

# HAZE

TULLY ARNOT

SARAH CONTOS

JENSEN TJHUNG

22 AUGUST - 25 OCTOBER 2014



*Haze* is an exhibition of new work by Australian artists Tully Arnot, Sarah Contos and Jensen Tjhung. Together, these three artists undertook 4A's inaugural Beijing Studio Program at the studios of Chinese-Australian artist Shen Shaomin in Huairou (怀柔区) on the northern outskirts of Beijing in September 2013. Upon returning to Australia the artists spoke of both the highlights and challenges of living and working on the fringes of the Chinese capital. The experience had a subtle effect on each artists' individual practice, broadening their understanding of different conceptual approaches to object-making and divergent modes of interpretation.

Despite Huairou being known domestically as an 'oxygen bar' for Beijing due to its leafy environments at the foot of a section of the Great Wall, Tully Arnot, Sarah Contos and Jensen Tjhung were transfixed by the grey mist that was a constant element within their surroundings. During their stay they individually began to consider their own position in this foreign landscape and the ways in which quotidian materials and objects - and language itself - can undergo transformation in order to articulate the complexities of a place such as Huairou.

Drawing on personal accounts, anecdotes and memory, Arnot, Contos and Tjhung have each conceived new bodies of work that are disparate in their approach to materials, yet share a collective interest in the specific moments or places where differing regional and national cultures meet, exchange, blur and sometimes collide. Materials such as rope lighting, camouflage clothing, shopping bags and Styrofoam suggest alternative meanings for quotidian objects. There is a common interest in the appropriation of forms and ideas located specifically in Huairou incorporated into these works, using strategies of multiples, reproductions and representation to attempt to articulate the artists' experience.

Incorporating materials manufactured and purchased in China, Tully Arnot presents a body of work which explores notions of the uncanny and absurd through the existing meaning and value of found objects. His approach involves re-animating or activating static images and materials to produce kinetic works that tease out experiences of translation and representation within an everyday context. In 4A's ground floor gallery hangs *Cold Beer, Cold Women* (2014), a rope light sculpture which echoes an aesthetic of advertising prevalent in urban areas in China. Intermittently flickering on and off, the lights playfully shift between legibility and abstraction. Installed diagonally in the gallery space, the rope light signage offers a multitude of readings from both the front and back side.

In the first floor gallery we encounter two female voices permeating the space, the first endlessly singing a verse of popular Chinese karaoke, the second an explanation of the lyrical content in English. Spread across 16 channels of video and sound, Tully Arnot's *Postcards Of My Bedroom, Wish*

*You Were Here* (2014), alludes to notions of spatial and emotional absence. Arnot's image-scape has been constructed from photographs he took during his Beijing residency, producing an animated collage as a snapshot of his time. A bottle rolls back and forth along the ground, the karaoke keeps playing and outside the single window a group of men sit and drink. Nothing seems to really happen; Arnot observes anyhow. He reproduces this image en masse across multiple monitors, transforming a personal collage of memories into a melancholic contemplation of spatial experience.

With an existing interest in the appropriation of cultural and social forms, Sarah Contos has continued this line of inquiry, drawing on examples of traditional and contemporary Chinese construction to reflect on the shifting value of culture. *23 Ming Vases for Little Horse (everything that moves, breaks)* (2014) is a series of vases and decorative vessels that have been inspired by the namesake vases which are often considered primary traditional forms in Chinese culture and more importantly, highly valuable and collectable objects. Contos became interested in these forms as a historical example of cultural appropriation, the Ming vase being at least in part in response to lively trade with the Islamic world with many examples reflective of strong West Asian decorative influence. By contrast to their originals, these forms are constructed from everyday materials such as plaster, calico, canvas and cardboard. Contos selected these materials based on her observation of makeshift and temporary housing that has now become predominant in many of the traditional hutongs of Beijing. Similar to the Ming vases themselves, these neighbourhoods were once the enclave of the cultural elite in China's past but are increasingly being razed to make room for modern development. As fragile and largely functionless objects, Contos' forms speak of the intersection between collective desires for development and the need to preserve traditional culture.

Furthering the exploration of development and the inevitable destruction that it involves, Jensen Tjhung's *New God/False God* (2014) investigates the dizzying rate of the production of contemporary art in China and how it is received within a broader social and political context. Tjhung's new work draws on narrative and abstraction to examine the nature of the public sculpture within the current landscape. The installation positions two mannequins slumped over and cradling plinths, looking towards the central monument like cast-aways to a sinking ship. As in Gericault's figures adrift in *The Raft of Medusa* (1818-1819), Tjhung's spectral-like figures occupy both an aesthetic and political position. Their gaze, transfixed on the tiled and muddied structure, and violently spiked by camouflage flags, alludes to attempts to lay claim to the value and meaning of public artworks. Surrounded by four monochrome prints *New God/False God* articulates alternate notions of representation and the void in Western and Eastern art history.

