

ZANE MELLUPE

1981 RIGA, LATVIA



BIOGRAPHY

Zane Mellupe is a Shanghai-based artist from Latvia. As an artist, she works mainly in contemporary photography where Zane deconstructs the popular understanding of photography, expanding it both conceptually and materially. Another important part of her work is socially involved art, urban renewal projects (e.g. Yongkang Road Art) and documentary research.

Embarking on photography studies at the age of fourteen in Riga, and subsequently in London and Shanghai, Zane Mellupe devises her artistic work as a way of “thinking in images”. Her installations and mixed technique photographic work reveal hidden interpretations of our feelings. She employs in her art works three mediums important to her: the image, the object and the body. The object merges with the image; the body reclaims its functions and enters the photographic image. These three mediums are in a dynamic of simultaneous coordination and opposition, in the same way of literary figures of speech. A recurrent element in her work is a questioning of photography, treating the image as if it were an object, and also multiplying the suggestive powers of the image. This oeuvre becomes a visualization of metaphors that allow us to express mind states. She creates textual pieces, the “physical world of literature”, in an echo of her works. Photography and reality merge together in Zane Mellupe’s work, a constant back-and-forth between the material and the conceptual.

Zane’s artistic work could be divided in 2 sectors: the directly personal where she focuses on herself, and the social where she focuses on societal issues, often involving other artists in order to research the topic and have a dialogue with society.

Zane’s main solo exhibitions are, ‘In the memory of a perfect wife’, ‘Another Trilogy’ and, ‘Creating Terminology? Entropy?’.

Her educational background includes Theatre Direction studies at the Shanghai Theatre Academy, a Bachelor of Arts in Chinese Language & Literature (Shanghai Teacher’s University, 2004), and Master of Arts in Photojournalism & Documentary Photography (University of the Arts, London 2007).

PERSONAL EXHIBITIONS

- 2016** "ENTROPY: SENDING OUT AN APPLICATION FOR AN N-SUM", 1933 CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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- 2015** "CREATING TERMINOLOGY? ENTROPY?", THE BUND ART MUSEUM, SHANGHAI, CHINA
-
- 2014** "ANOTHER TRILOGY", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
-
- 2014** "SHANGHAI LIGHTS", PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY SCHOOL, RIGA, LATVIA
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- 2013** "SHANGHAI LIGHTS", THE CASTLE OF CULTURE, VIESĪTE, LATVIA
-
- 2012** "ŠANHAJAS GAISMAS", M.BUCLERA PHOTOGRAPHY CHAMBER, LONE, LATVIA
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- 2011** "IN MEMORY OF THE PERFECT WIFE", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
-
- 2010** "SHANGHAI LIGHTS", MAJORI CULTURAL CENTRE, JURMALA, LATVIA
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- 2009** "ŠANHAJAS GAISMAS", SALDUS LIBRARY, SALDUS, LATVIA
-
- 2009** "SHANGHAI LIGHTS", MUSEUM OF OLAINĒ, OLAINĒ, LATVIA
-
- 2008** "SHANGHAI LIGHTS", PHOTOGRAPHY MUSEUM OF LATVIA, RIGA, LATVIA
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2005

"ALSO IN CHINA", HOUSE OF UNITED NATIONS,
RIGA, LATVIA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017 "IF I DISAPPEAR", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

2017 "HOME...", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

2017 "ON STARTING ANOTHER CONVERSATION ABOUT COMPARATIVE FEMINISM", WHYWHYART, NANJING, CHINA

2017 "LIKE WATER?", WHYWHYART, SUZHOU, CHINA

2016 "— |", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

2016 "THE BLURRED LINE", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

2016 "BEYOND THE LIGHTS", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

2016 "1000 APERTURES & 1 VISAGE", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

2016 "'ANIMAL FARM'", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

2016 "TEN", ISLAND6 MAIN, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2016 "RESTART", RIGA PHOTOGRAPHY BIENNIAL, RIGA, LATVIA

