

CHEN CHIEH JEN - ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

ARTIST STATEMENT:

Chen Chieh-Jen, *About the Forms of My Works*

"History has been lingchi-ed, that is, chopped and severed as human bodies. Violence is also gradually internalized, institutionalized and hidden. We do not see where we are and what was before us. We do not see the violence of history or that of the State either. That is the reason why we need to gaze at the images of horror and penetrate through them. Is the dark abyss of wounds not the very crack that we need to pass through so as to arrive at the state of full-realization and self-abandonment. In the early age of so called "history of photography" regions outside the western world played the role of "shooting objects"....I focus on how to reverse the subject of colonial photography history from people in a front of a lens to the behind... Regarding the work "Lingchi", I had this idea after i finished "Revolt in the Soul and Body 1900-1999" series, in order to further discuss this issue, which is very complicated, concerning law, ethic, view, and being viewed, colonization and inwards colonization etc. I have talked about these in a Taiwan art magazine column. Simply speaking. What I am concerned is the little smile on the face of the victim. Completely subject to be fed opium, strapped up, dismembered and shot, this is "an actively fighting back smile". Not merely the so called ecstasy by the west, but meanwhile, it is little however full of revolt spirit and optimistic attitude- the smile gazing at future and reviewing today. Aesthetic value and social consciousness have noconfliction or necessity to be divided; oppositely, it should be a movement of mutual osmosis and influence. Lu Xun is a key figure combining these two parts. the film of head chopping stimulated his literature creativity, which in my opinion, is an important moment in "the history of shooting objects", an active reaction after viewing and reintegrate."

Lingchi - Echoes of a Historical Photograph (2002) is

based on the famous 1905 photograph of a man being punished the Manchu way, by being cut into pieces for the crime of murder. His ecstatic expression is attributed to opium, which was administered to prolong the torture. Philosopher Georges Bataille discussed this photo extensively in his book *The Tears of Eros* and noted the correlations between the beauty of religious eroticism, divine ecstasy and the shocking horror of cruel torture.

Chen's cinematic close-ups of the victim's face bring to mind images of blissful euphoria, homoeroticism, and religious crucifixion. Slow motion close-ups of a hand holding a knife, the grim expressions of the crowd of ponytailed bystanders, blood dripping down the crowd's legs and flowing into the ground are eerie, but surprisingly not as violent as what one might expect considering Chen's topic. The film is oddly un-sadistic, even though the content is of death by dismemberment.

Interspliced with the staged reenactment of the torture scene are scenes where the camera slowly pans above a crowd of silent women. These women are factory workers in Taoyuan, and due to various tragic events such as occupational hazards or unemployment, they no longer are able to work. Chen links these contemporary women to the 1905 victim. Due to the women's circumstances, which are often beyond their control, they are also suffering a long torture, but without any bliss.

Chen came to international prominence with his large computer images of similar torture scenes. However, this film is a departure from those past works. By linking the historical with the contemporary social and economic situation in Taiwan, Chen has created an extremely powerful work that links the past with the present, the fictive with the documentary. He is also specific to the local situation, while remaining universal."

(Text by Susan Kendzulak)