

Joseph Ng
(alias Cheng Zhu), 2006

On the Move

Essay for the catalogue of the *Transkoreana* solo show, Tang Gallery, Bangkok

The interrogation of one's identity is constantly in motion through the photographic images of Marc Lathuillière, whose trials and travels are an integral part of his work. For him, travel comes first: a road expedition has become a singular life-as-art process in relating experience of things he comes to encounter with, especially with the native cultures.

Based in and out of Asia for the last 5 years, the French writer-turned-photo artist attempts to invigorate curiosity on issues of identity and cultures. Especially in his own "discomfort" towards trying to inquire facets of representations he comes across that are easily regarded as, in his own words, "visual clichés".

As a travel writer, he has always been asked by his editorial associates to look for visual imageries that might be deemed easily as a western canonization of the Asian Exotica. The smiling faces of Thai, the temples, market activities or the stereotypical realities in Korea, where he spent a year in 2003 doing French-language radio spots for a Korean government-sponsored station to promote Korea to the outside world.

Reflecting upon his experiences in Korea, Marc once expressed, "it was basically cultural propaganda. I was being force-fed these clichés about kimchee, totem poles, girls dancing in headdress, the football stadium - the same few images the national State always put on tourist brochures."

In order to construct truly the inner and outer realities of the society and its communities, he then embarked on a 1000 miles scooter trip from Seoul to Busan. Carrying a little motorcycle toy as his only accompaniment, the artist seemed content to use this experience to make up his own lyricism as to the nature of the landscapes and the people he came into contact with.

Like a window slightly opened, the journey offered tantalizing fragments of the country's identifiable features, but with a more grounded embracement. Marc Lathuillière then created diaristic snapshots of these encountered places and people displaying the miniature motorcycle toy.

The exercise of performativity between travel and documentary becomes blurred as the artist brings his "personal dealings" to his photos, and allows it to be seen and be affected by the public and by using humor, mocking up the conventions of what constitutes "travel photography". Concerning with trying to find authenticity in the

ordinary realities through the framing of his subjects, Marc Lathuillière effortlessly subverts his photo works into potent personal and public symbols.

Presently based in Bangkok, he is simultaneously working on two projects, one in Thailand, where he also travels around the land to document people and places, this time with an abstract star-like toy.

A work-in-progress closer to home, *France Face Lost* attempts to shed light on the current social climate in France, dealing with complex conditions of the globalization culture and how it has reflected the French society in accordance with values, and social meaning. Like in his *Transkoreana* project, Marc Lathuillière continues his participatory process by asking his subjects to don a plastic mask and be portrayed in a seemingly natural setting and manner.

© Joseph Ng and Tang Gallery
2006