

Hu Jieming , a world in thickness

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The first time I encountered Hu Jieming’ s world was in *Altitude Zero* (2006) presented at the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art.

The assemblage of the traces of ships, hatchways and portholes formed a both realistic and fantastic setting to his images between air and water. I could then already see one of Hu Jieming’ s characteristics—quite rare in the world of new media arts—which was the ability of giving some thickness to any preliminary idea by taking care over the images during the shooting process as well as the images projections background.

This is a characteristic that I see in many of Hu Jieming’ s works.

In *Cross the centre* (2006), the idea, after all quite common, of a tracking shot through the city activated by pedaling visitors, is enriched by the choice of devices (an old cart wheel synchronized with two old parts of bicycles and used car seats) and the environment where the tracking shot is shown (a set of old windows).

This liking for those assemblages, combining high technology and objects ‘dead or about to die’ , can only be seen in a few artists with the same precision, such as Brad Hwang, the Korean artist living in Berlin, and the French artist Jean Michel Bruy è re.

This same kind of contrast between new media (internet) and material (transparent films) can also be found in the works *1995–1996* (1996) and *The Fiction between 1999–2000* (2000) where the visitor is immersed in a labyrinth made of screen stills coming from the internet from midnight of December 31, 1999, until midnight of January 1, 2000 – 24 hours later. Another kind of thickness!

Another aspect of Hu Jieming’ s work is a liking for parallel worlds associated with a predilection for the diversion of images.

In The best strategy is *to be on the move* (2002), the overlap of images from daily life with old songs, and inversely old film soundtracks reinterpreted by clay puppets, the juxtaposition of construction sites, aerial performances where only public reactions are shown, war films (among others), creates a maelstrom of impressions where each sound or visual image is transformed by the others.

This type of overlap is also expressed in fixed images as in the Postcard (2006) series.

Another diversion could be presented as an homage to the cult film of the 60’s *La Dialectique peut-elle casser des briques ?* (1973) [Can Dialectics Break Bricks?], where Ren é Vi é net substituted the original subtitles of a Chinese Kung Fu film with Marxist subtitles: New Journey to the West is made up with the Chinese classic film Journey to the West in which Hu Jieming has substituted the original dialogue with a neo–liberalist dub.

Hey! A World is under Construction (2006) presents a diversion more ‘plastic’ where earthly constructions are integrated in parallel worlds, on the surface of the Moon or Mars, and can be fully visible by looking through telescopes in a perspective that reminds one of the French artists Anne and Patrick Poirier, with the unique difference that Hu Jieming doesn’ t hesitate to represent examples easily recognizable from our architectural heritage.

It is important to specify that during the preceding year, Hu Jieming had already trained on Earth with *Where is my Home?* (2005) where he succeeded in rebuilding Guangzhou with elements from Shanghai.

This cartographic game can also be found in *The Cities in the Wind* (2001), although this video belongs to another category of works which includes *One Minute Soulful Touch* (2002), the series *Related to...* (1996 – 1999), *Outline only* (2002) and *From Architectural Immanence* (2002).

In this series as well, the idea of using encephalograms, cardiograms or building crenels as a base for sound creation could border on pure gadgetry. However the choice and transition of the images with the background musical score, particularly in From Architectural Immanence with the dynamic use of the sequences’ transitional sections disturbing the already frenzied movement of the musical notes, all give this a thickness which I could appreciate during my first encounter with his work.

The only escaping thing to this thickness, is a quality that can be noticed in all of Hu Jieming’ s works, as the incomplete enumeration above reveals. It is a sense of humour, as light and subtle as the thickness and diversity of his works.