2016 "PHOTOFAIRS | SHANGHAI 2016", 1933 CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2016 "BABEL ME", SHANGHAI MUSEUM OF GLASS, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2015	"UNIQUE EDITIONS", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
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2015	"THE STROKE OF A PEN", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
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2015	"THE PRINCIPLE OF HAPPINESS", GALERIE EIGENHEIM & WEIMAR ART FESTIVAL, WEIMAR, GERMANY
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2015	"TERRITORY - ART PARIS ART FAIR", IFA GALLERY BOOTH, PARIS, FRANCE
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2015	"COMMUNITY HOSPITAL", YUYUAN LU ARTS, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2015	BEIRUT ART FAIR, BEIRUT, LEBANON
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2014	"UNCOVERED CHINA", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
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2014	"PHOTO SHANGHAI", IFA GALLERY BOOTH, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2014	"ART PARIS ART FAIR", IFA GALLERY BOOTH, PARIS, FRANCE
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2013	"DRAWING AND WHAT", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2013	"INVESTIGATION NO.3: MR & MRS ZHANG - ART PARIS ART FAIR", IFA GALLERY BOOTH, PARIS, FRANCE
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2012	"TRACE, LINE, SHADOWS", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2012	"RED LAND, YELLOW STARS", IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
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2012	"MY COUNTRY", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2012	"CLOSET", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2012	"TRACE, LINE, SHADOW", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2012	"THE LEFT LEG OF A CAT - ART:GWANGJU:12", IFA GALLERY BOOTH, GWANGJU, SOUTH-KOREA
2012	"ST-ART FAIR", GALERIE LIBRE COURS BOOTH, STRASBOURG, FRANCE
2012	"SOMETHING IN COMMON", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2012	"SECRET 7", YY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2012	"SECRET 7", CHRISTOPHER GILL STUDIO, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2012	"RED LAND, YELLOW STARS", GALERIE LIBRE COURS & IFA GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
2012	"INVESTIGATION NO.2: FACING DISTANCE - ART PARIS ART FAIR", IFA GALLERY BOOTH, PARIS, FRANCE
2012	"CELLS", SH CONTEMPORARY 12, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2011	"THE HELL. THE HEAVEN. ON THE WAY. IN BETWEEN.", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
2011	"JE SUIS CHINOIS. ET TOI ?", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2011	"15 DAYS WITHOUT YOU", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2011	"THE HELL. THE HEAVEN. ON THE WAY. IN BETWEEN", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2011	"THE BIRTH OF A MYTH - PART II - ART IN A STATE OF ALERTNESS", YK ART SPACE, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2011	"RUBY, ROXY AND THE FLAMING LAMBORGHINI", STUDIO ROUGE, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2011	"ENQUÊTE N°1 - ART PARIS ART FAIR", IFA GALLERY BOOTH, PARIS, FRANCE
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2010	"THE BIRTH OF A MYTH - PART I", YK ART SPACE, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2010	"POLICE AND HER", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2010	"FAKIRS", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2010	"COME, TAKE A WALK WITH ME", YONGKANG LU ART, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2010	"ABSOLUTE 0:00", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2009	"THE ARTIST DIED YESTERDAY", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2009	"SYNESTHESIA", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2009	"PLACEBO", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI, CHINA
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2009 "LEDS ANIMÉS", GALLERY TWENTY-ONE, PARIS, FRANCE

2009 "INDIVIDUAL: NEW ART FROM BEYOND BEIJING", RED GATE GALLERY, BEIJING, CHINA

2009 "ART PARIS ART FAIR 09", GALLERY LOFT & GALLERY TWENTY-ONE, PARIS, FRANCE

2009 "30 DEGREES", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER & STUDIO ROUGE, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2008 "URBAN LUST", IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2008 "ZERO GRAVITY", SUN GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2008 "URBAN LUST", ISLAND 6 & IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2008 "ROMA CONTEMPORARY ART FAIR", MANAART, ROMA, ITALY

2008 "QUADRAREIL CERCHIO", ALLEGRA RAVIZZA ART PROJECT, MILANO, ITALY

2008 "FERNELMONT CONTEMPORARY ART, SECOND EDITION", CASTLE OF FERNELMONT, FERNELMONT, BELGIUM

2008 "CLOUDS OF CROWDS", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2008 "AUTOMATA", ISLAND 6 & IFA GALLERY, SHANGHAI, CHINA