The works created for *Haze* embody as much as they reflect the individual artists' response to their time in China. Rather than simply attempt to articulate a singular notion of cultural exchange, Tully Arnot, Sarah Contos and Jensen Tjhung attempt to isolate and respond to specific incidences where personal, social and political elements are combined to produce moments of obscurity, misrepresentation or mistranslation. Bound by their shared time spent in Huariou, these artists illustrate the subtle impacts of place and collective experience on their practices and the ways in which refiguring and replicating objects can produce alternative readings within culturally-specific contexts.

Toby Chapman  
Exhibition curator

## CATALOGUE OF WORKS

### GROUND FLOOR

#### Tully Arnot

*Cold Beer, Cold Women* (2014)

Rope light, cable ties, string, Google translation of "Cold Beer" in simplified Chinese.

### FIRST FLOOR

#### Jensen Tjhung

*New God/False God* (2014), series:

*But Do You Love Me* (2014)

fibreglass, materials, wax, resin, PVA, enamel, leather  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist.

*Hopelessly Devoted* (2014)

fibreglass, materials, wax, resin, PVA, enamel, leather  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist.

*Mystic Terror, Public Sculpture* (2014)

tiles, plaster, steel, bitumen, wax, enamel, cloth  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist.

*Black Painting (2014) #1* (2014)

glue, bitumen, acrylic, grease, enamel on ply with perspex  
60 x 90 cm  
courtesy the artist.

*Black Painting (2014) #2* (2014)

glue, bitumen, acrylic, grease, enamel on ply with perspex  
60 x 90 cm  
courtesy the artist.

*Black Painting (2014) #3* (2014)

glue, bitumen, acrylic, grease, enamel on ply with perspex  
60 x 90 cm  
courtesy the artist.

*Black Painting (2014) #4* (2014)

glue, bitumen, acrylic, grease, enamel on ply with perspex  
60 x 90 cm  
courtesy the artist.

### FIRST FLOOR

#### Sarah Contos

*23 Ming Vases for Little Horse (everything that moves, breaks)* (2014)

plaster, calico, painters drop sheet, chicken wire, wood, plastic take away containers, plastic bins, plastic home kitchen wares, polystyrofoam cups, paper lanterns, ocky straps, netball bags, sewing pins, ceramic smiley face beads, tassles, acrylic and enamel spray paint  
23 pieces (dimensions variable)  
courtesy the artist.

*The Great Wall* (2014)

digital print  
10 x 15 cm  
courtesy the artist. Photo: Tully Arnot.

#### Tully Arnot

*Drunk With Shen On a Big Wall* (2014)

digital photo  
10 x 15 cm  
courtesy the artist.

*Nervous Plant Needs To Pee* (Fern) (2014)

artificial plant, microcontroller (Arduino Uno), servo motors, light sensor, motion  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist.

*Nervous Plant Had Too Much Coffee*  
(Peace Lily) (2014)

artificial plant, microcontroller (Arduino Uno), servo motors, light sensor, motion  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist.

*Postcards of my Bedrooms, Wish You Were Here* (2014)

HD video from tourist photos. Karaoke by 谢丹丹  
16-channel video installation with sound  
courtesy the artist.

*Happy Mao Sad Mao* (2014)

1¥ note, motor with mechanical assistance from Dr Josh Harle  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist.

**Tully Arnot's** practice develops on 'outsider' modes of invention, generating a non-teleological creative process with unanticipated outcomes. Inventive and alchemical explorations of material and form are used to explore the subtle changing of states within art from everyday object to sculpture/invention/artwork, or stuck between in a state of flux. Arnot's work aims to reconnect with objects and understand what their functions (and by extension, our needs) really are. His works poetically interpret the intangible relationships we have with everyday items and illuminate new ways of thinking and interacting with the world around us. More subjectively, Arnot's work addresses feelings of absence, longing, play, the uncanny, human relationships with objects and technology, the absurd and contradiction. Arnot's current research explores various real and imagined Artificial Intelligences, addressing the value of our relationships with non-sentient forms. His current body of work looks at the way these relationships feed back into our own capacity to interact meaningfully with one another. His work often integrates complex technologies with everyday or crass components. This merging of high and low thought exemplifies the isolating nature of our increasingly connected, but ultimately disconnected world.

**Sarah Contos** is a multidisciplinary artist working across various modes of collage, sculpture and installation. Her work unpacks notions of primitivism, eroticism and history – whether cultural or personal – utilising formal and referential counterpoints to explore ideas of identity, sensuality and myth. Working with a diverse range of materials – from ceramics, plaster and screenprinted textiles to collected fabrics and discarded objects – Contos forges disjunctions in culture, time and gender to create new mythologies, characters and histories, reflected in fictional objects and forms that float between the familiar and the uncanny. Her work is at once highly personal, intimate and enmeshed in wider taxonomies of art history.

**Jensen Tjhung** is a Melbourne-based artist. Graduating from the Victoria College of the Arts (painting) in 2002, Jensen has shown work at Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne; Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart; Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, and has undergone residencies at Artspace, Sydney and Beijing Studio Program at 4A Centre Of Contemporary Art. Tjhung's work is often project-based, large scale installation and sculpture which addresses themes of belief, loss of belief, hysteria and void.



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