

Liu Ding & Han Dong
Let's Say Goodbye!
4th May to 25th June 2017
Magician Space

This is another attempt to practice self-awareness and self-understanding. The exhibition is guided by a twenty-year friendship between two people. Having known one another for a long time, this marks the first time fragments from the trajectory of their practices share the same space under an exhibition context. That is not to say there is necessarily any direct connection that converges their works together. Throughout the years, they have never lived in the same city, nor have they worked within the same field – they often rarely intersect. In fact, there has been extended periods of time where there hasn't been any contact at all.

It wasn't until in recent years that they resumed seeing one another occasionally again. The once twenty-something youngster is quickly approaching his 40s; and the youthful man back then is well into approaching middle age now. Liu Ding met Han Dong when he first started as an artist. From there, he came into contact and quickly became acquainted with figures from the literary world. It was initially through poetry and writing that he began to look at methods of perceiving and describing the world, seeking ways to articulate this approach within the sphere of art. Invited by the 2015 Istanbul Biennial, Liu Ding produced 31 poems, which was both a method of contemplating and recording the political reality he was facing. Of course, Liu Ding does not consider himself as either poet or writer, but the attentive audience might observe the role text frequently functions, concealed or incorporated through various guises, within his work at different stages of his artistic career.

After all these years, Liu Ding frequently mentions the meetings at Han Dong's studio in the evening and of the settings where they would eat together with other companions. They often congregated at the Daoxiang restaurant on Huangpu Road. In the late 90s, Han Dong presided over the influential literary journal *Lotus (Furong)* and invited Liu Ding to chair a column on contemporary art for a year. Han Dong's desire and perceptiveness to examine and dissect a practice borders on the obsessive. For him, writing requires qualities of self-restraint and discipline – a conviction that has naturally left a profound impression on Liu Ding's own practice. We cannot say for sure whether Liu Ding's natural inclination to literature has origins from his father – a man who had once set out to become a writer in his youth, but who eventually entered into medical practice due to some unfortunate circumstances. Yet since Liu Ding embarked on his artistic career through to his adulthood, Han Dong has become a role model, a mirror, a rare confidante, and someone to share an ongoing dialogue with. They have together all kinds of secrets related to their artistic practice, but they take equal pleasure in revealing the methods and clues towards deciphering their codes as they see them.

In 2013, Han Dong published his third collection of poems *Born Again*. The publication concentrated on a selection of poetry written in the period from 2002 to 2011. During these ten years, Han Dong experienced an unforeseen number of personal ups and downs in his life. The poems are composed of people and events related exclusively to him: *Dear Mother, The Last Few Years, For Cao Xu, Round Jade, May, We Sat On The Street, A Calmness, A Brown Sofa, Have A Toast, Self-Awareness, The Alley, Snowfall, Some People Don't Like To Talk, Anger, Always Finding Something To Do, Friendship Hotel, Green Tree, Red Fruit, The Chicken Seller, The Vegetable Market, A Tomb Sweeping Outing, Tall Tree In The Small Alley, Night Stroll To A Villa, Elevator Door, Etc., Dark Sun* – the titles have a succinct and almost austere quality to them, they directly address people, while also avoiding unnecessary flourishes of language – the attempts to elevate their status with quotation marks at this point seem almost redundant.

These few years, a friend passed away
Yet it feels like he is still alive
A friend stepped into immortality
So it's bye bye. Let's say goodbye
I'm still Han Dong, also known as Lao Han
Lao Han is healthy, hiking every week
Not looking ahead from the top, no more outdoor liaisons
So from halfway up, heading down the hill.

Han Dong's poetry often emits a feeling of resolute resilience, ready to be confronted with any desperate circumstance, or to say goodbye at any moment. Yet it also fundamentally avoids an excessive reaction, and is essentially a more clear-headed sense of self-awareness.

In 2013, Liu Ding was invited to present an artist talk at the Tanks in Tate Modern, London, to introduce his practice to an audience. With this particular lecture, Liu Ding created an alias to initiate a 'weak performance' – a method of performance developed for the work *I Simply Appear in the Company*... It marked the first time Liu Ding created a state of presence by employing a form of absence within the setting of a performance. It was explained to the audience that the artist was unable to arrive at the lecture. In this scenario Liu Ding played the role of 'Mr Liu', who performed as a stand-in as a 'good friend' for the missing artist. Mr Liu subsequently entered into a discussion with the event's curator – a dialogue that was subjected to further stages of manipulation through the act of its translation. It was precisely here that the initiation of the conversation and its commentary became foregrounded as the content of the work itself. Through the enactment of the other, a distance was constructed between the individual and the self, allowing for a complex process of self-examination to unfold. Embedded within the work was a compelling desire for the artist to escape oneself.

