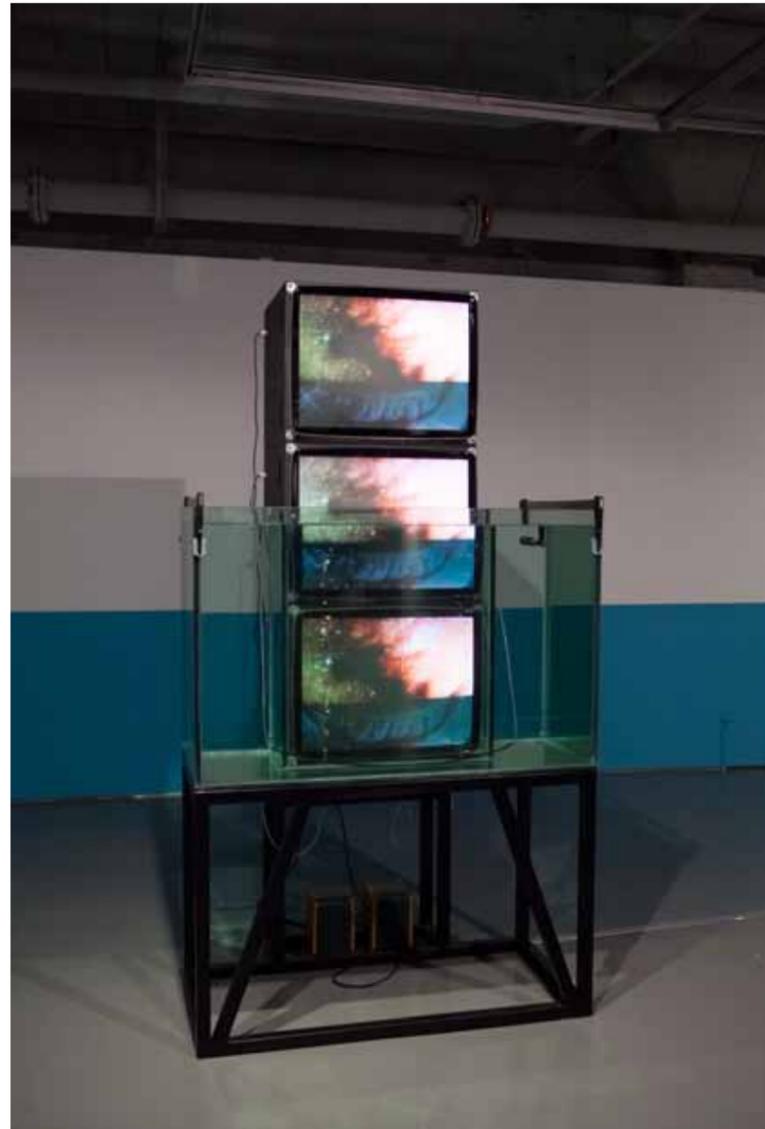# Yang Zhenzhong

Yang Zhenzhong is based in Shanghai, a city in which one is never more than five seconds from a screen, and is best known for his pioneering of video art in the region. Although his work invariably deals with serious contemporary issues, such as urban tension and crowd control, it often has a humorous element.

