

# THE WORLD IS AN AVALANCHE OF RIDICULE

YAO JUI-CHUNG

Text: 1imageart

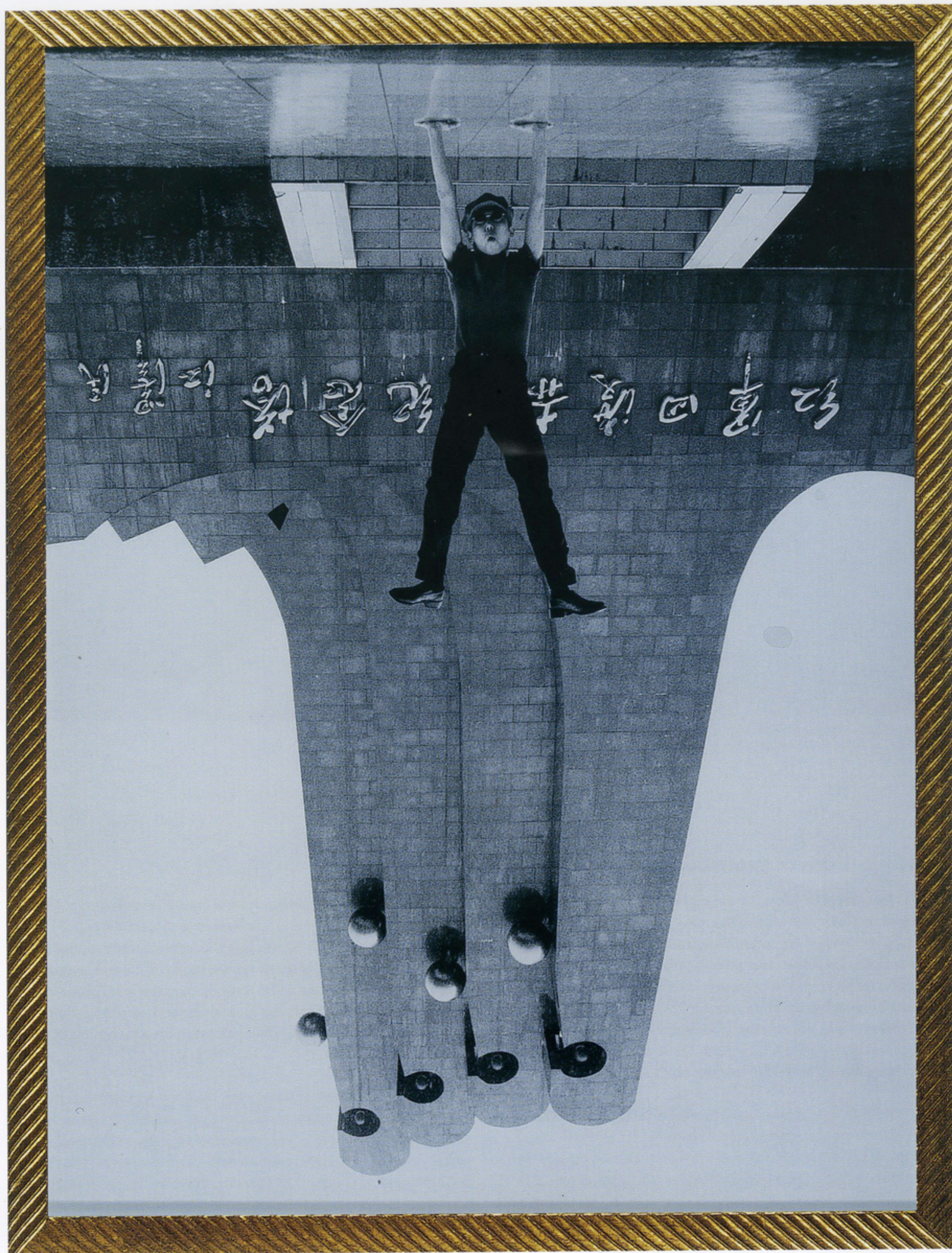
## 世界是 龐大的荒謬

姚瑞中

文：一影像

As I stepped into artist Yao Jui-chung's studio The Illusion, Mocha, a 22-year-old cat was jumping around and meowing lively to welcome my visit. The first thing I saw then was astonishing rows of artworks and archival files, which clearly show the reason the owner of the studio was known for his exceptional obsession with archives. During the interview, with the melodies of Hong Kong singer Fanny Wang in the 80s as background music, he talked in great detail about many musicians, including Samuel Hui Kwun Kit, Adam Cheng Siu Chow, Roman Tam Pak Sin, The Wynners, Joseph Koo Kar Fai, James Wong Jim and Michael Lai Siu Tin. This might explain the artist's turn from his avant-garde style in the early stage of his career to documenting the ancient culture of traditional temples.

造訪姚瑞中工作室「幻影堂」，迎門的是一聲貓叫——22歲的老貓摩卡，還能走能跳，聲音宏亮。入門則是整排的作品與資料檔案匯集，令人驚嘆其對檔案的特殊情結。訪談時，姚瑞中播放着香港歌手薰妮上世紀八十年代的歌曲，並談到許冠傑、鄭少秋、羅文、溫拿五虎、顧嘉輝、黃霑、黎小田等音樂人，如數家珍——這似乎解釋了這位早期作品偏向前衛的藝術家，何以轉向關注和記錄歷史悠久的宮廟文化。



Long March - Shifted the Universe, Chishui, China, 2002  
《萬里長征行動之乾坤大挪移》，赤水·中國·攝於2002年



Hengwen Temple, Yuanlin City, Changhua County, from *Incarnation* series, 2017  
《彰化縣員林市街文宮》· 選自《巨神連線》系列· 攝於2017年

## Our world is one of enormous absurdity

Born in 1969, Taipei City, Yao Jui-chung has participated in various exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale. Many of his artworks, which take the form of photography, installation, painting, or video, are collected by museums and galleries around the world. He also has numerous publications. He is not only the leader of one of the earliest multidisciplinary troupes in Taiwan, the Ta-Da-Na Experimental Group, but also the art director of the Golden Horse Awards nominated movie *A Confucian Confusion* (1994) directed by Edward Yang, as well as the co-founder of VT Artsalon.

