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NI HAIFENG Vive la Difference

january 15/ february 13

LUMEN TRAVO gallery presents a new solo of Chinese artist Ni Haifeng (b. 1964), setting an installation and photographs from the works *Vive la Difference* (2008), *Les Fleurs du Mal* (2009-) and *Commodities and Money* (2007). The issues of production, consumption and commodification in global capitalism are under focus, as in Ni's previous work *Self-Portrait as Part of the Porcelain Export History* (1999-2001). The artist explains : 'Dustbins of History' is one of the terms used by Marx that I still remember from the politics classes throughout my primary school days. During that time, Marxism was a compulsory part of the curriculum for all students. ... 'Capital, Critique of Political Economy', is one of the most widely quoted books in the last hundred years. Its strong analysis of early capitalist modernisation and its fierce denunciation of the dehumanising effect of money, still bear a significant relevance in our day of global capitalism.' (Ni Haifeng, 2007)

Commodities and Money

'Is a photograph, which shows the spread-out pages of the English edition 'Capital, Volume One', the chapter on commodities and money, in which Marx analysed the universal form of value: money was the supreme representative of social power in capitalist society, and the only social bond in an increasingly divided and fragmented community. The pages are, however, covered with a thick layer of dust, having been left exposed in a dusty environment for a period of eighty days.' (Ni Haifeng, 2007)

Vive la Difference

'Using shreds of fabric that have been discarded after commercial factory production, the artist has collaborated with two different design teams to produce a pair of unique "high-end" fashion garments that will be presented in Arrow Factory's space in the form of a luxury store window display. The two garments share the same origin—a dress designed by French luxury brand Hermès—and the same materials (a box of fabric shreds) but the social context and process of production is entirely different. Ni has chosen to work with two workers with incongruent backgrounds—one is a Chinese run "mom and pop" tailor shop Bieju Yige (别具一格) located in the hutong adjacent to Arrow Factory that subsists on tailoring, mending and patching clothes for the neighborhood residents, and the other is Beijing based French-Australian designers Aurelien Lecour and Tony Saint Hua, creators of Le Divan Studio who work in the creative sector of fashion industry. Each has been enlisted to reinterpret and reproduce their own dress based on an image of the unique "original" design.' (Ni Haifeng, 2008)

Les Fleurs du Mal

'Up till recently, consumption of sexual commodities has gradually been regarded as a huge growth area, and erotic products are increasingly visible in our everyday life. Against the back drop of a 'pornographication' of mainstream media and the emergence of a more heavily sexualized culture, we are increasingly targeted as sexual consumers.

Upon my first visit to one of the factories, I was struck by the sight of the leftover materials littered here and there, amid the unfinished silicon penises and virginals, flesh colored, slimy, gruesome, resembling decomposing organic substances, which reminds me of the images of 'carrion', 'decay', 'sex' and 'death' in Baudelaire's verses. Permeated in offensive fumes of melting silicon, the site reminds me of a profound contradiction between the promises of consumerism and the harsh condition of production, between the intended 'pleasure and happiness' of what the industry purported to deliver and the 'darkness' in which it is carried out. I always think that this 'darkness' constitutes the shadow of consumerism which is suppressed, conveniently forgotten or purposely left behind by the workings of market mechanisms. The underground factories, this whole invisible economy are, metaphorically speaking, a subterranean world of 'decay', from which the flowers of evil spring. That brought me to The Flowers of Evil.' (Ni Haifeng, 2009)