



ARTPREMIUM

19 Boulevard Malesherbes
75008 Paris
France

T + 33 (0) 1 55 27 36 56
E info@artpremium.com
W artpremium.com



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Section "WE BELIEVE IN"

HAN BING *Politics of Love* Pages 22 - 29



A photograph of a pond with fallen leaves and a weeping willow tree reflected in the water. The water is a deep blue-green color, and the sky is a clear, pale blue. The weeping willow tree is on the left side of the frame, its branches hanging down into the water. The leaves are mostly yellow and orange, with some green ones still visible. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

HAN BING

Politics of Love

HAN BING, a young Chinese versatile artist, openly accuses the consequences of globalization and stresses us to focus on love as the answer to the contemporary crisis.





PREVIOUS SPREAD

The Stars Light Our Way, from the series "Urban Amber: the landscape of desire of our times", 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

The Nouveau Riche Leads The People, from the series "Theater of Modernization", 2007, 150 x 143 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Tower, from the series "Urban Amber: the landscape of desire of our times", 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

Nonetheless, Bing's photographs present these workers in their "existential condition" while they carry objects from their everyday lives in precarious environments, sometimes even during night-time like in *Unpredictable Moon*. If the government promises abundance for its inhabitants, the reality has proven to be far from it. Enduring situations often compromise the workers health and well being, single objects such as lamps or shovels can save the workers lives. Additionally, the shovel has a symbolic value for the artist, as it represents childhood memories – he was raised in the countryside – with the promise of a better life. Objects have an emotional charge, cabbages, bulldozers, bricks, all seem to have an incommensurable power to depict China's loss of traditions and culture.

The bulldozer is used to destroy ancient neighbourhoods in Beijing and around the country to construct new modern buildings. Bing is against the destruction of "hutongs" in his series *The Age of Big Construction* where brand new constructions are juxtaposed to shatter traditional constructions. The speed of urbanization is lamentable; these images are "mirrors of the process by which their traditional everyday lives are ruptured through modernization." Not only cities are being havocked, natural ecosystems as well are being devastated. *Urban Amber* constitutes reflecting images showing polluted water bodies, they reflect huge skyscrapers, emblems of the middle class, and the labourer's fate to serve the opulent class. Moreover, ecology and global warming have become a central subject in today's political discourse, as they are threatening entire populations, sometimes even displacing them. China is no exception, in fact, it is one of the best examples of consumerism and the neglect of ecology. The artist highlights this through his performance *Forever: Polluted and Profaned as Judgment* as he grabs empty plastic bottles and Styrofoam, a deadly material for the environment.

As a child of globalization, Bing's social and political engagement has widened to India, a country facing similar difficulties to China. With an unrivalled cultural heritage, a growing middle class, pollution problems flooding the country and a powerful economic strength, India's similarities to China are

Politicians and economists are talking of a new colossus that little by little has spread new seeds. The time seems to be ideal as the United States are crumbling with an escalating gap between the rich and the poor. China's vast territory, working force and technological development are propelling the country to a stratospheric growth. Chinese politicians have even appropriated the "American dream". Slogans all over the capital celebrate the "Chinese dream", a capitalist concept where opportunity, determination and hard work are enough for one's success.

And yet, the social pyramid needs a working force at its base for the engine to continue its cycle and the ruling class needs them to keep their position at the top of the pyramid. Chinese artist Han Bing denounces his nation's merciless politics that are devastating and sacrificing a part of the population to the detriment of some. His series *Everyday Precious* in which he appears alongside construction workers holding a brick, embodies the struggle of social workers, of labourers who constantly dream of opportunity, modernization and the presumable benefits of globalization.

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irrefutable. In 2010, Bing created his performance *Dreams of Lost Home* in Delhi; together with 8 Indians, he performed a ritualistic ceremony. Matching his fellow Indians, the artist hugged big stones, as if the objects were pillows, the floor was covered with cotton simulating the sky or a dreamlike surface. The performance was a metaphor of work in our life: it chains us and fuels our dreams. Labour again appears like an oppressing force and is revealed to be one of the main axes in Bing's creations. He caricatures Chinese new social order in his series *Theatre of Modernization* depicting three archetypes, the social worker, a farmer and the "nouveau riche". The latter always wears a suit and seems to speak on behalf of others and peculiarly, has the physiognomy of Xi Jinping, China's general secretary of the communist party.

Although Bing's work deeply relies on exposing the existing injustices in his motherland, he likewise chooses to explore life's driving forces such as love and its opposites. His work is not pure political criticism; he intends to underline the consequences of the increasing social gaps generated by new behaviours. Competition and individualism are two idiosyncratic attitudes encouraged by neo liberal systems, kindness and love aren't exactly part of the

equation and to succeed in current societies, one must squash others to be part of the elite. Instead of this perpetual carnage, Bing believes in humanity and love as interwoven energies, both delivering messages that transcend the borders of time and politics. Even if we perceive the artist's way of expressing as criticism, he prefers to think about it as a way to defend freedom, the utmost important social condition. Furthermore, his aesthetics are imbued with softness, despite the crudeness of his topics and his critical vision towards China and the rest of the world, he tints his photographs and performances with a silky array of colours. His gestures are also delicate, proven in his performance *Love in the Age of Big Construction* or *Making Love to the Thirteen Shovels* where his gentle manners inhabit his work.

Pacifism imbues Bing's creations. His body of work intends to heal social rifts just like a balm. He professes understanding and empathy in his projects like in *The Green Cabbage Walking Movement*, a group performance consisting of people walking together with cabbages. Social coercion is constructed via this simple activity, art serves politics and humankind helping to improve social conditions, allowing them to dream of a better world.

M.E.

New Culture Movement, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

PREVIOUS SPREAD

Plaza of Dionisos Bridge, from the series "Urban Amber: the landscape of desire of our times", 2003. Courtesy of the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Love In The Age Of Big Construction - II-1, from the series "Love In The Age Of Big Construction", 2006. Courtesy of the artist.



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