Yao Jui-chung is now at once a photographer/ painter/ installation artist/ performance artist/ editor/ curator/ teacher. He is definitely one of those people who fit the definition of a 'slashie', a buzzword in recent years, but he does not claim to be one. Instead, he calls himself a jobless person because none of his jobs offers him a stable income. He has to work every day throughout the whole year in order to make a living. "My only day-off in the year is the New Years Eve," Yao smiled bitterly.

Yao Jui-chung has been very active in the field of photography since the 90s, and has published *The World is for All, Long March – Shifted*

*the Universe, Phantom of History, and the Mt. Jude Floating*. These works are, in a satirical manner, intended to dissect the history and destiny by provocatively expressing the forbidden and revealing the blemish of the sacred. All these reminded me of the two kinds of laughter in Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: the angel's smile, which chants the great order and joy of all things in the world; and the devil's smile, which uncovers the absurdness of things and liberates us.

Yao expressed, "sensitivity plays the leading role in art. It is the experience that gradually accumulates as you live in a place for a long period. At some point, you would naturally start to think about and consequently respond to it. Of course, knowledge is indispensable. Yet our education nowadays focuses too much on foreign theories from the European knowledge system. As a matter of fact, I don't find it necessary to explain philosophy with art. I am more into local experience and field study since you can only realise how ridiculous this world is when you really go out there and see for yourself."

