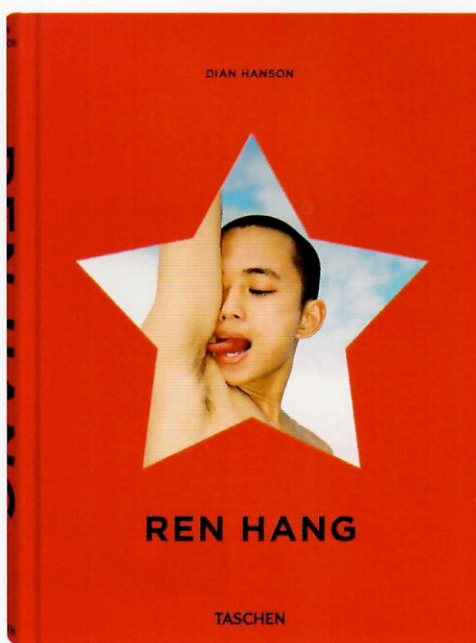


Body of Work

Controversial Chinese photographer REN HANG had his first monograph published recently. Catch more of his work next month during Art Basel in Hong Kong through Blindspot Gallery

BRIGHT, LURID, PROVOCATIVE – Ren Hang's photography is ripe fodder for discussion, but the artist himself is often reluctant to partake in the conversation. The work is fettered with nudes (a mixture of his own friends and people who approach him from the Internet), often contorted in unnatural shapes, occasionally paired with animals or elements of nature: a naked man in a shoulder stand against the wall with legs tucked in, a dove strolling nonchalantly across his posterior. The artist's own mother, clad in a black bra with lips awash in red, kissing the decapitated head of a pig. A topless woman whose head is fully encased in a clear plastic bag filled with water, her face concealed behind a veil of goldfish and swathes of her own black hair.



Every situation is painstakingly staged by Ren.

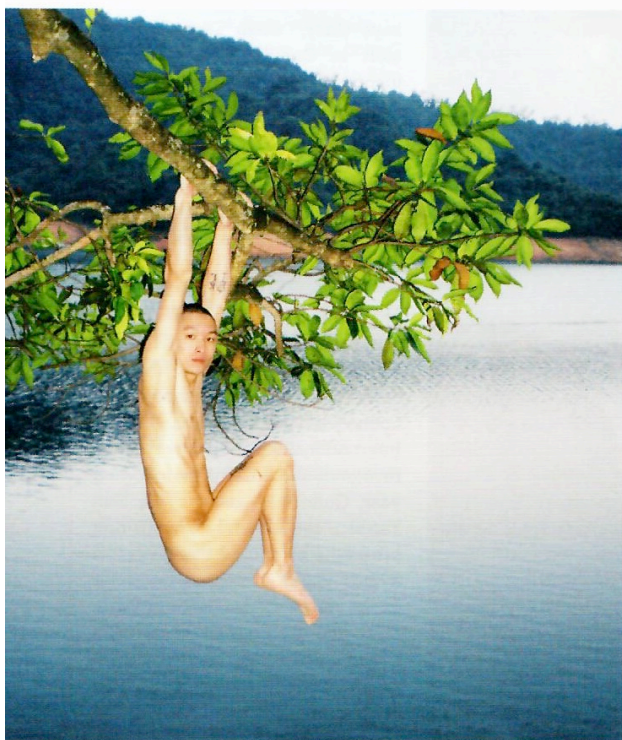
This isn't stuff for the meek, and that Ren lives, exhibits and produces his work in China is something of an irritant to the country's censors. "It is a problem," the artist shrugs, "but not a big deal to me." He often has his activities curtailed while shooting outdoors, has works removed from exhibition at the 11th hour, or has his shows shut down altogether, yet remains undeterred. In fact, his love of his country in spite of its stringent rules is well documented, and he's known to keep his distance from the local art scene as well as from the term "artist".

For work that is so raw, rough and controversy inducing, it is, Ren suggests, neither political nor



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sexual in nature. It's a juxtaposition of shapes, of ideas he likes, of impromptu inspirations. He's notoriously laconic when it comes to discussing his work, and he doesn't name his pieces for fear of tainting them, though his poetry and diaries, published on his website, are more illuminating, documenting his inner dialogue and struggle with depression.

The images shown here represent a selection from his first official monograph by Taschen; he's self-published a number beforehand, "because I like reading books," he says. The eponymous tome covers the 29-year-old's seven-year career, providing a broad overview of the work of one of China's most important young talents today. Up next for Ren? "No specific plans. Just to continue living." 

Naked/Nude, an exhibition of Ren Hang's work, is showing at Amsterdam's Foam Museum until March 12