2007 "PLUGIT", BLUE LOTUS GALLERY, HONG-KONG

2007 "PLUGIT", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI,
CHINA

2007 "MADE IN SHANGHAI", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER,
SHANGHAI, CHINA

2007 "MADE IN CHINA", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER,
SHANGHAI, CHINA

2007 "FESTIVAL ART CONTINU", MARRAKECH,
MOROCCO

2006 "LIFE CIRCLE", LCC, LONDON, UNITED
KINGDOM

2006 " 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF
CABLE STREET", CABLE STREET & THE ART
PAVILION, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

PROJECTS

2010 "FOUNDER OF YONGKANG LU ART
(EXPERIMENTAL SPACES IN YONGKANG
ROAD)", SHANGHAI, CHINA

2008 "CO-FOUNDER OF THE ART COLLECTIVE 'LIU
DAO'", ISLAND 6 ARTS CENTER, SHANGHAI,
CHINA

TEXTS

ZANE ZANE

BY CHRISTOPHER MOORE, CRITIC (PRAGUE, ON 3 JULY 2011)

Doublings and transformations are almost commonplace in Russian literature. Think of Akakii Akakievich in Gogol's 'The Overcoat', numerous of Nabokov's characters, notably Lolita's Humbert Humbert, and Mikhail Bulgakov's 'The Master and Margarita' and also 'Heart of a Dog'. Not that such magical elements are found only Russian literature; it is common to much Central European literature (think of Kafka) as well as the Magic Realists of Latin America, such as Gabriel García Márquez, and the Indian storytelling tradition as popularised internationally in recent decades, particularly by Salman Rushdie. Linguistic doublings are fundamental elements, too, of Chinese grammar. And ever since Walter Benjamin published his 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in 1936, we have been awake to the extraordinary doubling-effect of photography, of which Warhol's droll umpteen explications might be taken as some sort of argumentative re-doubling. And many of these doublings and re-doublings are fascinating precisely because they are so banal. Roland Barthes noted in his famous and famously criticised essay, 'Camera Lucida', how the vast majority of photographs look the same, literally billions and billions of photographs of families arranged in exactly the same positions, trillions of 'portrait' photographs that attest to the uniqueness of the subject but quickly become indistinguishable from their unknown but equal counterparts. This was the basis for an early series of photo works by Zane Mellepe called 'Family'. 'Passport' photos that she found, on streets, in old cupboards and shops, were blown up to poster size, including all the defects to the photographs, including burns and scratches, united together to form a 'family' (but note, not re-united – this effect is purely one of the artist's categorization and description).

Zane Mellepe was born in 1981, in Latvia, one of the Baltic States and now a member of the European Union. But she grew up in the Soviet Union, which occupied Latvia from 1939-1991. This is important, as transformation as a process visited upon an object or person, rather

than as a matter of subjective instigation, consistently figures in her art. After finishing school she studied Chinese, and eventually moved to China, where she continued her studies at the Shanghai Theatre Academy and the Shanghai Teachers University. Later she studied photography in London but China pulled her back. In recent years, she has been curator, gallerist, and creative director. But she has always been an artist.

In her first solo-exhibition, Mellupe presents us with photographs, found objects, sometimes combined, luminescent electrical wire sculptures, and short stories that accompany the various works. She presents herself in her family home in Latvia and settings from her adopted home in Shanghai. The stories and works read as personal histories — “As a child I believed that I used to be a dog in my previous life” — emphasised by the use of the first-person voice. Fragmented impressions have been gathered together and almost sound sincere. But pause a moment. The exhibition is titled ‘In memory of the perfect wife’, which references a memory from a school lesson but also nothing at all, that is, the everyday of everyone and yet no one in particular. We think we know, it seems so familiar, so we profess to already understand. But do we? Perhaps we have just fallen through the mirror (the artist’s *Doppelgänger* will be ‘performing’ at the opening, so you might ask this ghost for her opinion).