## 世界是龐大的荒謬

姚瑞中1969年生於台北，曾參加威尼斯雙年展等大大小小的展覽，資歷非常豐富，並有多件作品由各國美術館收藏，當中涉及攝影、裝置、繪畫、錄像多種領域，也曾出版不少書籍。他不但是台灣最早期跨領域劇團之一——「天打那實驗體」的團長，也是由楊德昌執導的電影《獨立時代》（曾入圍金馬獎）的美術指導，以及非常廟藝文空間創辦人。

姚瑞中現在同時是攝影師、畫家、裝置藝術家、行為藝術家、書籍主編、策展人、教師等。目前「斜槓族」的說法十分流行，姚瑞中無疑也是其中一位「斜槓族」。然而他自稱「無業遊民」，因為所有工作都無法產生固定收入，他每天都必須工作以維持生計。姚瑞中苦笑：「一年裏，只有除夕那一天會休假。」

姚瑞中從九十年代開始活躍於攝影界，曾發表作品包括：《天下為公行動》、《萬里長征行動之乾坤大挪移》、《歷史幽魂》、《玉山漂浮》等。這些作品以戲謔的態度衝破禁忌，呈現了神聖的殘缺不全，意圖解構歷史與命運，不禁讓人聯想到米蘭·昆德拉《笑忘書》的兩種笑：一種是天使的笑，意味萬物擁有美好秩序與歡欣；另一種則是魔鬼之笑，揭露事物荒謬，讓人得以解放。

姚瑞中說：「藝術最重要的是感性經驗，那是長久生活在一個地方，慢慢累積而來的一種經驗，然後你自然會去思考，並回應那樣的情感。當然知識是不可或缺的，可是現時的教育太過著重歐陸系統的外來理論。我不認為用藝術解釋哲學是必要的。我比較在乎本土體驗及田野調查。在實地上行走，你才會理解世界是多麼龐大的荒謬。」

Chongsheng Court, North District, Taichung City, from Incarnation series, 2017  
《台中市北區重生堂》，選自《巨神連線》系列，攝於2017年





1

2

3

- 1 *Temple of the Queen Mother of the West, Mt. Datong, Shulin District, New Taipei City, from Incarnation series, 2017*  
《新北市樹林區大同山王母廟》· 選自《巨神連線》系列· 攝於2017年
- 2 *Xingde Cihuei Court, Shiding District, New Taipei City, from Incarnation series, 2017*  
《新北市石碇區行德慈惠堂》· 選自《巨神連線》系列· 攝於2017年
- 3 *Temple of Ch'an Master Daoji, Yongfu neighbourhood, Neimen District, Kaohsiung City, from Incarnation series, 2017*  
《高雄市内門區永富里濟公廟關聖帝君》· 《巨神連線》· 攝於2017年



From *Barbarians Celestine* series, panoramic view, 2000  
 《獸身供養》系列·全景側面·展出於2000年

## In-depth gaze into the Taiwanese culture of traditional temples and sceneries

Since *Roaming Around the Ruins* series, Yao has never appeared in his own photographs again. He has scarcely taken portraits for years, instead, he concentrates on capturing fractured statues and scenes of unmanned spaces, which he recorded in a relentless search around the whole island. Later, he created *The Ruined Islands*, *Nebulous Light*, and *Mirage*.

In 1998, Yao published the *Beyond Humanity* series. In the work, many grotesque and fragmentary figures of gods, angels, dinosaurs, and animals are left in abandoned scenes which resonates with his subsequent works including *Barbarians Celestine*, *Savage Paradise* and *Heaven*. Inspired by the traditional decoration technique of traditional temples, Yao even introduces gold foils into his works. On one hand, it creates a dazzlingly splendid effect, but on the other hand, the broken and barren side is being emphasized. "I lived right next to a temple during my childhood. They said that I would help sweep the floor of the temple's yard when I was only two or three. I have always been quite affectionate towards temples," explained Yao.

In October 2017, Yao Jui-chung released another series, *Incarnation*. It is a series of photographs showing giant holy statues from the front, back, side, and also their reflections. Some are burnt black and damaged, and some are just reflected avatars in a street mirror. He made an exhibition with the same title in December 2017 and won the Taishin Arts Award. Yao said, "All of these began with one of my dreams. It motivated me to go on numerous trips around the island, walking 20,000 kilometres only to capture images of more than 300 holy statues. It was an exhausting journey."

