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Public Secrecy in Contemporary China: Ducking the Firewall

Public Lecture

Tuesday 19 February, 5-7 P.M.

Samuel Alexander Theatre, Samuel Alexander Building

Tank Man, the über-image of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, has been repurposed endlessly in the quarter of a century since the crackdown. These remediations of that original photograph have often taken the form of political cartoons, memes and YouTube remixes, which circulate broadly outside China. In China itself, though, Tank Man has been largely monitored out of online sight, and the digital artists who have repurposed his image in recent years are typically so harried by the censors that their work cannot hope to endow him with mass viral visibility, let alone the iconic status he possesses abroad. But precisely because of their fugitive character – which produces audiences who are alert and on the qui vive – these remediations ensure that Tank Man remains the grit in the clam of public secrecy about 1989, and most particularly when they take the form of augmented reality art.

Waste, Precarity, and the Artwork in Contemporary China

Key Ideas Seminar

Wednesday 20 February, 1-3 P.M.

Room A201, Samuel Alexander Building

In recent years, waste has become a dominant signature in Chinese art and documentary film. Many leading artists now work profusely with refuse – building site debris, landfill, and e-waste – scavenging for material that can be reclaimed, and redeemed, through art. In this seminar, we explore the relationship between art, waste and precarious experience, focusing in particular on how the identity of the waste-picker is represented, and sometimes appropriated, in Chinese visual culture. How do waste and precarity intersect? What is the impact of living and working on the dump on the people who carry out this labour? Is it problematic for artists to assume the role of ragpicker in works that tend to circulate among privileged audiences? How can artists and filmmakers most appropriately explore lives far more precarious than their own?

A list of recommended reading and viewing is available on the CIDRAL website.

For more information:

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