

seesaw

AN ONLINE PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE: OBSERVATION FULL AND FELT

"[Photography] is the capture and projection of the delights of seeing; it is the defining of observation full and felt."

-Walker Evans

CAMERALESS: *World's Shadow* 2009-2011 by Zhang Dali

Technique and History

I used an antique technique, called photogram, to reproduce sunlit shadows at different times. I have not used a camera because a camera can't reproduce the real size of a shadow.

Photogram technology was used in 1843 by Anna Atkins, in *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, an illustrated book. The images were exclusively photograms of botanical specimens. Atkins used Sir John Herschel's cyanotype process.

Meaning

There is, under the sun, a world constituted by material objects and shadows. Our eyes pay attention to material objects and not the other part - the shadows.

Shadows are a very intriguing and greatly differ in their form. Besides the fact that they can represent the existence of material objects, shadows carry their own value and existence - not just as a reproduction or copy of the world of material objects, but also as a type of antimatter.

The material world affects and controls our nervous system; it makes us feel agitated and troubled. When we keep calm and quiet, we realize that the world is only a small part of the universe, not the whole.

The shadows that I have documented exist only for a very short time, but through this technique I have captured them so that they will exist for a long time, in front of our eyes, under our view.

Production

I began this project in July 2009.

I went to the northern outskirts of Beijing, in the Changping County, at a mountain site called Yinshan Talin (the Pagoda Forest of the Silver Mountain), where there is a Liao Dynasty (907-1125) site of old pagodas. I used large cotton canvases to record the shadows. They looked like the soul of the pagodas, and made me think of the Shroud of Turin, the linen cloth bearing the image of Jesus.

The shadow is the soul impressed on the land - after a short time it disappears, but the canvas will retain its image.'

ZHANG DALI was born in Harbin, China, and is based in Beijing. He trained at the Beijing Central Academy of Art & Design. After studying painting in China, he went to Italy, where he discovered graffiti art. He was the only graffiti artist in Beijing throughout the early 1990s, and from 1995 to 1998 he spray-painted over 2000 giant profiles of his own bald head on buildings throughout Beijing, placing the images alongside 'chai' characters painted by the city authorities to indicate that a building is scheduled for demolition. The appearance of these images became the subject of great media debate in Beijing in 1998. Zhang has shown work internationally in many exhibitions, including at the International Center for Photography (New York), 18Gallery (Shanghai), Magda Danysz Gallery (Paris), Courtyard Gallery (Beijing), the Institute of Contemporary Arts (London), Kunstnernes Hus (Oslo), and at the 2006 Gwangju Biennale in Korea. He is represented by Kiang Gallery (Atlanta), Eli Klein Fine Art (New York), and Base Gallery (Tokyo).