In 1998, Han Dong, his friend Zhu Wen, and alongside other independent writers, launched a literary movement titled *Rupture (Duanlie)*, to articulate a decisively different voice in order to draw the line between themselves and the institutionalized literary practice – a system with a tendency to monopolize distribution and criticism. This uninhibited spirit of independence was contagious and wide-ranging. Han Dong's age at the time now matches Liu Ding's age today. It is perhaps inevitable for Liu Ding to identify with the many concerns shared by this scene

initiated by Han Dong, especially moments of rupture within the system and of the proclamations exhorted throughout these events. What is particularly relevant is how Han Dong broke away from the pressures wrought onto him by reality, but also how as an individual, he had developed in relation to the fissures and friction caused by the encounters with his surroundings. It is difficult for Liu Ding not to be inspired by the enduring 'age-old scorn', which can be found resolutely within the verses of Han Dong's poetry - a feeling emblematic of the alienation and efforts of our era, but also of the relationship between society, industry, an artist's practice, and the individual.

Passing a place innumerable times
This place has become smaller
Walls of the street have become walls of a house
Trees look like giant bonsais

The first time was an anomaly
Having witnessed life's flood
Its memory fades and dissipates
Like a scrap of paper floating about

So you should go around the world
Before the scenery becomes old-fashioned
So you should leave promptly
And learn how to be born again.

