

Inside the Exhibit: Yang Yongliang - Yan

By Zoey Zha, March 19, 2015

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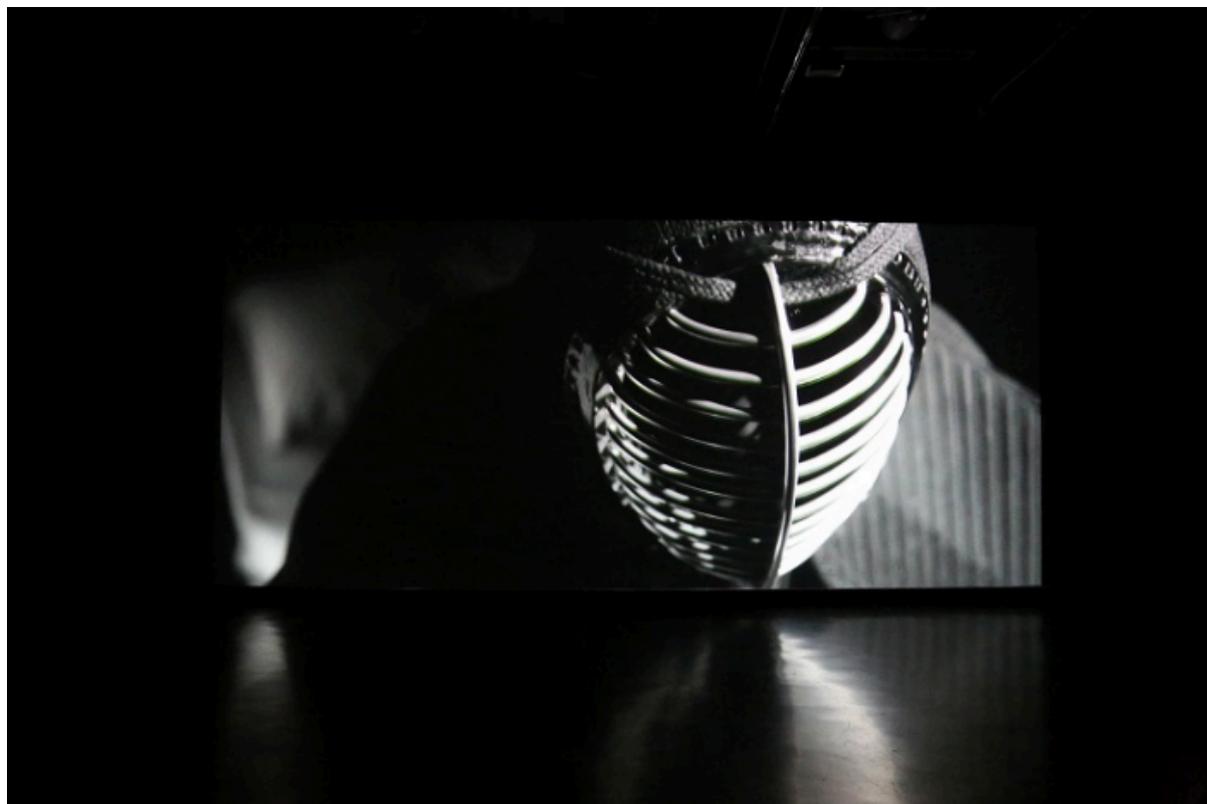


Best known for capturing his hometown's chaotic urban scenes in striking works that allude to classical Chinese art, Yang Yongliang is one of Shanghai's most acclaimed contemporary artists. He takes the next step in his artistic evolution with his new solo exhibition, *Yan*, which runs until April 7 at Shanghai Gallery of Art.

Trained by University of Hong Kong professor Yang Yang, the 34-year-old's fondness for traditional paintings came at an early age. He's able to create replicas of Song landscape masterpieces and that classical background runs throughout his works regardless of medium.

Yang's unprecedented work mixing modern photography with traditional black-and-white paintings turned heads internationally. What appears as a serene mountain landscape is actually composed of Shanghai's skyscrapers and construction cranes. The jarring juxtapositions have been exhibited at the world's most prestigious galleries such as the British Museum and New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

With his name firmly established within contemporary art circles, Yang is tackling film with *Yan*. "It was, and has always been my dream to be a film director," he says of the 50-minute piece. "There are no lines for actors and no narrations. What I want to present is the path of the character's emotional changes and that was the basic rule I stuck to when editing."

