

Art

Edited by Ysabelle Cheung
ysabelle.cheung@timeout.com.hk

That's all, folks

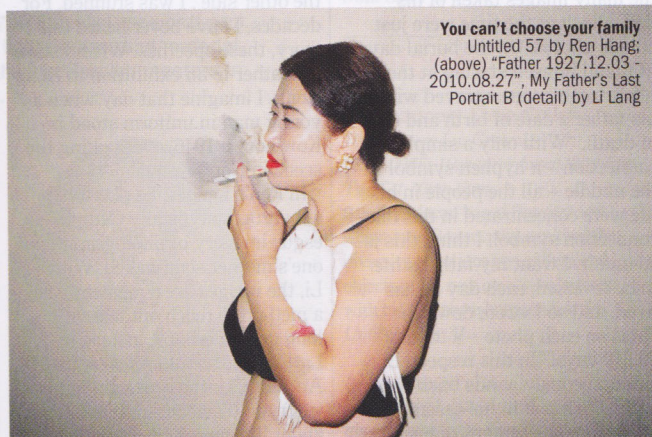
Two Chinese photographers, **Ren Hang** and **Li Lang**, tell Ysabelle Cheung about the subjects of their new Blindspot Gallery show *My Mum/My Father*

They fuck you up, your mum and dad." So begins the three-stanza poem *This Be the Verse* by Englishman Philip Larkin, written in 1971. This pithy piece is a strong diatribe for the (often subconscious and damaging) causality of parenting and relationships between child and mother or father – something that's frequently called 'delicate'. In Blindspot Gallery's new show, however, these relationships are examined in a less direct light, blurring objectivity and subjectivity, familiarity and unfamiliarity, cause and effect. Nonetheless, one thing is certain: where we come from and, more specifically, who we come from, is a powerful subject.

In *My Mum/My Father*, Beijing-based photographer and poet Ren Hang focuses his lens on his

mother, while Li Lang revisits his late father. Ren is known for his explicit, NSFW images, often whitewashed in bright exposure, forcing the viewer to assimilate the full picture. Genitalia and various sexual organs are splayed, juxtaposed and squashed in natural settings – forests, building rooftops, someone's living room. "Nudity is the most direct way for me think about sex," says Ren. "I like sex, so I like nudity." Controversial media channel Vice created a documentary on his works titled *The Art of Taboo* (2013), although Ren nonchalantly shrugs this off. "For me, there is no taboo in my work," he says. "The documentary people just titled it that way."

To some, photographing one's mother semi-nude might be considered taboo. In Ren's



You can't choose your family
Untitled 57 by Ren Hang;
(above) "Father 1927.12.03 -
2010.08.27", My Father's Last
Portrait B (detail) by Li Lang

works for *My Mum/My Father*, his mother fills the frames in just undergarments, smoking, positioned with various (dead and live) animals. The sexuality of the image has been completely removed – whether this is because of the subject or the almost aggressively humorous air in the portraits is unclear. "There was no particular reason to me choosing my mother as a subject," says Ren. "We have a very good relationship and it hasn't changed because of this series. My mother even said I

could shoot her nude but I felt a little bit shy facing my own mum naked."

In contrast, Li mentions that his relationship with his late father was 'dull, on the surface'. "But although we were not like a traditional father-son," he says, "I could feel that my father deeply loved me, in the same way I deeply loved him. We just did not articulate that love in everyday life." After his father passed, Li, already established with his portfolio of both documentary

Chip off the old block
 "Father 1927.12.03 -
 2010.08.27",
 My Father's Hat, by Li Lang



I want my father's life to be revealed, each day he has lived, so I wrote down the dates on each photo – a total of 30,219 days!

and art photography, pored over the many images taken of his dad, which at the time were just simple photos. On the burial day, Li found himself staring at the black tombstone engraved with his father's date of birth and date of death. "With only a simple connection – a hyphen symbol in the middle – all the people in his life were concentrated in this one connection symbol. I think this is so unfair. I want my father's life to be revealed, each day he has lived, and so I wrote down the dates on each photo – a total of 30,219 days!" In this respect, Li simultaneously winds back time and recreates it in his assembly of photographs – images of his father and his father's various objects (a hat, a shirt) scribbled with tiny cramped dates.

