

INTERVIEW - 25 JUL 2016

Everyday Pleasures

YJ Wang and Xiaopeng Yuan talk about their curatorial and publishing project, Same Paper, and their Shanghai-based studio and independent bookstore, Closing Ceremony

BY FRANCESCA TAROCCO

Wang and Yuan publish art books and zines as a vehicle to engage in wider conversations about contemporary art practices, photography and image making, curatorial strategies and the aesthetics of banality in today's art world. They run a left-field artists' book studio and independent bookstore that feels unlike any other art space in China. This they chose to name, ominously, Closing Ceremony. They say, with an ironic scoff: 'We are prepared to go bankrupt and close at any time in the pursuit of this cause.' They have an almost utopian, collaborative approach to producing artists' books (and art books and zines). Their work illustrates the ultimate appeal of this type of approach to art making, curatorship and self-publishing. They see these as artworks in their own right. Same Paper is interested in exploring the aesthetics of banal images. In their curatorial projects, Wang and Yuan explore our photographic obsessions with the mundane, the bland, and the omnipresence of commodity culture. They seek to promote new Chinese artists, yet their strategies and practices are not confined to Shanghai or China. Their upcoming publications include *Magic* (July 2016), together with the Brooklyn-based Korean conceptual photographer Kanghee Kim, and *Toothbrushes* (August 2016) with French photo-based artist Maxime Guyon.

Francesca Tarocco What was the motivation for starting Same Paper?

Same Paper We started about three years ago – we have been friends for a long time. We were bored with our jobs. We kept talking and talking about it – YJ was living in Beijing at the time. We wanted out of mainstream commercial media and cultural production. Then YJ moved to Shanghai



Closing
Ceremony
bookstore,
Shanghai.
Courtesy:
Same Paper,
Shanghai

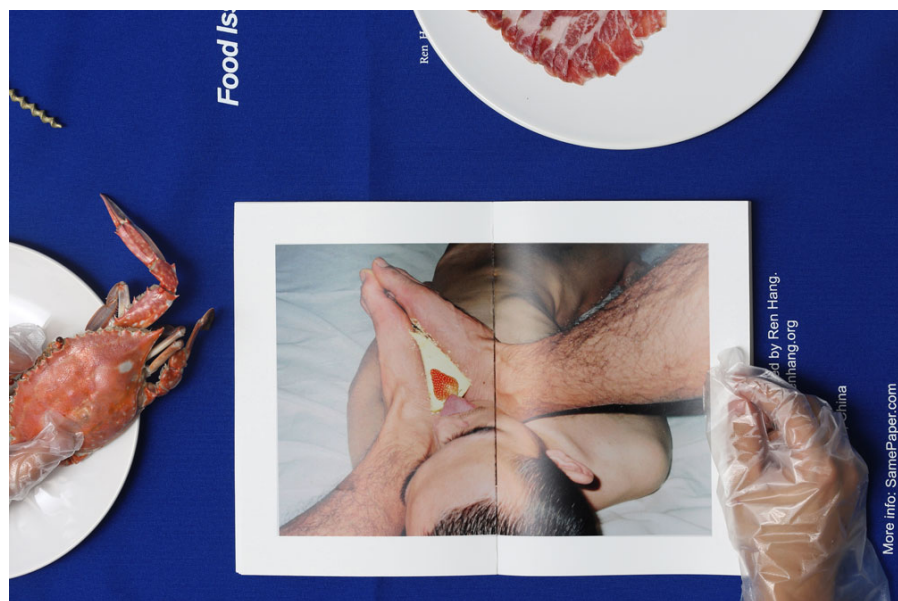
and we decided
to try
something out,
to create a
platform.
Shanghai feels
like the right
place to do it,
Beijing does
not really have
this kind of
self-publishing

or art publishing community. At first we took things slowly but now we want to do more and more. We want to work with non-Chinese artists and join an international conversation. We are beginning to push the boundaries here and we take risks. People are surprised, excited – they want to see, to touch, to own new things. We curate many events, book launches and art projects in our bookstore and in the back room, sometimes every week.

FT Why books and zines?

SP Books and publications are not all we do and think about, that's about half of it. We are constantly thinking about new projects, all kinds of things. Some of the time we use books to do these things. But yes, we have an affinity for books, a whole lot of memories and emotions. Certain

experiences and atmospheres of when we were growing up, certain images – we are probably the last generation in China [Same Paper were born in 1982 and 1987] that is going to feel this way about books as physical, material objects. People born in the 1990s are the screen generation; they get what they want online. For us, growing up, we looked at pictures and then cinema magazines – ordinary everyday visual pleasures. We looked at so many images, online and on social media – we just kept looking and looking. About ten years ago we discovered this whole world of artists' books and zines. In the south of China, in Guangdong, there were art books coming in from Hong Kong or pirated copies, even photocopied art books. It was mesmerizing.



