

The artists invited to realize a project at 1646 are asked to engage in conversation with a correspondent via email or DM, be it someone previously unknown to them or whom they're already familiar with.

This conversation spans the period before an exhibition is completed. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this exchange to ask questions so they may be guided through the artist's decision-making process and how their initial ideas develop toward completion. It provides insight into the artist's body of work and is intended to paint a picture of the otherwise untraceable choices that constitute the artist's practice.

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Su Hui-Yu
in conversation with
Vincent Stroep

As part of the exhibition:
The Cinema of Séance
This took place before the opening.

About Su Hui-Yu

Su Hui-Yu is an artist and filmmaker. He obtained an MFA from Taipei National University of the Arts in 2003, and has remained active in the contemporary art scene ever since. This conversation is held in relation to Su's solo exhibition *The Cinema of Séance at 1646*.

About Vincent Stroep

Vincent Stroep is a producer for, among others, *Courtisane Festival*, *Ghent*, and *Berlinale Forum*, Berlin.

Su Hui-Yu in conversation with Vincent Stroep

31-12-2020 (For Vincent, Belgium)

01-01-2021 (For Su, Taiwan)

Dear Su,

At last I am writing to you, only a few hours before parting with the dreaded year 2020.

To start off our conversation, I want to tell you a small anecdote.

Recently, I recommended *Night Porter* (1974) by Liliana Cavani to a young artist I work with.

For some weird reason or another, in my head, and especially from an aesthetic point of view, some scenes in the film resonate with your work.

The controversial film tells the story of the ambiguous affair, and its aftermath, between an SS officer and a concentration camp prisoner. Ill-considered, I described the film to the artist as 'perverse'. After watching it, she told me that she found *The Night Porter* to be romantic rather than perverse. And she was right.

Sexuality outside the social norm is one of the central subjects in your work. What led you down this path?

11-01-2021

Dear Vincent,

Happy New 2021! Sorry for the late reply, it truly took me a while to think about your question.

I think it's very reasonable that my work remind you of these classical cult films, if I may use that word to describe them - in a positive way. In many ways, either *Night Porter* or *Sodoma (Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma)*, or even the Giallo films have all strongly influenced the East Asian movie industry and the public memories, by tortuous paths. 1970s Japan (and later Hong Kong, then Taiwan) was full of these kind of images, like *Female Prisoner #701*(1972) or *Sex and Fury*(1973). Good or bad, artsy or cheesy, gradually the genre arrived in Taiwan via Japan, Hong Kong and those who majored in film studies in Europe, then the genre affected some local directors while the island was still under martial law governance, not to mention the Japanese masterpiece *In the Realm of the Senses*(1976).

To my generation, growing up in the 1980s and the early 1990s (martial law was lifted in 1987), we didn't have the chance to experience all of the films, but these so-called 'controversial',

'bloody' and 'erotic' images were like hazy fragments in our subconscious, which were disseminated through film posters, TV ads, bill boards, and midnight TV programs.

To me, the erotic performance, the taboo fantasy, the physical excitement, and the sexual imagination, were like a blurry memory — personal and collective, both. Now the blurry memory and the disclosure of all kinds of archives involving these films are together becoming a crystal. A crystal reflecting body-politics, bio-politics or even gender politics — from the military government era to present day collective unconscious (even though we thought the old days had been fading away for decades). On another hand, it's also a track leading us to rethink the relation between East Asia and "modernity". Regarding the "romantic"; yes, to me it's another mysterious stuff. Again, either in the artsy version of the exploitation films or some cheesy cult-movies from this tradition, you can always refine something like that, romantic, fine beauty, meta-physic state, whatever we like to call it. The mysteriously aesthetic experiences were like flashes in our brain, and this is why I said that I'm doing something called 'Re-shooting'; it's a movement of refining, revisiting or re-interpreting, in the name of Film.

22-01-2021

Dear Su,

This time it's me with a late response. Apology is due.

Our conversation has been 'piano' up until now, I think it's time we shift to 'crescendo' :)

Your answer is a perfect bridge to *The Women's Revenge*, which you will be showing at 1646.

A work that is indeed very explicitly 'reshooting' films like *Woman Revenger* (Tsai Yang-Ming, 1981) and *The Woman of Wrath* (Zhuang Xiang Zeng, 1984).

I read it as a blatant attack on misogynist society via the tropes of aforementioned films.

You depict the brutal act of revenge in gory details but leave open the cause of the women's dismay.

Why did you choose to highlight the former and omit the latter?

25-01-2021

Dear Vincent,

Thanks for your further questions.

I can't be so sure if present-day society is still as much of a serious misogynist society like it has been or not, but in a sense, it is a reflection of the possibility that it could be— even it became more invisible.

