.

Eastern Standard is supported by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, the British Council, and Mondriaan Stichting.

Urban Development

While the New York skyline has long been the quintessential image of the modern city, the silhouette of Shanghai has become an iconic representation of a contemporary megalopolis. Tobias Bernstrup's video installation *Mantis City* (2006) recasts Shanghai as a sci-fi landscape home to a giant praying mantis reminiscent of Godzilla or King Kong clinging to the Empire State

Building.

David Cotterrell reimagines Shanghai's urban plan in response to the city's quickly proliferating high-rises in his sculpture *South Facing 4.3* (2006). Using over 1000 plaster models of luxury residential towers (which are quickly taking the place of the more traditional housing structures) Cotterrell replicates officially sanctioned building designs. Each structure faces south at least fifteen degrees. Dictated by the Chinese government, the regulation recalls the traditional orientation of the Emperors' residences and ensures a certain amount of light for each resident. Repeated endlessly, however, the utopian vision morphs into nightmare. With an accompanying trio of video sketches Cotterrell pays homage to the figures he imagines as the real heroes of Shanghai: the lone traffic conductors who attempt to exert control over the chaotic sea of traffic overwhelming the city.

In *Electric Shadows* (2007), a series of time-lapse videos projected on glass, Oliver Lyons and Alexis Raskin capture what they've described as the new official China alongside more vernacular images of a China that may be disappearing. Images of the contemporary Shanghai skyline, a wall of official newspapers in Beijing, and the newly opened National Theater near Tiananmen Square are seen next to vendors selling dumplings and couples dancing in front of the Workers stadium studies of more informal, communal uses of urban space.

Labor and Manufacturing

A new video installation made for MASS MoCA by Lucy Raven looks at two periods of industrialization in China: today, and during the Cultural Revolution in the wake of the effects of the Great Leap Forward. *Leap* (2008) suggests a link between nationalism and work that has been an integral part of Chinese culture past and present, whether in the form of communism or free enterprise.

Two of Edward Burtynsky's large-scale photographs from 2005, part of his *Manufacturing* series, show colorful teams of workers in seemingly endless factories. The visually seductive nature of the images provides a dramatic contrast to the harsh reality they depict. The pink accents and the laundry hanging on each of the balconies of the otherwise bleak housing block pictured in *Manufacturing #4, Workers Dormitory, Dongguan, Guangdong Province*, also from 2005, hint at the individuals who make up the faceless rows of laborers.

Three Gorges Dam

The Three Gorges Dam, the largest hydroelectric power station in the world and a marvel of engineering, is framed as a particularly potent symbol of the country's dramatic industrial growth and ambition. Catherine Yass's film installation *Lock* (2006) takes viewers on a barge traveling through the monumental dam's massive lock. Projected on two twelve-foot-high screens on opposite walls of the gallery, the work captures the site's metaphoric position at the border between China's past and present as well as its potential progress and decline.

A diptych by Burtynsky from 2002 suggests the colossal changes in the local landscape caused by the dam project including many of the now submerged towns whose residents have been displaced. Images of these Yangtze River sites, dismantled brick by brick by those who once lived there (for reuse in their new homes), suggest the human, emotional toll of the project.

Flotsam Jetsam (2007), a collaboration between Patty Chang and David Kelley, explores the relationship between landscape, identity, and imagination in the midst of the extensive changes at the site. The video details the process of fabricating a submarine and its launch below the dam, and then follows the submarine's progress along the river and through the dam's locks to the reservoir. Along the journey, locals enact performances of their dreams and fantasies

inspired by personal and collective histories of the Yangtze.

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla focus their attention on the changes happening in the Pearl River Delta a central manufacturing site through the eyes of a group of turtles floating on a log as they drift toward the sea. This poetic work, *Amphibious (Login-Logout)* (2005) subtly reminds viewers of the environmental impact of Chinas new development.

East and West

Walter McConnells moist clay sculpture *Itinerant Edens: Chinoiserie* (2003) reflects the countrys rich cultural history as well as a familiar fantasy image of the East. Inspired in part by his tours of classic scholars gardens, the landscape, obscured by a veil of condensation, is directly translated from an 18th century French wallpaper pattern.

As the view of China changes from the outside, so does Chinas view of itself. Patty Changs video *Shangri-La* (2005) took her to a rural town near the Tibetan border which, in 1997, named itself after the mythical paradise described in James Hiltons 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. Melding the fictional and the real, the video is exhibited with a sculpture constructed in the shape of the mountain visible from Shangri-La.

An Abundance of Images

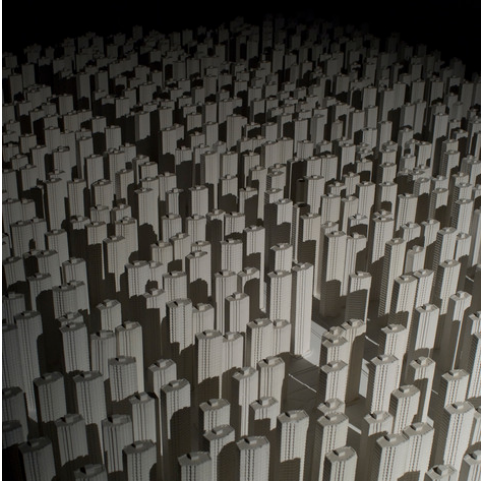
Roma Pas installation *Rendering* (2005-06) highlights the impossibility of a singular vision of the current situation in China, despite the abundance of images available on the internet, in newspapers, and on television. Two projection screens display a changing series of images of construction sites shot in many cities. One after the other, familiar visions of Chinas ubiquitous bamboo scaffolding slowly build up on screens like images opening on a computer. Workers, however, have been erased from the images, as have the buildings contexts.

Likewise, *Eastern Standard* does not offer a single view, but many varied impressions of a rapidly evolving country. David Thomas enormous photographic banner, *In the Palms of their Hands* (2007), which depicts Shanghais TV tower held between giant fingers a familiar, joke photo snapped by countless tourists illustrates our desire to grasp our subject, even if it means diminishing it. At the same time, this play on perspective aptly communicates the exhibitions aim to present alternative perspectives while reminding viewers of the difficulty, absurdity even, of synthesizing such an enormous and complex subject.

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) is one of the largest centers for contemporary visual and performing arts in the country and is located in North Adams, Massachusetts, on a restored 19th-century factory campus. For additional information, visit www.massmoca.org.

Eastern Standard: Western Artists in China is supported by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, the British Council, and Mondriaan Stichting.



Installation View of SouthFacing 4:3 Credit: David Cotterrell (2008)



Exhibition Publicity Credit: Tobias Bernstrup (2008)