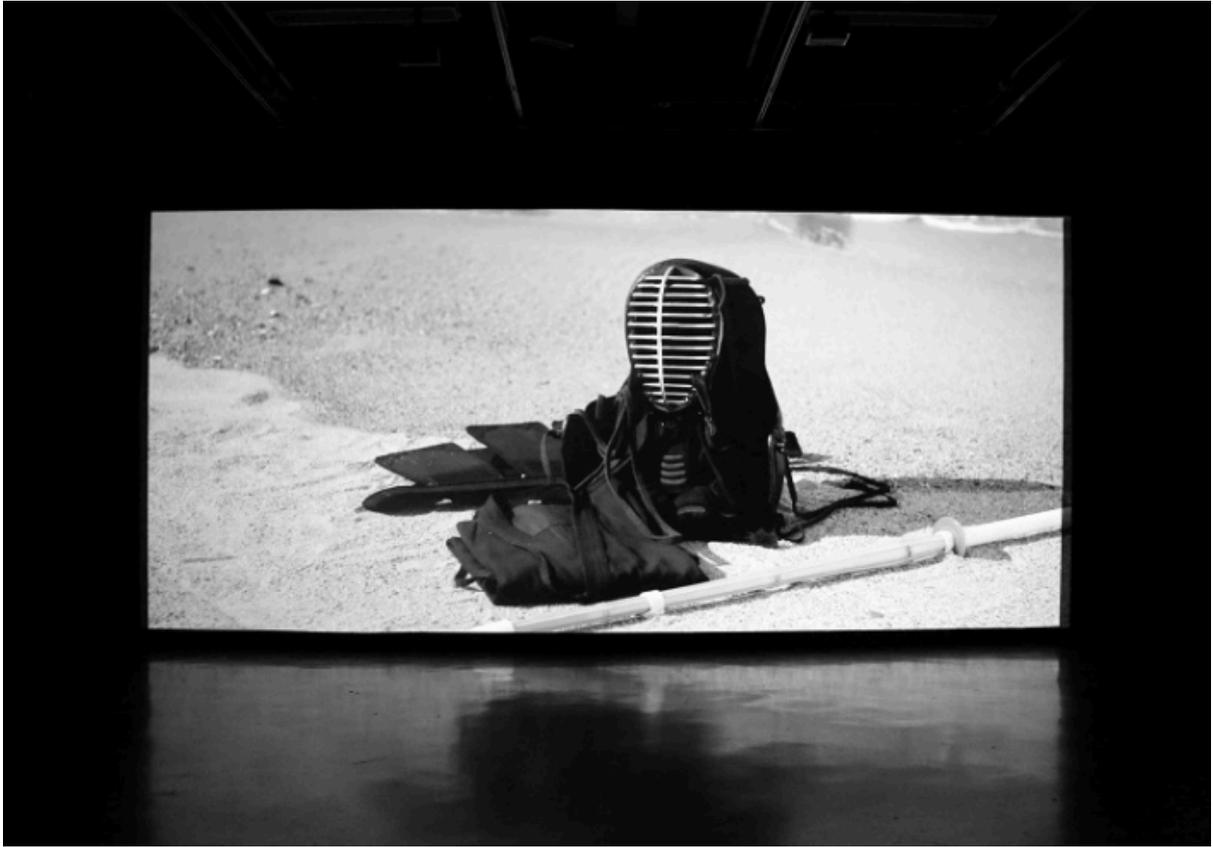


Translated as 'captivated dream,' *Yan* unfolds in Yang's signature black-and-white. The lead character appears on screen in full swordsman gear. However, he's in an abandoned park, alone except with a stray cat. He launches his journey back to human society, crossing through a forest and ending up in a modern metropolis. However, the film bounces back from reality and dreamland adding to the tension.

The movie wraps up ambiguously leaving audiences to debate whether the man has successfully escaped his fantasy. What's notable is Yang's mastery in eliciting emotions. A handful of scenes has no background music, with the only sounds being heavy and exhausting breathing of the swordsman, generating feelings of desperation and loneliness.

Yang deliberately created a character with no attachments to family, friends or a specific background. His antiquated costume isolates him from his surroundings.

"It reflects the relationship between urban dwellers nowadays," he explains. "We all wear masks, conscientiously or not, and transform ourselves to be much more indifferent and isolated beings."



Collaborating with team members from Hong Kong and Taiwan, Yang spent over a month in Japan filming the piece. He marvels at the cultural differences between the two countries but notes that they share the same urban isolation and indifference.

“Our actor was standing on the subway platform in a mask, costume and holding a wooden sword during rush hour,” he says. “Nobody bothered to look at him. There was a person sitting a few inches away and they showed no interest in learning who this weird person was. They walk their own path only.”

The film will be shown in a intimate screening area with the exhibition spanning Yang’s work in painting, photography and sculpture.

“I would say this film is an extension on my previous works,” he says. “But if there is any investment in the future, I want to direct sci-fi movies.”

// Until Apr 7, 10am-7pm. Shanghai Gallery of Art.