A version of the artist is on show here but how much it is a fiction (a true fiction – remember we are in the realm of literature) is open to interpretation, or better still, to play. Here we are in rooms full of magical pans baring images of themselves being held, ‘corrupt file’ *portraits*, doors with multiple door-handles and in the shape of door-wedges (for keeping them open, or closed?), and photographs of raw meat where the photographs have been subsequently ‘cooked’ in the method to be used for said meat (a fish, a brain, a steak). Knitting lies unfinished, the needles supporting the electro-luminescent thread, a thread that reappears Fontana-like as stitches in canvases and packing yarn for carefully made ‘canvas’ boxes. The head of a street-lamp found ‘in the street’ is packed into a box – a camera light box. The carved leg of a low table protrudes from a wall, like a tongue, or perhaps something else (more of those ambiguous doubles appear in the photographs, such as Boiled Chicken neck).

The photography is a portrayal of the self rather than self-portraiture, fragments of the artist secreted into familiar and tendentious spaces—crowded bookshelves, a chaotic bedroom. But then there she lies on the dinner table, face covered, served up for a feast (or to feast your curious eyes). And again, in the snow, naked, threatened by a dog (dear reader, did I mention Bulgakov?).

Self-portraiture traditionally makes claim to some authenticity, one that has been rigorously questioned and most rigorously by the American photographer, Cindy Sherman, who has made a career of making photographing herself but in all truth has probably never made a self-portrait. Mellepe charms us with a female humour I find very Slavonic (I am married to a Czech). It is at once innately sardonic but also generous. There is a feeling for magic there too, not in any occult manner but for the sake of charm. It is also cautious and critical—unwise the viewer who makes assumptions about these most unassuming artworks, particularly as to the authenticity of ‘feeling’, the extent to which the artist has exposed her ‘self’.

Other works show ‘pieces’ of the artist photographically reproduced on an old-fashioned set-of weights, the photograph ‘taken’ by her father (speaking to the relationship between subject and object—how it is ‘weighed’), or on a coffee-tabletop, the table a polished steel, modernist mountain peak; the image, the artist foetal and wrapped in plastic, protected, or perhaps stored away. Compare these with a series of images from Shanghai where a figure (not the artist) can be glimpsed within the intertwining boughs of an ancient tree, a simple formal relation drawn between human and tree but in the context of a background of green parks and colonial Shanghai villas. Again it is not simply the transformation that is vital but its mundanity: the magical banal. Another instance is the floral photograph ‘The Flower’. The mildly over-saturated colours of the countryside image speak to the artificiality of the still life, its framed beauty. Surprisingly, only slowly do we become aware of the similarly coloured and tumescent organ in the corner of the frame, again raising the theme of transformation, albeit here a latent one; but also camouflaged ordinariness, a domesticated object, like all the others, and part of the dowry.

My favourite work is the fountain meat-grinder, presented at once like the domestic Duchampian-object it is, as well as some venerated relic, but also transformed—‘developed’?—into equipment to develop

photographs: no doubt the very ones that have been ‘cooked’, another form of transformation. The reticulated water of the fountain speaks to systems and processes but also to subversion (a most piquant transformation)—let us not forget that Bulgakov’s writing was banned for decades in the Soviet Union, published only in unofficial ‘Samizdat’ editions; though let us avoid the clichéd metaphor of femininity and liquidity (dear reader, I did warn you to be careful—in this magical world, not everything is as it seems, nor as we might expect it to be). The transformations of “In Memory of the Perfect Wife” do not stop at the art works. Mellupe’s games and relics escape their respective places as objects and inhabit the gallery itself, an old colonial villa, the memory rooms inhabiting the real ones, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, even the artist has her double, invading the space, taking over her own constructed character.

The final page of Nabokov’s unfinished and posthumously published novel, *The Original of Laura*, reads –

“efface [circled]

erase

delete

rub out

[word expunged]

wipe out

obliterate”

Death, of course, is the ultimate transformation, the fascinating infinite jest, wherein every self-portrait is also a *Nature Morte*. So let us end with a quote from the character—let us call her Zane Zane—specifically from ‘Snow and Dust’:

The bite even more reassured me – dogs felt me – they felt my lies, they felt my fears and pretending, they had noticed I was spying on their treasure places. They knew who I was.

Now, who is the dog and what is the artist? Don’t despair. There is no answer. The double is also oblivion.