Yao continued to explain the absence of humans in his photos, "It is either because there was no one to be shot or I chose not to shoot anyone. Actually, these holy statues were very similar to our social landscapes, such as illegal constructions, high-rising buildings, convenient stores, and graveyards. So there are still many human traces in *Incarnation*. No matter how giant or sacred things are, they will be abandoned someday. In other words, all things are illusions, which is the reason I named my studio 'The Illusion'."

One of the characteristics of Yao's work is his large-scale aesthetics that examines and captures social phenomena from a broad perspective. He has been trying to reflect the structure of the whole society by representing and connecting individual cases. For this, he has taken more than 50,000 unfilled photos, not to mention the filed. In Yao's point of view, photography should serve the function of reflecting the landscape and structure of the society. "I am not talking about special, individual cases, but those conventional and common phenomena of large scale. Therefore, they need to be archived and formalised to show the cause of all kinds of absurdity, surrealism, jungle aesthetics and the postmodern collage."

Through photography, Yao can have an in-depth observation of the culture of traditional temples and demonstrate the aesthetics of absurdity. "Photography is an art of coincidence. But one may also say that it is a product of thinking." He states, "however, to me, the most important process in photography might not be taking photos, but choosing them: a beautiful picture is not necessarily what you would prefer. More often, it is the photo which corresponds to your life experience and perspective that means the most to you. To me, photography has become an art of selection." <sup>①</sup>



From *Heaven* series, exhibited in Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, 2001  
《天堂變》系列，台北當代藝術館，展出於2001年

## 宮廟文化與台灣景觀的深度凝視

從《廢墟迷走》系列開始，姚瑞中不再入鏡，一向鮮少拍攝人像的他，只框取殘破雕像與無人空間的景象。他走遍全島，記錄廢棄影像，此後尚有《廢島》、《幽暗微光》及《海市蜃樓》等。

他在1998年發表《人外人》系列，作品中出現許多奇怪殘缺的神明、天使、恐龍、動物塑像，它們均被置於荒廢的環境，隨後的《獸身供養》、《野蠻聖境》、《天堂變》作品亦非常類似。受到廟宇傳統裝飾技術的啟發，姚瑞中甚至將金箔加進照片，一方面金碧輝煌，另一方面又是破敗荒蕪。姚瑞中說：「小時候，家旁邊就是廟。聽說我才兩三歲，就會去廟前掃地。我一直覺得廟非常親切。」

2017年10月，姚瑞中發表了另一系列——《巨神連線》，他拍攝巨神像正面、背部、側身、倒影，以及焚毀焦黑、破損乃至於鏡中的神佛。他於同年12月推出同名個展，更獲得「台新藝術獎」。姚瑞中說：「我的創作動機，不過源於一場夢。我為此環島拍攝無數次，一共拍了三百多尊神像，走了大約兩萬公里，非常疲累。」

鏡頭下全是寥無人跡的景象，姚瑞中解釋：「不是沒拍人，就是沒有人。神像跟社會景觀鄰近，如違規建築、高樓大廈、便

利商店和墓園等。《巨神連線》其實到處都是人的痕跡。而再神聖巨大，依然會荒廢。換言之，所有事物都是幻象。這就是我把工作室命名為『幻影堂』的原因。」

姚瑞中的創作特質之一，是以宏觀視野審視和掌握社會現象的規模美學，他透過連結眾多個案反映整體社會結構，因此單單是未整理的照片就有五萬張以上。他認為攝影應當有呈現社會景觀和結構的作用。「我要談的不是奇觀，而是具規模、社會約定俗成的普遍現象，並非單一個例。因此，得把它們檔案化、格式化，藉此讓大家反思種種荒謬、超現實主義、叢林美學、後現代的拼貼究竟是怎樣發生的。」

是故，透過攝影，姚瑞中既可深入地觀察宮廟文化，也可具體呈現荒謬的美學。姚瑞中表示：「攝影是機遇的藝術，或可說成是思考的產物。但對我來說，重要的可能不是拍，而是怎樣挑選照片。拍得很美的照片，不一定是你要的，你要的反而是跟生命經驗、人生觀點和角度有所契合的相片。攝影，對我來說，已經變成是挑選的藝術。」<sup>①</sup>

All images © Yao Jui-chung