

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Chen Wei, *Rental Service*, 2009, Archival Inkjet Print, 100 x 120 cm. (39 3/8 x 47 1/4 in.)

CHEN WEI SLUMBER SONG

30TH APRIL – 5TH JUNE 2014
PRIVATE VIEW TUESDAY, 29TH APRIL, 6-8 PM

This spring Ben Brown Fine Arts presents *Slumber Song*, the first solo exhibition in the UK of contemporary Chinese photographer Chen Wei. Currently living and working in Beijing, the spirit of his work resonates with a new generation of emerging Chinese artists using photography as an instrument to capture human encounters with a rapidly developing China. Distinct from their 'New Wave' predecessors who place political and social criticism at the core of their artistic message, Chen Wei and his contemporaries focus on intellectual freedoms and the individual's place in modern China. Chen Wei's photographs are visually enigmatic, characterised by uncompromising technical virtuosity and the elaborate scenes he creates.

The exhibition will feature some of Chen Wei's most impressive still life photographs, the finest examples of his exacting approach to constructing a scene. In *The Raven Zoar* (2008), Chen Wei has carefully arranged each object in an eerie, cage-like setting, triggering feelings of anxiety and claustrophobia. Similarly the juxtaposition of objects in *Cage or Sonata* (2007) makes for an unsettling yet oddly beautiful image where, as in so many of his works, human presence is felt but not depicted.

Before physically constructing each scene Chen Wei makes elaborate sketches, choreographing each vital element into a surreal studio-like diorama. In his use of found and natural materials such as taxidermy, broken glass and rocks, the eccentricities of early investigations into science, alchemy, and philosophy are echoed. Hinting at the academic compositions of a Northern Renaissance master though often surprising in their subject matter, these pieces push traditional references into new, visceral directions.

Chen Wei is fascinated by human familiarity with everyday objects and frequently dramatises these relationships in his meticulous compositions. His *Coins* series and *A Boy in the Fountain Basin* (2012) give muddied coins, tossed ritualistically into pools and fountains, a new, ethereal quality. In these images Chen Wei depicts the complex relationship humans hold with their discarded items, explaining 'I wish the coins were about the present, about dream and loss.' *One More Cup of Afternoon Tea* (2009), coupling old cigarette butts with a blooming rose, similarly contrasts ideas of abandonment and renewal.

Interpretations that contradict and compete with one another are inherent in all of Chen Wei's works and are reflected in the exhibition title. He describes *Slumber Song* as a reference to a song about sleep, a lullaby, but also to a melody inducing a paralysing apathy. *Method of Slumber* (2009), with a metronome symbolising the passing of time, encapsulates this soporific atmosphere.

Chen Wei is a teller of unfinished stories. Fascinating in their open-endedness, his carefully fabricated scenes and cryptic titles contain numerous possible narratives for the viewer to unveil. Though often challenging, his diverse works make for compulsive viewing.

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Biography

Chen Wei was born in the Zhejiang Province of China in 1980 and currently lives and works in Beijing. He is a prominent figure in a new generation of internationally minded artists working within the realm of photography in China. Chen Wei has exhibited extensively throughout Asia including at the Museum for Contemporary Art in Shanghai, The Contemporary Art Institute in Beijing and the Seoul International Photography Festival in 2009. He has had solo exhibitions worldwide in China, Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland.

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Monday to Friday: 11am - 6pm

Saturdays: 10.30am - 2.30pm