When I imagined the project, I didn't attempt to analyze the statistics, instead, I wanted to propose a new option to the public: If there is a chance to shoot these kinds of subjects again, can we do it better or more interestingly?

This is why I also act in my video, if you watch carefully you might notice that. I'm one of the female revenge squad in the new story, in frame a few times in the very beginning, in the second to last scene when the camera shot moves through 'the woman's' crotch, and the last scene when 'the women' stand behind the plastic curtain. To me, it is a gesture in response to questions I have for those who misunderstood the creativities of the feminist scripts in the 1980s. For example, the Hong Kong produced film *Woman of Wrath* (the director, photographer, script writer, etc, are mostly Taiwanese) was adopted from the famous Taiwanese feminist writer Li Ang's work, the film is actually pretty artsy and humanist, but on another hand, both the posters or the public impressions of the work are still in a bit of a chauvinist style. I tried to use my own way of interpreting these stories and attempted to mix the collective memories of the films with my personal memory, with contemporary technology and artists.

I hadn't realized that I "left open the cause of the women's dismay"; if I did, I guess that how I see this new version. According to my plan, the violent, bloody, sad and anti-humanist scenes from the genre should be ideally transformed to a new state or reconstructed to a positive context — a work which is full of energies, desires, unconscious power, and historical commotion, with the passion of sex itself.

27-02-2021

Unfortunately, we are still in the dark as to when COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted and your exhibition will finally be able to open. I cross my fingers for it to open very soon.

Thank you so much for the very insightful response, especially in regards to the context of the 'reshot' films and your 'deepfake' cameo. Our conversation up until now has shown your work is permeated by film history, starting out as a visual artist, from 2017 onwards you also got embraced by many highly regarded film festivals. I would be curious to hear how you deal with this double life. Is it something you take in account when conceiving a new work?

28-02-2021

Dear Vincent,

It is an unpredictable era, an era of disease, and hopefully we are approaching the end of it.

About the double life you mentioned, indeed these are two different industries in a sense, but as you know, luckily we are also in a new time of technology, the dividing line between film and video art has gradually faded since the last decade of last century. My own generation and those after me now have more ways to spread ideas. Festivals or museums are sometimes like twins, they share the same works, artists or even curators. But you are also correct, I did consider this carefully how to put my work into two different fields, for different audiences

and expectations. Regarding the newest work, *The Women's Revenge*, the film version was more designed for a cinema experience, whereas the five channel installation was more conceived as a visual deployment. Ideally, as I see it, if the film was like a swirl, then the installation version should create something like a multiple gravitational field. Yes, I think this is what I have been thinking and reviewing since 2017 when I was first invited to the "film world", and fortunately it's still an exciting voyage so far. :)

01-03-2021

I am also curious about the following:

Your fascination for the human body stands out throughout your oeuvre. The word 'choreography' often springs to mind.

To what extent do you manipulate and control the movement of your 'actors', and what is your method for doing this?

04-03-2021

Dear Vincent,
Thanks for the question.

Yes, "the body" is an important issue for me, and to a certain extent, when you are trying to dig deeper into the collectivist history in Taiwan or East Asia, you won't be able to avoid that. I usually have workshops with the performers before the shooting. We invite theatrical mentors to guide the performers — some of whom are amateurs from different fields. During

the workshop, we share personal experiences, at times very private topics. The course/workshop and the sharing will help them to express their body essentially, so to me it won't become a drama but an action. The workshop takes a few days, after that the performers establish trust and might become friends, which is very important when shooting the scenes, it makes physical interaction more natural, they can accept their partners in the process. I actually don't use any academic methods, I adjust the course to fit to whatever I was need it to be. And I join in too, I partake in the workshop together with everyone else, so I'm able to decide who fits which role, or I can create a new roles for specific people.

17-03-2021

Dear Su,

For my final question I want to go full circle, but like the Ouroboros.

I started this conversation with a question on transgressing morality but *The Women's Revenge* seems to reveal a transcendent level as well.

The men being led to the abattoir at times even reminded me of European baroque paintings depicting biblical scenes.

Was I seeing an apparition or is there indeed a spiritual dimension to your work?

And I want to add that it was incredibly enriching to discover the many layers in your work during this conversation!

21-03-2021

Dear Vincent,

Very precise perspective XD. Yes, it is something about citing scenes from Western art history, Baroque especially.

The mannerist looking bleeding man, the woman who carries a little man, the Medusa style head, even the Renaissance/Baroque lights, they are all hints to the tradition of pursuing violence in human (art) history. I tried to connect the images with the bizarre scenes from the 1980s films. To me, there are always some invisible links between these things. I hope I answered your questions. And I really appreciate your creative points of view. It's such a great experience for me.

I look forward to meeting you in person in the not so distant future when the world is healed again.

cheers

Su