– *Born Again*, 2010



Let's Say Goodbye!
Exhibition View
2017



Liu Ding
Saying Goodbye
2017
Painting
Acrylic on canvas
287 x 159.5cm



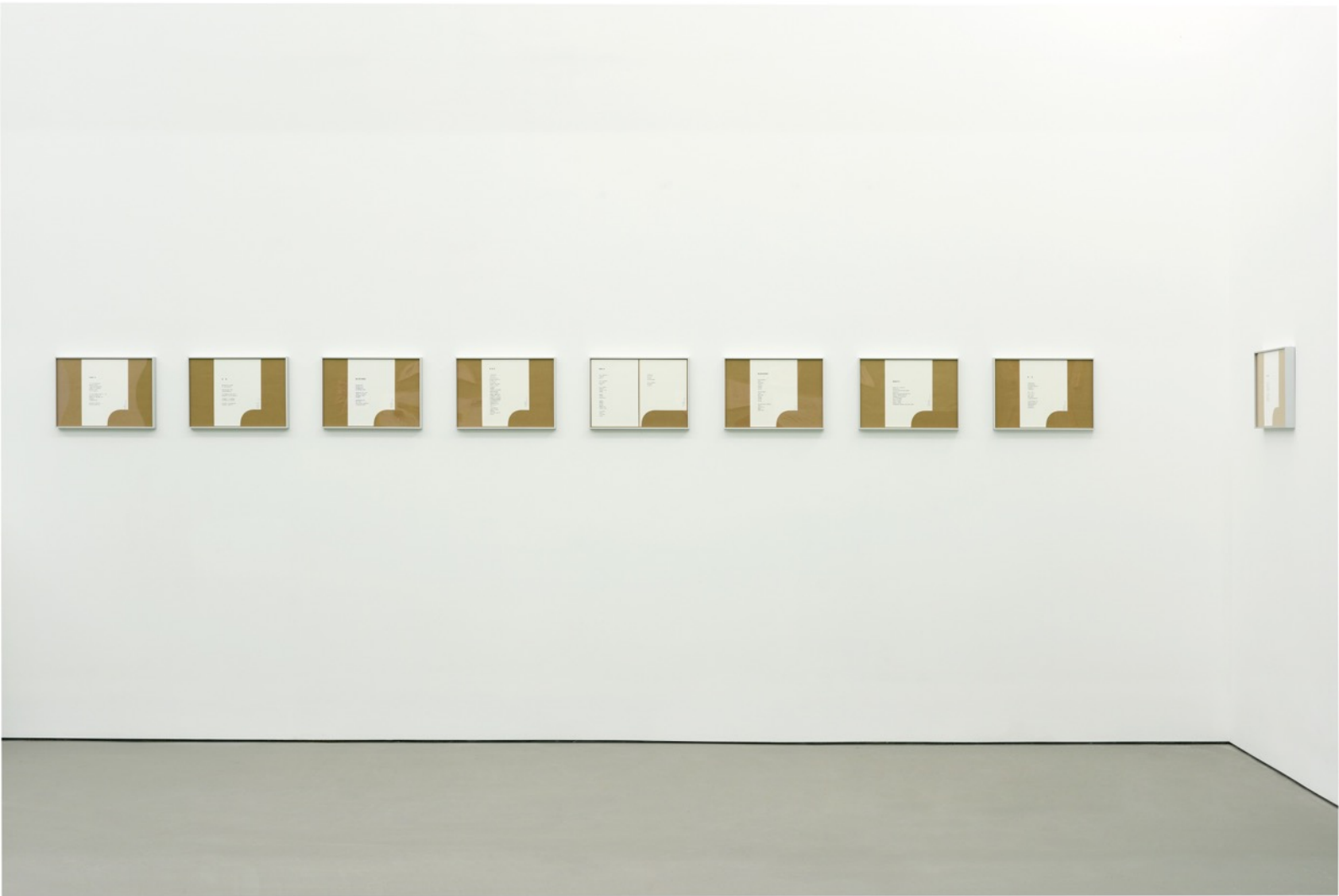
Let's Say Goodbye!
Exhibition View
2017



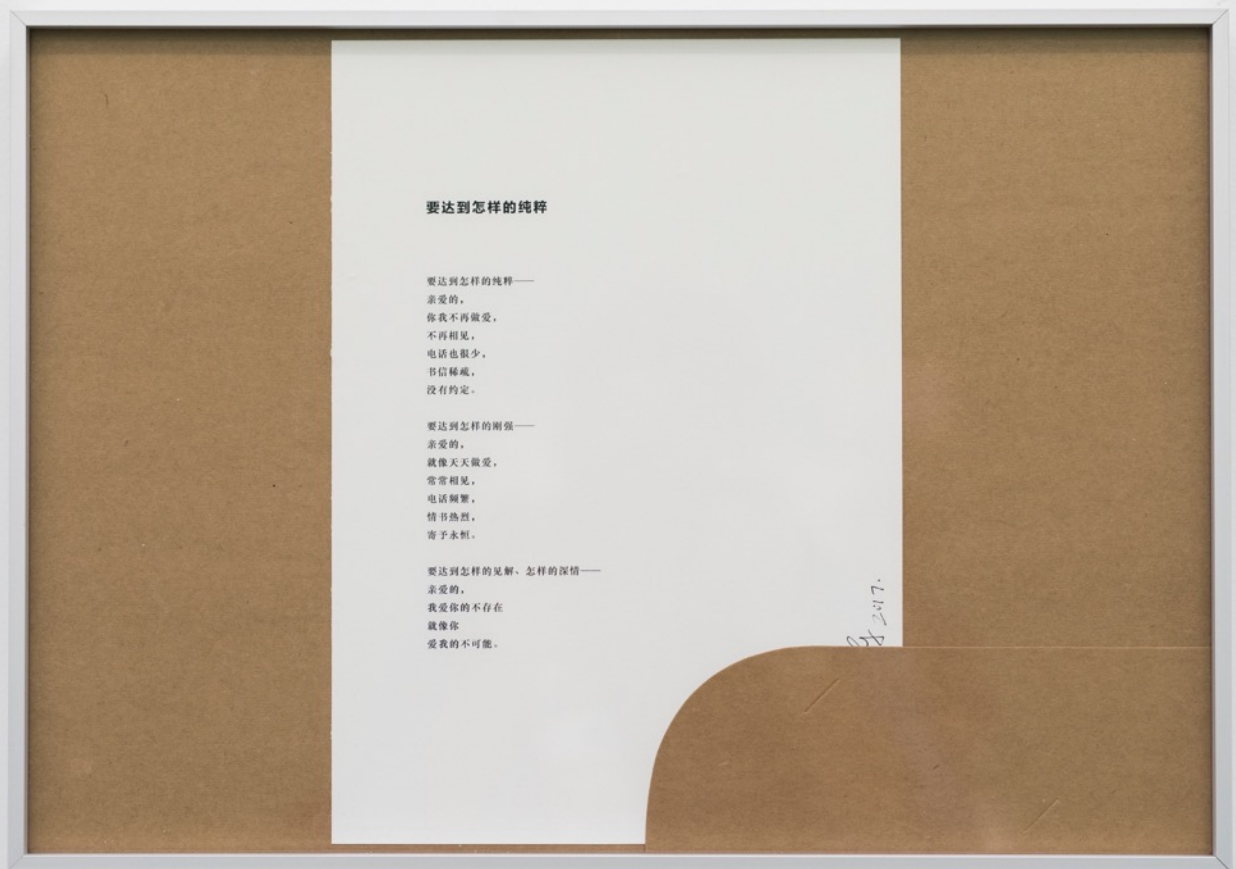
Liu Ding
Pine trees on the square
2017
Sculpture, copper, plastic, flowers, plywood, mirror
165 x 75 x 30cm
Unique edition



