

## Yang Zhenzhong Interview

When I was an art painter at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, Yang Zhenzhong works in a world of media but is best known for his witty and creative video pieces. That had been his intention at the time. The video 'Light Effect' by Mr. Zhenzhong, shows Yang Zhenzhong moving around on his back and front while the camera is on the ground. He is holding the famous Oriental Pearl building over his shoulder and the building's address appears in English as a feature. The video engages two 'artificially' Shanghai's residents: Yang Zhenzhong and the Oriental Pearl building, but it was not the 'tiger' and 'lion' of the city's iconic architecture.

### Can you describe the New

Media Art in your

work as being an artist?

Yang Zhenzhong: I started painting in school, like every body else at that time. After spending a year studying oil painting at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, I found being confined to one medium somewhat frustrating and boring, and I guess this thought led me on the road to making video art. I always tried to absorb new information from the magazine reproductions in the school library. But it was only after video equipment became available to us around 1993 that we could really start using it. Before that, students only borrowed the equipment, because we couldn't afford it. Zhang Peili, you know, who was one of the first Chinese artists to work in video, had to borrow equipment from television stations because that was the only place you could get it. So after 1993, I just started to experiment with this new medium, and other media, too.

**Why did you decide to move**

**from painting into media art?**

**At that time in the early 1990s,**

**very few artists in China were**

**making that kind of decision.**

I think it was just the environment I was in. I started my college studies in '84. There was a lot of activity in contemporary Chinese art before the big "China Avant-Garde" exhibition at the National

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Museum in Beijing. It created an environment that could lend itself to the exploration of video. Plus, being in Hangzhou, there was the example of Zhang Peili, who had already started working in video. So it seemed like a natural turning point for me to make that step. I also think that the restrictive attitude at the Academy triggered my decision to do something against the traditions.



**When you started out with video, did you have any sources of information about the video art being made at that time?**

As I said, I could see a few reproductions in magazines at the school library at the Academy. Another important source of ideas was films from abroad, which we saw on VHS tapes at that time, and later on VCDs and DVDs. Some people came back from abroad with little clips of Bill Viola's work or things like that, but I would say it was really not for us to see the original.

**When did you start to travel abroad, and what works first captured your attention?**

The first time I went abroad was in 1995 to take part in an exhibition in Vancouver, Canada. It was an exhibition of Chinese contemporary art. At that time I saw a lot of work. Almost every year after that, there would be one or two exhibitions that took me abroad. There aren't any specific works that stick in my mind. The biggest influence was just the conservative attitude toward media art in China. Once the problem was resolved that video can also be art, it didn't really matter. There wasn't much in the outside world that was really influencing me. I've continued going abroad, but less and less of this work I see there excites me, as I guess I've used to it.