



*UNCLAIMED OBJECTS*

YANG JIAN

Where Where Art Space

No.319-1, East End Art Zone A, Caochangdi Village, Chaoyang District, 100015 Beijing, China

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*THINGS LOST AND FOUND*

BY EDWARD SANDERSON

In the exhibition text for *Unclaimed Objects*, artist Yang Jian recounts the story of a parasitic fungus which lives in the stomach of a cow, and spreads by passing out of the cow via its dung, which in turn infects ants in the vicinity. The fungus then implants an urge in the ants to present themselves to be eaten by the next cow, thus passing into the new cow's system. This life-cycle is presented very specifically as a "story" by the artist and—while there are reports of such occurrences—this aspect of fiction versus truth forms a background to his collected objects and narratives currently on display at Where Where Art Space.

The exhibition space presents a set of objects that the artist has been collecting over the past few years. The initial impetus of this show seems to be an exploration of the discarding or loss of objects which the artist then appropriates and places within an extended narrative of his own work and the exhibition at large. Such a project is informed by a rather odd understanding of the activity of these objects within an ecosystem of creativity. Referring to the story of the fungus, Yang Jian makes direct links between the cattle (as host for the fungus) as the audience, the ant (as inadvertent disseminator of the fungus) as the media, and the fungus itself as these discarded or lost works.

This extended metaphor suggests that, as with the fungus, these lost and found objects somehow have the ability and drive to infect us in order to continue their lifespan. While this infection is again perhaps meant in a metaphorical sense (invoking the infection of ideas or images passing from the person to person), it is also interesting to see images as somehow embodying the urge to self-disseminate.

The objects presented are not just found objects in the Duchampian sense, but instead carry more specific meanings to be determined through mediation with the audience. This added significance is contributed by the artist, and—in a perverse and patronising way—*on behalf of* the object.

Duchamp's found objects act as responses to commodity production: as well as taking each *objet trouvé* out of the cycle of production and transposing it into the rarefied artistic context, each *objet* retains the feature of being replaceable by any other piece. The aura of production is minimal here; the hand is absent; the machine has ostensibly placed a barrier between maker and user; user becomes consumer.



Yang Jian's found objects, however, re-privilege the hand of the maker in relation to both the artist and the audience. However, the maker is radically distanced, in the sense that the link with him has been severed in the process of loss. Each object then provides a “fuzzy” link back to its owner/maker, presenting a partial tale about the circumstances under which the object was produced, used and lost. So, while they are “found” objects, they do not operate as *objet trouvé*—these are lost, found, and then re-imagined objects.

One significant piece included three passport photos of the same man, placed on the steps of a stepladder as you enter the space. The artist tells me that he found each of them in the same place on three consecutive days. This coincidence left him feeling that they were left specifically for him to find. This strange overlapping of the artist and the original person's activities provide a link to a magical realm where coincidence can be confused with some ulterior force or presence.

On the other side of the room, a discarded picture frame with a ripped shred of canvas is propped up at a right angle to the wall. On one thin edge, Chinese characters inform us that this was retrieved from the garbage outside the studio of the painter Zeng Fanzhi. Immediately after translating this for me, Yang Jian backtracks and says that in fact it is not from Zeng's studio at all.

This setting up of the stories around the objects by means of handwritten notes on the walls and the objects themselves, as well as the artist's own interventions into these narratives, establishes a consistent ambiguity over what is true and what is invention. This ambiguity creates a playful and humorous setting in which the imagination freely explores and completes the objects.



The text provided by the artist provides further clues and distractions, and as with the objects themselves, ultimately seems designed to upset any fixed interpretation. As Yang says in this text: “The exhibition exists in parallel with my [sic] oral narration.” (Given the complex intentions that the artist presents, it is difficult to dismiss as irrelevant the multiple missing spaces, and the subsequent word-collisions, in this text). The show as a whole, including its leakage out into the world before and afterwards, makes this upsetting the main aim of this process. As the artist says, the setting up of the stories, and the continual “self-criticism” evident as part of the stories, “fosters a detachment in order to avoid having people get lost in the spectacle of my recycling. [sic]” Yang Jian succeeds in this task, never letting the audience settle on too rigid an interpretation of the works, the infection exploiting this instable situation to pass to a new host.

—Edward Sanderson

(All images: **Yang Jian**, Installation view; Courtesy of Where Where Art Space and the artist / photo by Edward Sanderson)

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Tags: mixed-media, installation