Liu Ding
Pine trees on the square (detail)
2017



Han Dong
Born Again
2002-2013
31.4 x 44.5cm (x 9)
ED.3/3



Han Dong
Born Again (detail)
2002-2013
31.4 x 44.5cm (x 9)
ED.3/3



Liu Ding
A Day
2017
Mix media
Dimensions variable (six groups, 21 pieces)
Unique Edition



Liu Ding
A Day
2017
Installation view



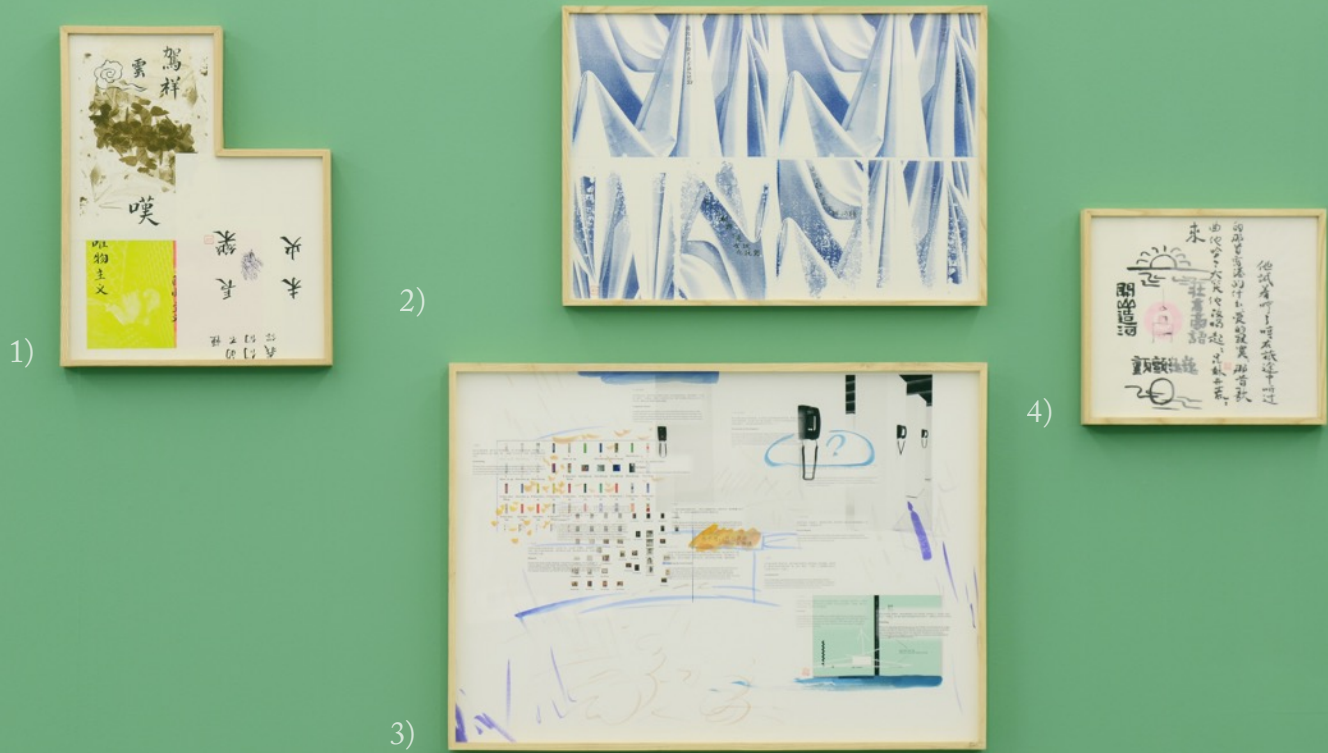
Liu Ding
A Day
2017
Installation view



Liu Ding
A Day
2017
Installation view



Liu Ding
A Day
2017
Installation view



Liu Ding

A Day

2017

*English translation:

