



Fiona Tan
Correction



Fiona Tan explores the essential properties of video, film, and photography, especially their capacity for representation and their relationship to time. Throughout her work she focuses on these concerns by using personal and archival sources of

imagery. Particularly influenced by her multicultural background — she was born in Indonesia in 1966 to a Chinese father and Australian mother, spent most of her youth in Australia, and now lives in Amsterdam — Tan raises several questions in her work: How do stereotypes and preconceptions affect how we view others? How do photographs aptly represent a whole person? What is the difference between and result of representing yourself versus being represented by someone else?

In her video installations *Facing Forward* (1999) and *Tuareg* (1999), Tan used documentary film footage from colonial expeditions, underscoring the uncomfortable interaction between white Europeans and natives of other countries. She documented twenty-year-old Japanese women undergoing a traditional rite of passage into adulthood, shooting archery while dressed in kimonos, in *Saint Sebastian* (2001). For *Countenance* (2002), a survey of Berlin's population that for so many years was divided between East and West, Tan filmed hundreds of Berliners as a response to August Sander's influential photographic series *People of the Twentieth Century*, a study of Germans made during the 1920s and 1940s that categorized the population into seven types. The subjects of Tan's portraits rarely move, and when asked why she uses film as a medium rather than still photography, Tan has said, "I find it intriguing to observe someone who has been filmed for a while. . . . With a filmed image, I become less aware of the image and more aware of the person as an image, the person within, or even behind, the image."

Tan plays with the properties of film and video because as she says, "The passage of time emphasizes the relationship between subject and camera: the contract/construct, however temporary, that went into making the picture." A number of Tan's other works explore movement performed for the camera and include the artist rolling down a sand dune in *Roll I and II* (1997) or being lifted by helium balloons in *Lift* (2000). She also deconstructs the idea of linear time by using edited montages, sound, and other techniques to make connections through disparate images such as a film made to study flowers and a sleeping figure in *Linneaus Flower Clock* (1998).



Tan's current project, *Correction*, reflects her ongoing interest in images as sociological documentation and in exploring how video represents movement through time. Tan combines a historical approach to photographing prisoners — a genre undertaken by photographers such as August Sander, Danny Lyon, Morrie Camhi, Deborah Luster, and Taryn Simon — with old Hollywood film techniques. Tan filmed in two women's and two men's prisons in Illinois and California, where approximately 300 inmates and guards volunteered to participate in her project. Without revealing their names or crimes, Tan filmed brief portraits using the *Amerikanische* technique, a term used by cinematographers in Germany to describe the classical medium portrait shot in film. *Amerikanische Einstellung* (the American shot) refers to a technique frequently used in Hollywood films in the 1930s through the 1950s, of framing figures from the knees up. In a genre between the still and the moving image, Tan captures her subjects looking straight into the camera. The only movement is their breathing, blinking, and sporadic muscle twitches. The collected portraits are projected on six screens arranged in a circle. Tan is interested not in making political proclamations or judgments with this work but in making visible a distinct segment of society that becomes invisible within the walls of correctional facilities. She invites viewers to confront their own prejudices and assumptions about prisoners and their guards and to consider these people first as fellow human beings.

Text by Julie Rodrigues Widholm, Assistant Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

FRONT AND
BACK COVERS

Correction (video
stills), 2004
Video installation
Commissioned
by the Museum
of Contemporary
Art, Chicago; the
New Museum of
Contemporary Art,
New York; and
Hammer Museum,
Los Angeles

LEFT, TOP

Saint Sebastian,
2001
Video installation

LEFT, BOTTOM

Lift, 2000
Silkscreen

RIGHT

Fiona Tan and her
crew filming at
Logan Correctional
Facility, Illinois, in
June 2004

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Courtesy of the
artist and Frith
Street Gallery,
London



Fiona Tan: Correction is the first of three projects undertaken by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, that proposes a new model among arts institutions to commission jointly and show the work of emerging artists. Tan's is the first exhibition in the series and will be followed by presentations of new work by Aernout Mik and Patty Chang at each of our institutions within the next year.

Fiona Tan: Correction
October 2, 2004–January 23, 2005

Exhibition Curator
Francesco Bonami
Manilow Senior Curator
with Julie Rodrigues Widholm
Assistant Curator

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MEMBERS-ONLY
LECTURE

Fiona Tan
Tuesday, September 28, 6 pm
MCA Theater

Fiona Tan will present an overview of her recent work in film and video.

The Louis S. Kanne Lecture on Contemporary Film is made possible through a generous gift by Mrs. Louis S. Kanne to the Chicago Contemporary Campaign.

CURATOR'S TOUR

Julie Rodrigues Widholm
Assistant Curator
Tuesday, October 12, noon



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Contemporary Art



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