

# THE 5<sup>TH</sup> ASIA-PACIFIC TRIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART

2 DECEMBER 2006 – 27 MAY 2007  
[WWW.ASIAPACIFICTRIENNIAL.COM](http://WWW.ASIAPACIFICTRIENNIAL.COM)

Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art

## MOVING IMAGE APT5 TOUR

TEACHERS' NOTES

**SUBJECT AREAS**

The Arts — Media, Drama & Music; English; Film, Television and New Media

**STUDENTS ATTENDING THIS TOUR SHOULD COME AWAY  
WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF:**

- the purposes of the films featured and the audiences they are made for
- which media technologies allow for audience interactivity
- the ways images are juxtaposed or manipulated for effect.

**INTRODUCTION**

New forms of artistic expression are often used by artists to question the boundaries of the art museum. When artists first used film and video it was as a direct rebuttal of the commercial art market. Many art institutions have responded to the importance of the moving image in aesthetic discourse; however, there often remains a distinction between new technologies and traditional art forms.

As we tour through 'The 5th Asia–Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art' (APT5), think about how these works have been exhibited in the context of a major exhibition. How does this affect the way we interpret the work and think about the relationship between moving image and other visual arts of the Asia–Pacific region?

TEACHERS' NOTES



Justine Cooper Australia/United States b.1968 / *Leopards (Panthera pardus), Congo 1911* (from 'Saved by science' series) 2005 / 76.3 x 99.1cm / Digital colour print on Fujii Crystal Archive Matte paper, ed. 1/8 / Purchased 2005. Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

**QAG** GALLERY 6  
**JUSTINE COOPER**

AUSTRALIA/UNITED STATES B.1968

Justine Cooper was artist-in-residence at the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 2003–04. During her residency she photographed and videoed the collections and storage areas of the museum.

The video, *S.O.S.*, leads the viewer through the behind-the-scenes collection storage areas. The accompanying soundtrack features animal noises which move through the same evolutionary stages as the collection areas.

In this video and the photographs from the series 'Saved by science' 2005, the artist opens the doors to one of the world's greatest natural history museums and, in doing so, the viewer can witness how disparate items are collected and transformed into scientific information.

These vast collections document the history of Western acquisitive expeditions, the connections to colonial histories and the scientific investigation into theories of evolution – revealing as much about human development as the specimens that have been collected.

**Discuss how a museum's collection demonstrates our need to investigate, classify and interpret all aspects of life. How do historical and cultural contexts influence personal interpretation?**

**Why do museums collect?**

Cooper is interested in the correlation between science, art and society. A museum's collection demonstrates the transformation from living thing, to object, to information. She has suggested that art also is 'no longer embedded in the object, but evolved into an information-processing event'. The knowledge garnered from both science and art shapes the way we think about our own identity. Discuss the study of human culture and the artist's allusion to humanity's position as part of and apart from nature.

**What is this art work about?**

The video ends with the sound of chainsaws as the image fades to white. Discuss the conventional filmic device (windows fade to white) used and how this can be read as death or transcendence. What does the final scene suggest to you?

**How does the artist allude to this?**



Yang Fudong China b.1971 / *Jiaer's livestock* 2002–05 / 10-channel video installation, 35mm, 18 minutes, colour, sound, suitcases and clothing / Collection: The artist / Courtesy: ShangART Gallery, Shanghai

**QAG** GALLERY 6

**YANG FUDONG**

CHINA b.1971

In his video installation *Jiaer's livestock*, Yang uses two video projections, which at first appear to be the same but actually tell two different stories. Accompanying each projection is a suitcase filled with monitors — the same suitcase can be seen carried by one of the characters in the film. Based on traditional Chinese fables and proverbs, the installation deals with issues of violence and death.

Many young Chinese artists who have trained in traditional art forms are turning to new media as a form of expression more suited to investigate contemporary culture. The use of new media can be attributed, in part, to the rapid modernisation of China and the subsequent displacement of traditional values and culture. In embracing these new attitudes, Chinese artists are using new technologies to depart from traditional culture. Discuss some of the social, political and economic influences operating on the production of independent media from the Asia–Pacific region.