1)

Sail the cloud
Sigh

Materialism
Social Class Gap
Liberalism

This is ours
You don't understand

2)

Experiencing Internationalization is not experiencing of Globalization
Internationalization art is not Globalization art
Internationalization's horizon is not the horizon of Globalization
The question of Internationalization is not the question of

3)

He tried humming that song "Solitude of Love" from Hong Kong, which he heard on a trip. Then he burst into laughter and changed into the song "Brothers and Sisters Opening Up the Wasteland".

4)

Cutting open a mountain to form a river
Heroic utterance
Trembling, tottering
Finding a short-cut in the forest
We part ways from here on in



Liu Ding
A Day
2017

*English translation:

1)
Have doubts about everything like Descartes
Share Voltaire's contempt of idols

The evaluation of an object requires the
standards of utilitarianism

Feeling fulfilled
The original truth behind everybody
Truth is the limitlessness of a being
Inside and outside
A linkage
Too empty
With the arrangement, enter the room,
and be seated
Hold the incense to commemorate
Sigh for No World

Criticism
Destruction

2)
Life is lovely
But it is a cold, solitary life,
Might as well die heroically.

I love life
Struggling is to live, the only way forward for life.
The past is muddled like a vague dream, yet it finds a
way to the heart along with wind and rain.

3)
In the jungle we fight with no holds barred
A blue-print drawn for each person
Elderly
Youth
Two parties wavering
The Four Modernizations



Liu Ding
A Day
2017
Installation view



Liu Ding

A Day

2017

*English translation:

1)
Resist
Looking into the abyss of a forest
Why do I always suffer infantilism?
Cutting a twig does not mean becoming
unhindered in the forest.

2)
A long sigh
The wind arrives from all sides
yet one remains still in the middle

The Middle East Issue
Crude Reality
The China Issue
Dressed-up Crudeness
Center
Power
Culture

African,
American,
European Issues

3)
Flood, flood, flood
Warmth of a newborn baby
Straight to the artery
Convergence
Read again

4)
I worship the bomb, grief, and destruction
I worship iconoclasts and myself

Oh! I'm an iconoclast

These plans do not fit my narrative
Even though they have all received training in the West
These plans do not fit my narrative
Even though they have all come East to do their research

1)



2)



3)



Liu Ding

A Day

2017

*English translation:

1)

Trickling

Unable to encounter the sea

Apply violent language to reflect on violence

The spring wind carries here grains of sand

Young leaves

Young buds

2)

Evidently I arrived too early

Now the curtain call will follow

3)

Huxian County Peasant Painting

It is a part of our contemporaneity

It never fails



Liu Ding

A Day

2017

*English translation:

1)

Critiquing the Self
Self-Criticism

2)

The Whole World Submits
Creative Industry

Soften

Generalized politics, a natural sense of morality within politics

Post-Internet Totem Art, a stand-in for participatory art

The turn to 'creative industrialization' within the economic crisis of Neo-Liberalism

The knowledge economy, art museum industry, gallery industrial park, artist lifestyle industry

3)

Did you see the mountain ranges?

Did you see all sides of the mountain?

Oh we're in the midst of the fog, in the midst of the fog

It's neither the rock-bottom nor has it petered out.

Up to now, I'll never understand

Everything is headed towards the end!!



Liu Ding
A Day
2017
Installation view



Han Dong
Born Again
2002-2013
31.4 x 44.5cm (x9)

Han Dong
Born Again
2002-2013
Collection of nine poems

**Featured as a publication and text work within the exhibition*

Reincarnation

Lying on a hotel double bed, smoking a cigarette,
Reading a fantasy folklore that takes you to the borderlands.

This guy is in dire straits, cold and starving,
Reminiscing about the comfortable kang bed-stove back home.

On the kang stove, a girl who's to be the concubine soon hears,
The beating drums and trumpets blaring outside,
She thinks to herself: I'd rather be dead!

In the vast netherworld, a solitary spirit,
Longing so much, to be embodied back into a sensual world of pleasure.

