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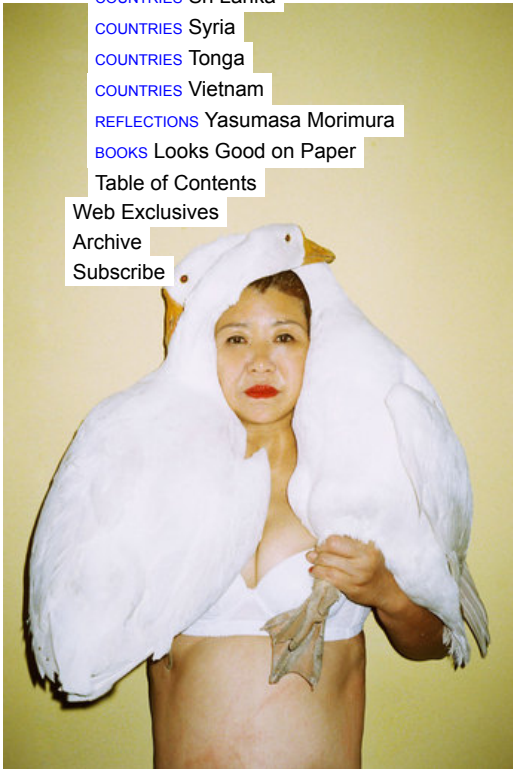
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REN HANG, *Untitled 67*, 2014, archival inkjet print, 100 × 67 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.



REN HANG, *Untitled 62*, 2014, archival inkjet print, 100 × 67 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

MY MUM / MY FATHER REN HANG & LI LANG

WEB REVIEW BY KATHERINE VOLK
BLINDSPOT GALLERY

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Blindspot Gallery's exhibition "My Mum/My Father" features two prominent photographic artists from China. The display at the vast gallery space, located in Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong, shows an unmistakable division between the two contrasting artists, who are connected solely by the subject of their works. Ren Hang and Li Lang's personal, photographic works challenge the viewer with abstract questions, through the artists' distinctive visual perspectives on the exhibition theme.

Ren's photography has earned the young artist international praise for the provocative portrayal of his subjects, who are usually his friends. In the artist's homeland of China, however, his work is not always as well received. Ren's work has been banned in many local galleries, due to the explicitness of its images and the conservative nature of Chinese society.

In the series "My Mum" (2014), Ren portrays his mother in a playful and loving, yet fictionalized manner. In these conceptual portraits, the artist's mother is stripped of her regular self, as well as most of her clothes, and yet she still retains her visual individuality. She has become an object—posed with various items and animals in colorful photographs. In one of the images, *Untitled 67* (2014), Ren's mother, wearing bright red lipstick, is carrying two white ducks, whose necks are resting on her head, as she stands against a yellow background. Through this work, the familiar sight of his mother becomes distorted and unfamiliar for Ren, enabling the artist to objectify a deeply personal subject. Images in which his mother poses in her underwear, for example, are challenged of their Oedipal implications, due to the humorous nature in which Ren portrays her.

When viewing Ren's works in the exhibition, the first set of images one encounters in the gallery are the aforementioned series of his mother posing with various animals. The next section shows *Untitled 62* (2014), a stand-alone portrait of his mother in a netted head-piece. The mask-like object covers her face in a way that is suggestive of fetish wear. Despite such circumstances, his mother has a resigned expression that infuses humor to what one assumes must have been an awkward situation: her son photographing her nearly naked with a net on her head. The playful placement of the net's flower-shaped pattern over her nose, slightly clown-like, seems to emphasize the asexual nature of this series—and how, in that regard, it differs from his other works in the past.

Li, on the other hand, takes a different approach to the theme of the show. Beginning his photographic career in the 1990s, Li is known for his subjective documentary style. He has exhibited extensively in China and abroad and, in 2014, won the Special Jury Prize at the Lianzhou Foto Festival for his work entitled "Father" (2010–14).



LI LANG, *My Father's Last Portrait B* (detail), from the series "Father 1927.12.03–2010.08.27," 2010–14, archival pigment print with pencil writing, 107.8 × 106.6 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

"Father," Li's touching documentation of his father, who passed away in 2010, evokes a highly emotional response within the viewer. The artist's mourning for his father, which was integral to the creative process, emphasizes his personal involvement and dedication to the subject. *My Father's Last Portrait A, B* and *C* (2010–14) are three images that feature Li's late father. The black-and-white portraits are covered with numbers that were painstakingly written by hand in pencil. When viewing the portraits, the numbers are only noticeable when looked at closely. These meticulously written numbers represent each day of his father's 82 years, which, according to the artist, amounts to 30,291 days. Numbers not only cover the entirety of the three portraits, but various other photographs of Li's father and his personal belongings, as well as a picture of the sky taken on the day he died, entitled *The Sky on August 27th* (2014).

In his artist statement, Li explains that when his father died, he saw the elder's entire life reduced to a set of numbers—the date of his birth and death—on his tombstone. He "wanted to erase the punctuation mark from [his] father's tombstone, to restore every single day of his life." From there, the artist took three years to complete the "Father" series—a tribute meant to resurrect, and give meaning to, each day of his father's life.

Li Lang and Ren Hang's works in the exhibition are different in content, but explore the same theme. Through these artists, and their medium of experimental photography, the show illustrates the different forms that familial relationships can have. Li and Ren bring balance to each other's perspectives, despite having different artistic personalities. Their varied forms of photography demonstrate the many emotional ties—whether it is lighthearted and humorous or serious and loyal—that bind a family.



LI LANG. *The Sky on August 27th*, from the series "Father 1927.12.03–2010.08.27," 2014, archival pigment print with pencil writing, 107.8 × 106.6 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

"My Mum / My Father" is on view at Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, until February 25, 2015.

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