

Ma Haijiao

By Lu Jing (Rain)

Using photography, film, and video as his primary mediums, Ma explores the thoughts and sensitivities of individuals in relation to each other, their immediate environments, and the larger context of Chinese society. While working from personal experience and close observation of everyday life, Ma ultimately creates fictional narratives. His pseudo-documentary style combines the appearance of reality with poetic flourishes.

Born in 1990 in the northern city of Baoding in Hebei Province, Ma Haijiao earned his undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in interdisciplinary media art from China Fine Art Academy in Hangzhou, where he studied under Yang Fudong, one of China's best-known photographers and cinematographers.

Ma's graduate project, titled *Ma Guoquan*, was also shown at the 11th Shanghai Biennale in 2016. This biographical film explores the life and family relationships of the title character, who suffers from a brain injury. Seemingly filtered through Ma Guoquan's mental deficiencies and memory loss, the film also reveals the spectacle of northern China in the 2010s, when ubiquitous construction sites had developed under the "Regional Urbanization Policy" and various religions emerged to provide spiritual sustenance for locals.

More recently, Ma completed *Family Separatism* (2017), a three-channel video installation that uses multi-generational perspectives to examine the notion of "family". The idea for this work originated in a letter that Ma discovered in a desk in a second-hand furniture store. The contents of the missive (which is framed and displayed in the installation) convey the estrangement and confusion among members of a Chinese family. Ma recreated the situations described in the letter using three characters who represent different generations: a young soldier serving in the army; a middle-aged businessman with an eye disease; and an elderly Christian intellectual. Their individual identities and complex interactions unfold across multiple, black-and-white projections.

Ma's work demonstrates an awareness of cinematic history and the influence of films by pioneer directors from around the globe, including *Satantango* by Bela Tarr, *Beau Travail* by Claire Denis, and *Still Walking* by Hirokazu Kore-eda. However, Ma has developed a distinctive style of his own that combines carefully composed images, slow and steady tracking shots, and a melancholy mood. His themes are also specific to a Chinese generation born in the 1980s and 90s, after the economic reforms begun in 1978, who lived through dramatic transitions from traditional to modern culture, from a planned economy to a market system, and from a relatively closed society to a more open one. These enormous changes impacted many Chinese families, creating intergenerational distance, anxiety, and conflicts. Although the narratives in Ma's videos are fictional, this reality of his generation is reflected in his work.

Ma Haijiao currently lives and works in Beijing. His recent exhibitions include *Today's Yesterday: The 1st Anren Biennale* (Anren, Chengdu, 2017); *The New Normal* (Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2017); and the *Spain Moving Images Festival* (Madrid, 2018). Nominated for the *Porsche/ARTO21 Young Chinese Artist of the Year* in 2017, he was also a finalist for the 10th *Three Shadows Photography Award* in 2018. Ma's new works were recently featured in *The 3rd Beijing Photo Biennial* in late 2018. The artist will stage another new project for *Art Basel Hong Kong* in 2019.

Below: Ma Haijiao, *Family Separatism* (2017).
Courtesy: the artist.