He closes the book and goes downstairs to eat at the restaurant,
Then he returns to continue reading.
Continually drawn to ponder over reincarnation.

Towards What Kind Of Purity

Towards what kind of purity –
My dear,
You and I no longer make love,
No longer see one another,
Hardly talk on the telephone,
Infrequent letters,
There are no commitments.

Towards what kind of sturdiness –
My dear,
Just like making love everyday,
Seeing one another all the time,
Telephone calls are frequent,
Fervent love letters,
Into the everlasting.

Towards what kind of understanding, what kind of passion–
My dear,
I love your non-existence,
Just like how you,
Love my impossibility.

The Raging World

Oh, this raging world,
Only the breeze is mild,
Only the trees in the evening are peaceful.
Only the stray dog is innocent —
The soft paw tipping over the hardened garbage,
It makes a clatter, clatter sound.

Only the chicken in the coop is meek,
The meat on the chopping board desire-less.
For only the stars seem most distant ——
Leading us to see them as hazy lights,
And this obscures our view of them too.

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Catching Fish

In the evening we head out to catch fish,
Walking the night to capture fish.
What a lovely evening and if it wasn't for catching fish,
We would be fast asleep,
Therefore we go fish catching.

Catch it, catch it,
One to the left, one to the right,
Smooth like the evening,
Ice-cold like the evening.
Best to catch fish while they're asleep.

Eventually we let all the fishes back,
Just like putting oneself into the trough too.
Returning the captured fish to where they belong,
On the way back,
So as to become more at ease with ourselves.

A Day To Be Alive

Today, I approached the pinnacle of comfort,
Sunshine radiating, neither cold nor hot,
All the pedestrians and speeding cars were orderly.
Large trees still and immobile, tiny grass wavering slightly,
I forged ahead onwards, with my two legs,
Left and right, briskly and purposely.

Today, this instant, is a day, a moment worthy of living,
Unrelated to everyone else and to all of their efforts.
As if everything prior were mere refinements, attempts,
And suddenly I reached here.
A feeling of liberation like a fish back in its own water.

May this existence always be here, I verify it will be,
Unrelated to everyone else and all of their efforts.

Hymn To A Block Of Old Flats

In a block of old grey flats,
People go up and down,
Entering through different doors,
They mostly disappear, while reaching towards the top,
After residing in this place for thirty years,
Neighbors are unacquainted with one another,
Socially indifferent, life has had its ups and downs.
Children grow up, the elderly disappear,
The middle-aged slowly sink into old age,
Shuffling along the corridor.
As newcomers arrive, faces become ever indistinct.
Light rays into the old building become subdued,
Electric bulbs are dim, cob webs cover the windows,
Litter is strewn into disarray, scattering shadows both real and false.
People shuttle back and forth, just like the old days.
Some carrying food baskets, a few with leather suitcases,
Slung between shared hands or hanging from their necks,
Frolicking around and causing a din like little mice.
There really are mice as big as dogs,
And dogs standing on their legs, really as tall as people.
Up and down, up down they go,
At sixes and sevens,
All at once, then vanishing from view again.
The turn of a key, the clank from a steel door,
Arriving home and into the cave.
The nameless block of flats remains, staggering and unshakeable,
Like a great sleep-walker.
Up and down, up down they go,
At sixes and sevens,
All at once, then vanishing from view again.
The turn of a key, the clank from a steel door,
Arriving home and into the cave.
The nameless block of flats remains, staggering and unshakeable,
Like a great sleep-walker.

We Cannot Help But Love Our Mother

We cannot help but love our mother,
Especially after she passed away.
When all the ageing and troubles ended,
You could only clean glass from the picture frame.

Love like this is pure, even where there is nothing left.
When she was alive, I was flooded with all sorts of problems.
Our love for her wasn't really there at all,
Or maybe it was hidden.

Set alight that fragile, paper thin photograph,
Make a small fire,
We thought we could love a living mother,
In fact, it was she who had loved us, while she was alive.

Self-Awareness

After so many years, I ran around, here and there,
Coming back to the place of origin once again,
Little has changed.

After so many years, I was in pieces,
Forward three steps and backwards two steps,
A wasted time.

After so many years, my wild grand schemes
And my reality
Never did they match up, invariably
I was moved by myself.

In a trance,
Vision unfocused,
Never finding a right direction.