by Andrew Spyrou

Fish Bowl, 1996, video installation, mixed media, courtesy of the artist

Background

I was born in 1968, growing up at the end of the Chinese Revolution. I was lucky enough to experience the change both as a participant, studying design at university, but also as more of a detached observer, not heavily involved in the transition. I also witnessed the progression of Chinese contemporary art from the underground, where it had wallowed in the '80s and '90s, to the legitimate position it holds today.
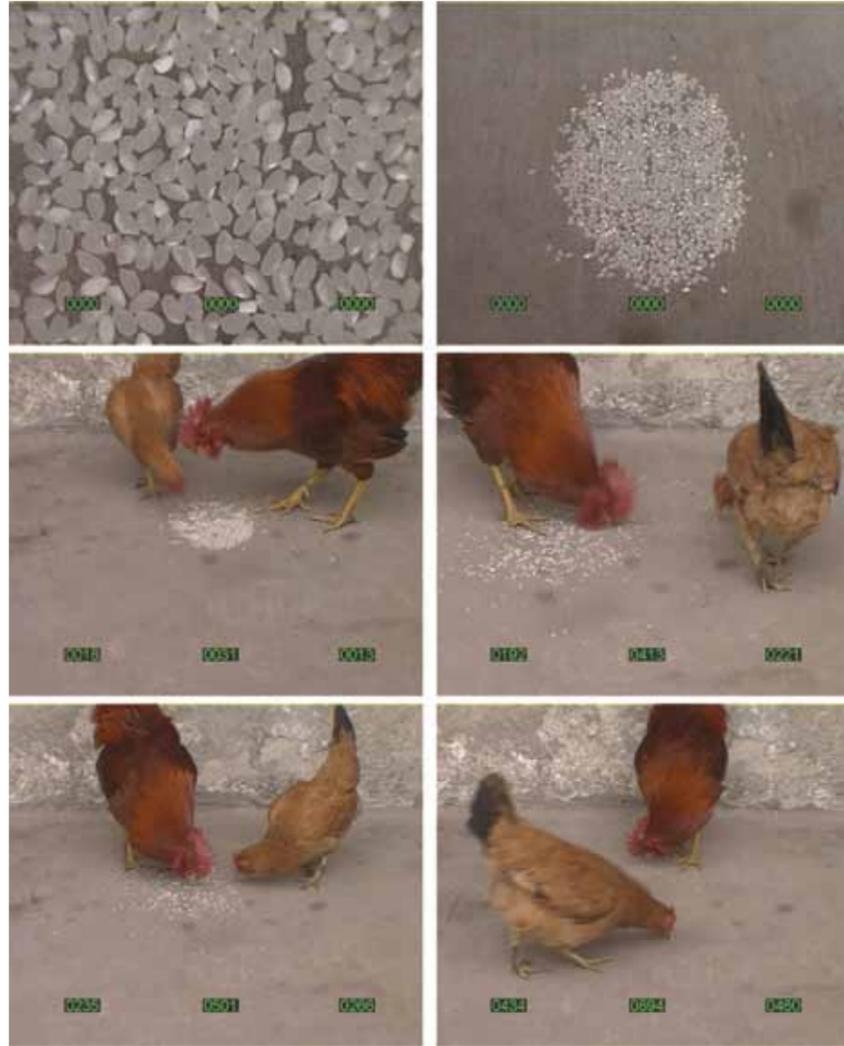
Shanghai and its Effects

Shanghai can be both exciting and frustrating. During my first years there I felt tormented. It wasn't just the urban landscape or the impact of noise: sometimes even breathing was difficult. Yet, although a metropolis attacks one's senses, as perhaps emphasized in a piece like *Shanghai Face* (where footage from a first-person camera wandering through the city is distorted through a tank of water), the charm of the city is also undeniable. It is essential to adapt oneself to the excitement and danger of the urban environment, studying how to move and maintain a quiet mental state in such complex and varied surroundings. Some of my work, like *Let's Puff*, in which a girl on one screen blows away the hustle of urban life on another, could be read as a comment on the city's failings.

