

The Walking Woman

This work intends to be a contribution to the objectification of phenomena that comprise a range of issues such as:

- 1.** Women's roles in the public sphere and their acceptability.
- 2.** The representation of women in terms of ways of dressing and the ways they present themselves, their imaginary.
- 3.** The way others react to women wearing pyjamas in a masculine version, i.e. shirt and pants, usually not worn by Shanghainese women.
- 4.** The idea of sophistication and the consumption of luxurious objects and clothes, in an ever increasingly consumerist society.
- 5.** The conjugation of two cultures, one western, the other Asian, constructed by two women, clothed in identical form but behaving in ways that reflect their socio-cultural background.
- 6.** The problematic of gazing: this performance will be constituted by photographs, taken by all of us, where we show the other looking at us, but also photos made by photographers—of us being looked at by others and us looking at others. This questions the gazing process: to make us think about whom is gazing, how he or she is gazing and what gazing means.
- 7.** The problematic surrounding the private and public spheres and the way women live through these spaces.
- 8.** Notions of freedom and confrontation, especially freedom of expression and to be able to choose what one wears.
- 9.** Codes of social conduct.
- 10.** The usage today of a type of clothing that was at first introduced by the Portuguese, but repositioning pyjamas in a context of glamour (therefore the sophisticated version) and taking them into the streets and inside deluxe shops. At one level the performance consists in an upgrading of going to the market and again confirms the wearing of pyjamas as an appropriate form of dressing.

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The Performance

30 ink jet prints on Epson ultra smooth fine art paper, 29.7x21cm each, with pencil inscription; two silk pyjamas; Consular documentation; 3 invoice; folio - artist's edition printed on IOR 180gr paper; text in vinyl sticker.

Dior

Two women, one Shanghainese, the other European (the artist), enter Plaza 66, a mall that is home to exclusive brands, wearing luxurious silk pyjamas and carrying cameras, they window-shop and visit (peek into) the stores.

The idea of being looked at and looking at the other is problematized by the fact that they take pictures of the onlookers; yet, they too are photographed and recorded in this performative activity.

In the company of the Shanghainese woman, the artist visits the Portuguese General Consulate in Shanghai to register her presence in this city. This visit further reaffirms that such clothing is neither inappropriate in a luxury setting or during acts of an official nature.

The problematic surrounding this clothing reflects a way of being and a life-style essentially Shanghainese and questions the governmental directive of censoring the use of pyjamas outside the home—"Not going outside wearing pyjamas, become a World Expo civilized person".

In this attempt to control dressing codes and de-dignify pyjamas as an attire to be worn outside the home, "what's been taken off is not pyjamas, it's freedom".

At one level, wearing a pyjama outdoors is a comfortable way of making public space an extension of one's home, as it is usually worn in the vicinity, for domestic chores nearby, going grocery shopping, walking the dog, or playing badminton with neighbours and friends. It reflects an appropriation of public space, where housing may be cramped and where a more communal type of living is the norm (such as the Shanghainese typical neighbourhood lanes).

To walk out in one's pyjamas is a "personalisation" and "humanization" (domestication/feminization?) of public spaces and it is a conquest. To show oneself to others also presupposes the consciousness of the self.

However, what is strange is that the attempt to discourage pyjamas from the streets makes them an enemy of civilization, when the use of a simple and comfortable piece of clothing should be synonymous with freedom. In this post-Facebook age in which "the world is better if we share everything: a world of transparent walls", the governmental campaign to wipe out the use of pyjamas in public seems nonsensical.

At the same time, wearing pyjamas in a non-domestic context reflects a social status. With the reforms in the eighties, pyjamas became fashionable and implied a more comfortable way of life as well as a degree of westernization and sophistication.

The western use of pyjama dates back to the 16th Century when Portuguese arrived in India; pyjama is a transliteration of a Persian term that means "leg garment or loose trousers around the waist". The British later popularized pyjamas, after their occupation of Mumbai, India, which was given to them thanks to the dowry of the Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza (D. Catarina de Bragança) who married Charles II, in 1661. The introduction of Western pyjamas in Asia can be traced back to the 18th and 19th Centuries through cities like Macau, Hong Kong and Shanghai, the latter a westernized city open to foreign ideas, gave a new usage to the garment. Portuguese were the second largest group of foreigners in Shanghai at various periods before 1949 so this performance by a Shanghainese and a Portuguese is also an attempt to recover that history when Shanghainese and Portuguese mixed together.

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4. The idea of sophistication and the consumption of luxurious objects and clothes, in an ever increasingly consumerist society.
5. The conjugation of two cultures, one western, the other Asian, constructed by two women, clothed in identical form but behaving in ways that reflect their socio-cultural background.
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7. The problematic surrounding the private and public spheres and the way women live through these spaces.
8. Notions of freedom and confrontation, especially freedom of expression and to be able to choose what one wears.
9. Codes of social conduct.
10. The usage today of a type of clothing that was at first introduced by the Portuguese, but repositioning pyjamas in a context of glamour (therefore the sophisticated version) and taking them into the streets and inside deluxe shops. At one level the performance consists in an upgrading of going to the market and again confirms the wearing of pyjamas as an appropriate form of dressing.

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