Both Li and Ren have exhibited these various images before, but

never before together and in a show exploring each parent in each artist's respective manner. To Li, showing these works in Hong Kong has special significance. "It reminds me of the winter in 2009, when I took my father to Tsim Sha Tsui's boardwalk," he says. "He was in a wheelchair by then. He looked at the skyscrapers of Hong Kong Island and suddenly said the sentence 'I came over to Hong Kong in 1946 and was on the Kowloon side. I have not been to the other side'. I was stunned. For decades, I have never heard this story, these specifics. When I show my father in an exhibition in Hong Kong, I imagine that day when a young man in uniform stood in Kowloon in 1946, overlooking the scene in Hong Kong."

In Ren's images, he playfully subverts the typically Oedipus-esque imagery of photographing one's mother semi-naked. With Li, the images are a memento and a method to reach out to a father long gone. Perhaps, instead of Larkin, one should refer to the Ancient Chinese proverb: "While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about."

My Mum/My Father

Blindspot Gallery, Jan 17-Feb 25; blindspotgallery.com.

Book now Art Basel HK 2015

The biggest art event of the year is back in March – ticket sales have officially opened and special prices are on offer until March 1. The usual gallery suspects feature, and once again Li Zhenhua curates the Film sector while newcomer Alexie Glass-Kantor curates Encounters. New Asia director Adeline Ooi has also just been announced. HKCEC, Mar 15-17. Tickets: \$150-\$850; hkticketing.com.

Interview Edouard Malingue



Space invasion
 The former space
 on Queen's Road Central;
 (below) Malingue

The gallerist talks spatiality ahead of the new space opening

Five years ago, the son of renowned Parisian gallerist Daniel Malingue moved to Hong Kong after a prolonged stint in London as a private art dealer. Edouard Malingue opened up his own gallery space in Queen's Road Central and has since developed one of the most intriguing contemporary arts programmes in the city with his wife. We speak to him ahead of the gallery's expansion and relocation to Des Voeux Road Central, which opens on January 10...

Your previous space was well received. Why the move to a bigger gallery?

After four years, we've got more clients and an ambition to keep growing. The new space allows for more versatility and flexibility. The previous space was 16,000sq ft and this new one is double the size. It can also be divided into two. We can now show more installations, sculptures and video projections. Also, I live in Hong Kong and this expansion is a declaration that this is my home. This is where I want to see my business thrive. The move is important for our artists as well as a personal move.

How has the curatorial development progressed in the past four years?

When I first opened the gallery in 2010, the plan was to let people know about my background in modern and impressionist art. We started

with a Picasso show, the first ever in Hong Kong. The long-term plan was to bring in a lot of contemporary art programming. For four years my wife and I have been able to curate these solo show.

The artists you choose seem to represent a particular interest in spatial dimensions...

There are a few threads in selecting artists. That's one of them. Architecture, understanding of space. With Callum Innes, each colour occupies space in a different view and Nuri Kuzucan is very interested in the urban landscape as a kind of living organism, displaying see-through hues of buildings and cities which seem to reveal the soul of the human being. There's also Yuan Yuan, who depicts interior scenes, always abandoned and derelict, but they still carry the memory of the people in the past.

What are some of the main difficulties in operating a gallery in Hong Kong?

The same as anywhere else: it's about creating a reputation that's very solid. Only time can make up for that, as well as solid shows, participation in art fairs and gaining credibility. Another aspect is that Hong Kong tends to be a commercial place and I wish art students would spend more time visiting galleries. So we organise tours and talks for students. The gallery's opening hours belong to them. If a student enters a gallery and is snubbed, the gallery is not doing its job – it's meant to be for the public.

Finally, what have you got planned for Basel in March?

We're presenting in the general section of the fair but we also have a Wang Wei solo show. Expect two gigantic mural paintings that will make you think about how we create an environment for ourselves and whether this environment is a place to thrive or a place for entrapment. Ysabelle Cheung

Edouard Malingue Gallery

Opens Jan 10. 6/F, 33 Des Voeux Rd C, Central, 2810 0317; edouardmalingue.com.