Red Venus Sitting In A Corner, 2010, sculpture, stainless steel, baking varnish, 220 x 208 x 118 cm, courtesy of the artist
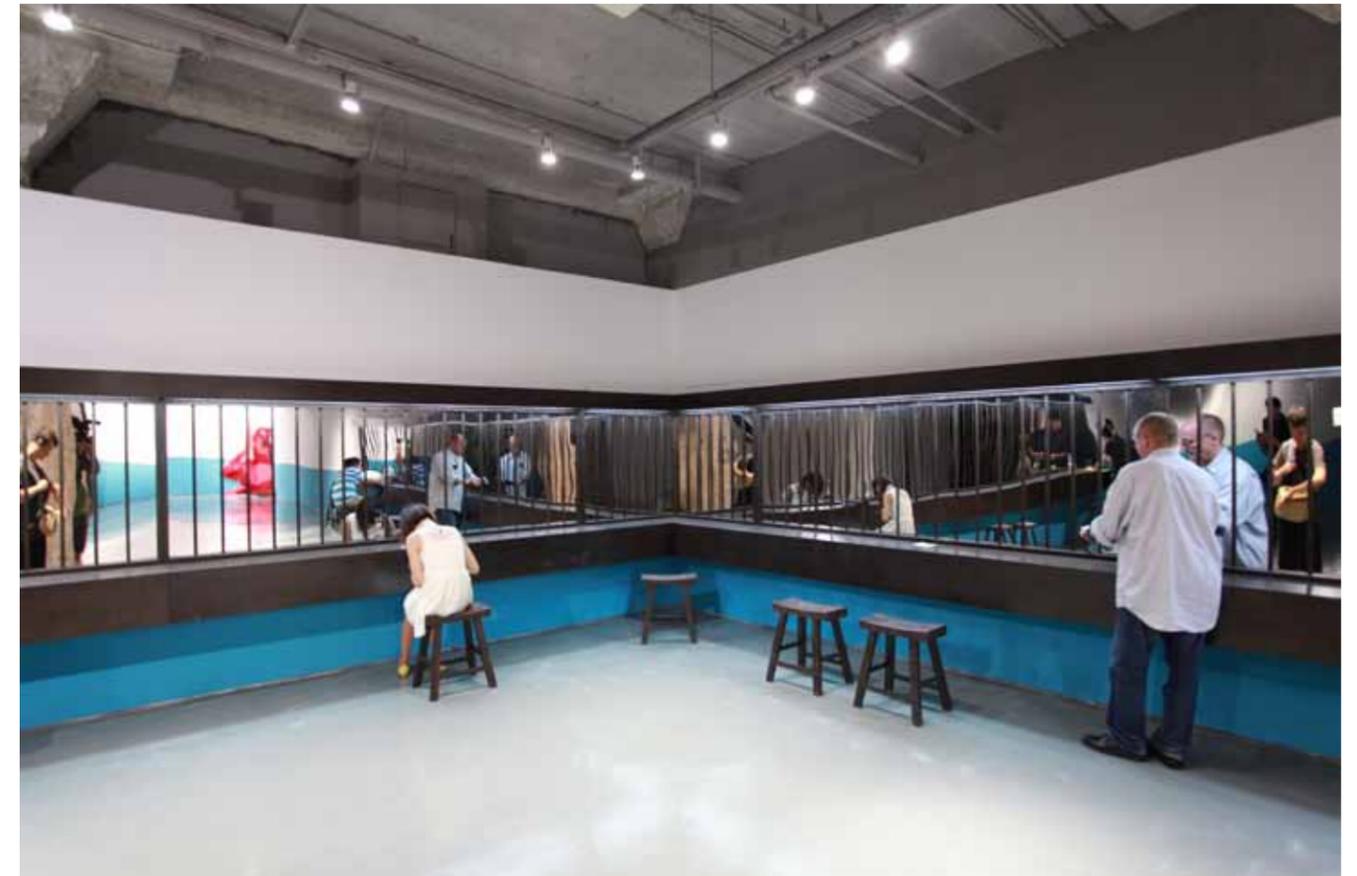
Fences, 2013, installation, courtesy of the artist

Multimedia

In my studio I am constantly dealing with diverse technical issues, such as shooting photographs, editing videos, painting, making sculptures, finding an expert programmer or studying blueprints with carpenters. It wouldn't be fun any other way.

While a lot of my pieces may be interested in viewer interaction – like *Summer 2009*, a group of hanging photographs which, if viewed from one angle, reveal a provocative image of girls in short skirts, and *Trespass*, which immerses viewers in a disorienting landscape – these are really just about setting up new modes of viewing. I want to turn the conventionally applied principles of perspective on their head: I convert 3D landscapes into a 2D illusion, the opposite of much other art.

Audience Participation - Artistic Polarization

Crowd control is ubiquitous today. Urban planning can be seen as the art of crowd control, and as citizens, we are now completely accustomed and totally dependent on this control. My piece *Xi'an Zoo Bus Stop*, for example, where I installed a fake bus stop complete with a completely incorrect and distorted city map, was conceived with the intention of highlighting the dysfunctional nature of the city. Without the participation of the audience, the work would not exist.

But art needs to be politicized; it is often politicized unconsciously, and any attempt to deliberately avoid such politicization is futile. My piece *922 Rice Corns*, where I filmed two chickens pecking at/counting rice, started off as a playful piece, but could be said to deal with both the obsessive statistical nature of our capitalist lifestyle, or the competition inherent in lives the world over. While art has no power to solve society's problems, humour is a very important way of remedying this powerlessness.