**Why do you think many young Chinese artists use new media, such as video and photography?**

While all art forms demand a period of engagement with the viewer, the duration of engagement with moving image is inherent to and prescribed by the film itself. The meaning of each image can only be fully understood in terms of its relationship to the preceding and subsequent images.

**How does the use of video installation influence the way you read this work?**

Yang's use of video installation in *Jiaer's livestock* immerses the viewer in the images and, in doing so, suggests a conspiratorial interaction with the events taking place. Discuss the ways in which media technologies allow for audience interactivity.

Although Yang's images are allusive and open to interpretation, his works all have existential themes related to how identity is shaped through experience, memory and culture. The artist juxtaposes images to create a metaphorical allusion rather than a literal narrative. This installation deals with issues of violence and death and references narratives based on traditional Chinese fables and proverbs. Discuss the ways Yang Fudong's images are juxtaposed or manipulated for effect.

**What do you think this work is about?**

TEACHERS' NOTES



Yang Zhenzhong China b.1968 / *922 rice corns* (still) 2000 / Betacam SP (exhibited on DVD), 8 minutes, colour, sound, ed. 7/10 / Purchased 2005. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Collection: Queensland Art Gallery



Yang Zhenzhong / *I will die* (Shanghai version) (still) 2001 / Betacam SP (exhibited on DVD), 20 minutes, colour, sound (Mandarin language, English subtitles) / The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art. Purchased 2006 with funds from Michael Smicha Baevski through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery



Yang Zhenzhong / *Light and easy no. 5* 2002 / Type C photographs, ed. 8/10 / 120 x 79.3cm / Purchased 2005. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

**GoMA** GALLERY 1.1  
**YANG ZHENZHONG**

CHINA B.1968

Yang Zhenzhong employs digital media to explore contemporary society. He uses humour, metaphor and cultural motifs to make political comments on identity and the contradictions found in urban life.

In *922 rice corns*, a hen and a cockerel appear alongside a large pile of rice. A tally records the number of rice grains eaten by each fowl as voiceovers provide commentary on the progress of each bird.

You can think about this work in terms of China's past policies on gender equality, consumption, and economic rationalisation. Many of Yang's works reference imagery from the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Propaganda images such as plump hens and roosters were used as a symbol of strong, industrious workers. Discuss how the artist alludes to political and cultural issues.

**What aspects of Chinese culture and history does this work explore?**

The artist has described how this work came about:

I held a handful of rice in my palm. I wanted to know how many grains there were. If I counted them one by one, it would take too much time. So I put the rice on the ground and let two chickens help me count them. I thought this was a clever way to do it. But the chickens were not teachable. Sometimes they didn't finish the rice, sometimes they fought each other. I tried again and again to film them . . . In the end, I got the number: 922. Now I know I am foolish. Chickens never want to know how much they eat. This is a human problem. Humans are stupid.

Yang Zhenzhong, *I will die* (Shanghai version) 2001

In the video work *I will die* (Shanghai version) 2001, various people recite the phrase, 'I will die'. Many of them laugh as they say the words, defusing the weight of the statement. Yang has completed a number of different versions of this work in other countries, highlighting the different cultural responses to the subject of mortality.

**What role does humour play in this work?**

Yang Zhenzhong, *Light and easy no. 5, 9, 15, 16, 17, 24* 2002

Through absurdity and visual humour Yang explores individual and cultural concerns while avoiding personal opinion or judgment. Humour is used to make light of sensitive issues that may be difficult to articulate in everyday situations and offers an avenue for political comment on contemporary society. Discuss how this work may be read from different political and cultural perspectives.

Through the observation of culture, objects and social behaviours within his home city, Shanghai, Yang questions the meaning and conventions inherent to everyday existence.

**How does Yang comment on contemporary life?**

Yang's photographic series 'Light and easy' 2002 portrays people balancing large objects such as a motorbike, a vending machine and a truck on their hand. As in much of his work, the artist employs the media of advertising propaganda to create these moments which explore the juxtaposition between the artificial and the real. This series could be read as a critique of the value of consumable objects, while simultaneously offering an opportunity for the cities residents to slow down. Discuss the correlations between the different styles and formats this artist uses (i.e. still and moving images).