Look here, look here,
I'm in a daze.
Sit here, sit here,
I'm just flustered.
Yearning to be pulled towards something,

In other words too clever,
Not stupid enough.
In other words just a know-it-all,
A big fool.

I'm forever mediocrity,
But the heart lays unreconciled,
Lofty and overbearing,
Rarely a moment of requisite calmness.

After so many years, the landscape remains beautiful as a painting,
The time that remains,
Is already not much.

Liu Ding

Liu Ding is a Beijing-based artist and curator. His artistic and curatorial practice focuses on multiple viewpoints and modes of description, exploring a trajectory of discursive thoughts that connect the historical and the contemporary. His work seeks to broaden possibilities for a more manifold understanding in relation to the historical narrative of subjectivity within Chinese art. He has participated in international biennials such as: Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul (2015); Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane (2015); Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai (2014); Prospect 3 New Orleans, New Orleans (2014); Taipei Biennial, Taipei (2012); Chinese Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale, Venice (2009); Media City Seoul, Seoul (2008); and Guangzhou Triennial, Guangzhou (2005).

His work has been shown at numerous major art institutions including: Tate Modern, London (2012, 2013); Turner Contemporary, Kent, Arnolfini, Bristol (2008); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2007); Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo (2007); São Paulo Museum of Art, São Paulo (2008); ZKM, Karlsruhe (2011); Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern (2016); PasquArt, Biel (2008); Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2006); Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2006); Luggage Store Gallery, San Francisco (2006); Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2012, 2016); 4A, Sydney (2017); Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2008); Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, Shanghai (2006); Times Museum, Guangzhou (2011, 2012); Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei (2012); Para Site, Hong Kong (2016); Red Brick Museum, Beijing (2016); Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima (2015); Guandu Museum of Art, Taipei (2016); and MoMA PS1, New York (2015).

He co-curated *Little Movements: Self-Practice in Contemporary Art* at OCAT, Shenzhen (2011), which travelled to Museion in Bolzano, Italy (2013) and Asia Cultural Complex, Gwangju, (2015). Other curatorial projects include: *Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile - A Beijing Perspective*, Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing (2017); *New Measurement Group and Qian Weikang*, OCAT Shenzhen, Shenzhen (2015); *From the Issue of Art to the Issue of Position: Echoes of Socialist Realism*, OCAT Shenzhen, Shenzhen (2014); and *We Have Never Participated*, Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, Shenzhen (2012).

His writing and editorial works include: *Little Movements: Self-Practice in Contemporary Art* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2011); *Little Movements II: Self-Practice in Contemporary Art* (Cologne: Walther König, 2013); *Accidental Message: Art Is Not A System, Not A World* (Guangzhou: Lingnan Art Publishing House, 2012); *Individual Experience: Conversations and Narratives of Contemporary Art Practice in China from 1989 to 2000* (Guangzhou: Lingnan Art Publishing House, 2013); and *Reef: A Prequel* (Maastricht: Bonnerfontenmuseum, 2016).

Han Dong

Han Dong was born in 1961, and graduated in philosophy from Shandong University in 1982. Beginning in 1980, Han Dong has been involved in various unofficial literary magazines throughout his career, as well establishing himself as an influential poet, essayist, blogger and novelist. Han Dong has consistently sought to demystify poetry by stressing its importance as an everyday routine and avoiding moral explication. From 1984 until 1995, Han Dong was the driving force behind Nanjing-based 'Them' – an unofficial journal whose influence reached different groups and movements across cities in China.

Poetry collections:

White Stones, Dad's Looking Down on Me from the Sky, Born Again, They, Have You Seen the Sea, Han Dong's Poems

Short story and novella collections:

Our Bodies, My Plato, Bright Scars, The Dollar Beats the RMB, This Moron is Dead, Six Short Stories by Han Dong

Novels:

Striking Root (translated as Banished! University Hawai'i Press), Me and You, A Small Town Hero Strides Out, Metamorphosis of an Educated Youth, A Chinese Lover, Joyful yet Secretive (Love and Life)

Screenplays:

In the Qing Dynasty, Beijing Days, I'll Love You Forever

Film:

One Night on the Wharf

Literary Prizes:

Han Dong has won the Liu Li'An Poetry Prize, the Chinese Language Media Prize for Novels, the Gao Li Gong Literary Festival Chairman's Prize and the Jin Ling Literary Prize. Banished! was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary prize.