

Dear readers of Sun Emerald,

How are you? This is the 4th article in our series “The Secret Life of Images”. All the previous articles that have been featured in this series can still be viewed online at <http://www.....> We are very interested in receiving your feedback and we will be happy to respond to any request from our readers for us to write on certain themes and topics.

ICCSA is looking forward to your participation in our Chinese New Year Photo Show "Reading Self and Reading Others". If you wish to have any discussion with us or take part in one of our workshops on producing photographs for the show, please contact us at xxx.

Relationship of Everyday Life.

In the first article we introduced you to several possible ways of reading the meanings of several well known photo works and what these interpretations could tell us about the photographer's views of the subject or the larger context around the subject. The readings might make us aware of the manipulation created by the photographers, for example, in Jeff Wall's *Milk*, we saw how the photographer draws the viewer's attention to something speculative while he gave out subtle meanings on the dominant situation in society or how John Heartfield criticised the propaganda of a political ideology in *Hitler's Salute*. The 2nd article touched on the special issue of migrant domestic workers in Ireland and gave us an introduction of the production processes of the photographer with migrant domestic workers as the subjects, in order to ascribe meanings to the activities of these migrant domestic workers in Ireland. This article also explained how photography could be used to advocate certain meanings and used by whom and in which context. The 3rd article highlighted the use of cultural signifiers which represented civilisation's accomplishments, expressed by specific cultures and communities in order to create visual representations of their identities. These visual representations communicated their accomplishments and desire and can be used to construct identities, foster collective goals and build a community's pride.

For this article I would like to write on the theme of relationships and how relationships can be portrayed in visual forms and through the use of artistic concepts and approaches to express and project certain meanings.

Our first set of photographs are taken from Marina Abramovic who is a well known performance artist who also stages performances to be photographed. She investigates through her performances and performed photographs many issues but most of them centre on the theme of relationships, especially of her well known collaboration and partnership with her private and professional partner Ulay from the 70s into the 80s.





Abramovic and Ulay use these images to express in visual form certain stages of inter personal relationships that include love, tension and violence. The 3rd image that depicts the 2 of them holding onto different parts of a bow and arrow is titled “Rest Energy”. In my opinion it expresses the hidden tension that may exist in all relationships that can lead to dangerous situations or consequences that would be difficult to anticipate. Certain curators who have exhibited this image have arranged it to be shown under the concept of love and trust, interpreting that the balance maintained by the 2 figures in the photograph requires a high level of trust, sensitivity, understanding and working together to upkeep the equilibrium of a steadfast or stable relationship. This reframing through an exhibition's concept by some curators provides a different reading of the meaning of the image and demonstrates the ability of any image to be distorted and can be used to portray different meanings that may suit a user's or viewer's intention.

Staying on the subject of relationships, I would like to show you some images from Chinese photographer Hu Yang's photo series “Shanghai Living”. Hu Yang who is based in Shanghai spent a year photographing around 400 homes of people living in Shanghai from Feb.2004 to Feb.2005. These photographs portrays intimate portraits of a wide range of Shanghai residents, often from starkly contrasting backgrounds, and also depicts varying tones of relationships between these persons and the state, the economy and contemporary lifestyles. These are reflected in the images of the well-to-do, the poor, the old, the migrants and the lonely persons. (You can view more of the photographs from this series at <http://www.shanghartgallery.com/exhibitions/huyang/default.htm> and foreign news media in http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/specials/chinarises/cityofdreams/HUYANG_FEATURE/alt_02.html

These images show us the huge gaps of contrast existing between the rich and the poor in terms of their lifestyle and home environment, accompanied with a social commentary on how each of these persons have to struggle and cope with contemporary China's fast paced social economic and

political changes and lifestyles. This form of photography combines artistic expression with anthropological and social perspectives and has historical documentative and journalistic values.

The image below portrays Hu Zhihong who was laid off and lives with her husband who works in a supermarket and a son who is in school. In order to save money she used supermarket flyers as wallpapers for her room. When Hu Yang's photographs were published in 2005, he informed us that Zhihong spent most of her time then dancing.



The next image is on LiYou who works for a foreign company and needs 2 hours each day to relax after work. The bathtub is an important aid for his relaxation; therefore it commands a strategic position in his living and entertainment space, which is integrated as one.



Another image in this series by Hu Yang is that of Sun Bingchang, a retired worker in Putong district, who started a home hotel business to provide accommodation for visitors from other provinces who cannot afford to pay much, and with the money he earns, he helps children in depressed areas, doing in his own way what he thinks the leaders of the previous generation stood for and has done for China, expressing great attachment to them.



The last set of images reproduced here are created by artist Chinese artist Weng Peijun (Weng Fen) from his series entitled *Great Family Aspirations – Good Health and Good Business* photography series, which depicts portraits of a young and dynamic Chinese family, who seem to be strong, alert and ready to meet all kinds of challenges that may come their way and are determined to stay fit and efficient as a family unit, and are somewhat suggestive of an army unit. The subjects portrayed in most of Weng's photographs are himself and members of his family, whom Weng has directed to be in various poses. These images can be read in various ways, e.g. as ironic self-portraits and/or as commentaries on contemporary Chinese families, and/or as inscriptions of the state's ideology onto the labouring and performing bodies of contemporary Chinese citizens and families.

