

Translucent Text

Jayne Dyer



In an age of increasingly paperless information, the loss of the central role of bound and unbound text has potent implications. Books have tangible, physical properties that trace time and histories through the turning of each page. Information can be transparent and alert us to a particular culture and time, or else it is opaque, refuting or even upending expected views and conventions.

"Translucent Text" at 798/Red Gate Gallery in Beijing opened in April with these ideas in mind, and with Chinese artists Zheng Xuewu and Deng Yifu and Australian artists Tony Scott and Jayne Dyer on display.

Since 1990, Redgate artist Zheng Xuewu has used Chinese characters and letters in his work. *The Century Document* is an ambitious installation consisting of 1500 tightly rolled newspaper bundles that take the form of traditional Chinese bamboo manuscripts. For two years, Zheng Xuewu meticulously bound Chinese and Western daily newspapers into scrolls. And this is the clue—the scholar scroll, historically revered in China as a container of knowledge and wisdom, is reduced to the dogma and banality of everyday news. By implication, knowledge and learning have become nothing more than appearances. Sealed shut, the work expresses what Zheng Xuewu sees as a paradox. For Zheng Xuewu, this is "writing and the absence of writing, reading and the inability to read."

Tony Scott, who lives in Beijing, appropriates artifacts and everyday domestic and ritual objects from cultures other than his own. In the series "New Health Plans" and "Fading Images," Scott sourced acupuncture medical charts dating from the 60s in Beijing's Panjiayuan "dirt" market. Like a surgeon, he cuts into the surface of each chart. The original intention is cleared away to reveal the subterranean history that Scott redraws through use of Western systems. In

doing so, he blurs classifications. Information is conflated and meaning becomes obtuse, reflecting the shifting boundaries of what is considered fact.

With titles such as *American Diplomatic Policy on Western Europe*, *Avant-garde Art in China*, *Sword and Blood—the Story behind NATO*, *The Bible* and *Trotsky's Autobiography*, the 18 books in Deng Yifu's *Yifu Ordinance Bookstore* are wide-ranging and seemingly open-ended. Yet, since the artist cuts the outline of a gun into the body of each book and inserts its plastic-like Perspex shape's equivalent into the hollow, the work becomes a provocation, the meaning of which is anything but transparent. Like a loaded gun, *Yifu Ordinance Bookstore* is charged with inter-cultural and historical references that raise questions about authority and power relationships today.

Jayne Dyer's installation, *One Reading*, questions our assumptions about one's access to information as well as the transparency of it once accessed. For this work, Dyer collects books. Some projects may require 1000 books built into structures that infer architecture or edifices in a state of growth or collapse. In *One Reading*, books are systematically painted black, and page-by-page. The books are piled up with open pages, suggesting their availability, but still our reading of them is denied. Black butterflies infest the closed space of the gallery, swarming over the books, floor and walls. In doing this, she potentially destabilizes the space and simultaneously implicates our expectations of the object as trope or metaphor.

These four artists sit squarely within the changing, sometimes fractured social fabric of our times. Their works operate as open-ended, "linguistic" communications—in a state of flux, pointing towards an understanding of a narrative, but recognizing that responses are, at best, translucent. □

Left to Right: Jayne Dyer, *One Reading 2*, 2007. Book, pins, acrylic paint, 33 x 23 x 16 cm. / Jayne Dyer, *One Reading 1*, 2007. Books, paper, pins, acrylic paint. Installation, size variable.