Ren Hang, *Food Issue*, 2015, Same Paper. Courtesy: Same Paper, Shanghai

FT You have already produced seven art books/projects. Last year you made *Food Issue* with the photographer Ren Hang. You spent a long time with him looking at unpublished images.

SP We think that there is something interesting about Ren Hang's work – the way he shoots young Asian male bodies, the materiality of those faces, the eyes, the skin. We looked at many of the rejected images in his archives. The artist's feet show up in some photos by accident. Maybe he had been doing something with his feet during the shoot or touching his male models with them. This kind of seemingly insignificant acts caught our attention. It occurred to us that we could work with these images of feet and male bodies. We wanted to show less polished images by Ren Hang. At the beginning he was quite skeptical. In the end we cajoled him into giving us these pictures. *Food Issue* evolves around the idea of a food party. It works with very deliberate images and some short texts. Some of it is humorous and nonsensical. This is how we know Ren Hang as a person. It took us a long time to find a printer – the images are so strong and yet quite abstract in their composition. In the end, we decided to print some of the pictures individually and insert them in between the pages, almost flyer-like. The book is wrapped in a deep blue tablecloth – it kind of tones down the eroticism, but it can also serve other purposes.

FT *Daddy and Son* is another of your projects, an absorbing look at today's online visual culture. Your brazenly pink-papered zine is filled with lo-res and heavily pixelated black and white images sourced from online porn sites.

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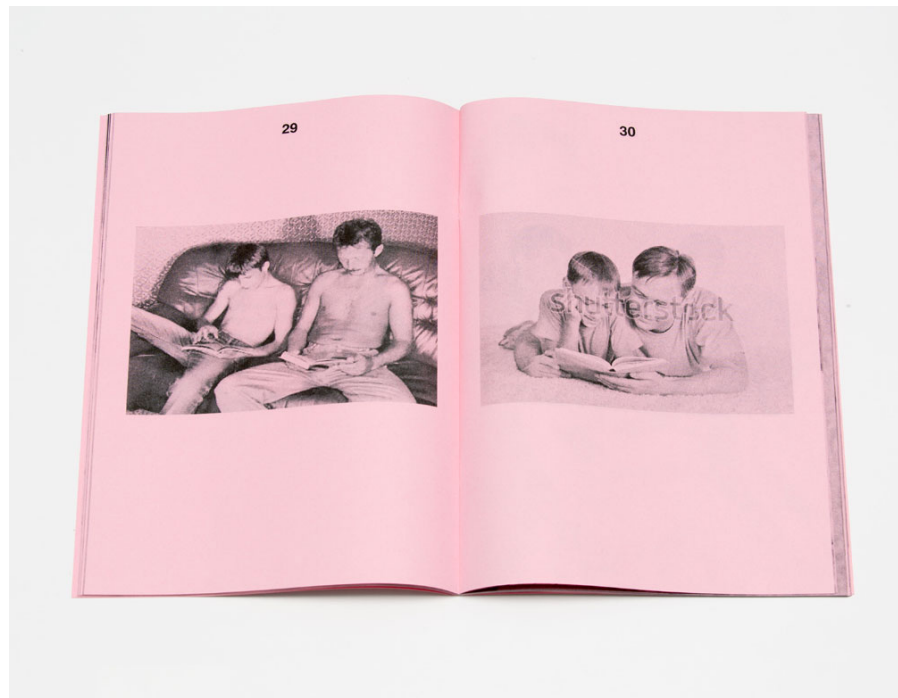
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SM Yes, every year we publish *Daddy and Son* on father's day. It came about from us inputting the keywords 'daddy and son' into the Chinese search engine Baidu and into Google. Plenty of pornography popped up, like dadsonvideo.com, so we decided to explore this darkness that can be so easily accessed online in China.



Daddy and Son, 2016, interior spread, Same Paper. Courtesy: Same Paper, Shanghai

FT You are interested in a kind of everyday – photography's representation of the ordinary.

SP Yes, it is about some kind of absurd normality and the language used to describe that. Accidental images actually perform a completely new function when viewed alongside others. That's what our *Trend Issue* was about.

FT Apart from your own projects, Closing Ceremony focuses on some key artists' projects and books, including

works by Anouk Kruithof such as *Pixel Stress* (2013), Viviane Sassen's photobooks, and also *The Cars* by Wolfgang Tillmans (2015). What about Thomas Mailaender's *Illustrated People* (2015) [in which the artist applied negative's from the collection of the Archive of Modern Conflict onto models' skin, before projecting a powerful UV lamp over them]?

SP Yes, skin is the best photographic paper.

Samepaper.com <<http://Samepaper.com>>

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