



PRESS RELEASE

Ren Hang, photography

In collaboration with

OstLicht. Gallery for Photography, Vienna
Stieglitz19, Anversa
The Estate of Ren Hang

Opening

Saturday September 12th, 2020
H 3.00 pm – 8.00 pm

On view

13 September – 29 November 2020
Every day, 11.00 am – 8.00 pm
Entry Ticket € 6 Reduced (6-26 years) € 3

The exhibition opens to the public in keeping with all health and safety measures.

FONDAZIONE SOZZANI
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The Fondazioni Sozzani presents "Ren Hang, photography" for the first time in Milan. With over eighty photographs, videos, books and magazines, the retrospective is dedicated to one of the most important photographers of contemporary China, who tragically passed away in 2017 at just twenty-nine years old.

Ren Hang's photography is a hymn to mankind's body, sexuality, beauty, and vulnerability. His images connect the feelings, desires, fears and loneliness of younger generations now in China in an almost ironic way - through their corporeality.

The nude is at the center of his work. As Ren observed: "people come to this world naked; so the naked body represents people's original version. By shooting nudes, you can feel the person's real and authentic existence through their naked bodies".

He was born in 1987 in Changchun, in the province of Jilin, in Manchuria, and began to photograph as a self-taught since his early years of high school. At seventeen he moved to Beijing where he studied advertising, but leaving university early to devote himself to photography. He shot with small 35mm point-and-shoot cameras, handy and inexpensive, that he confessed he broke regularly. He was almost obsessive using it, shooting incessantly. His roommate and friends were his first subjects, but soon he received more and more requests from peers and fans who wished to model.

Ren depicts the human body as an abstract form, often in unexpected compositions and perspectives, overlapping well-known motifs and traditions of Western art. His photographs can be painfully provocative, or sometimes dreamy and surreal, all reflect strong graphic shapes. Recalling iconic images such as Ophelia in the river surrounded by water lilies or Leda and the swan, Ren's is a visual vocabulary that spontaneously draws on abstraction, surrealism, dada and historical photography.

His works have also been considered a form of rebellion against the conventions of China's restrictive regime, where nudes and independent publishing, and self-publishing, aren't allowed. Ren says: "I don't consider my work as a taboo, because I don't think so much about the cultural or political context ...It is not my intention to challenge the limits, I simply do what comes naturally to me".

Ren published nearly twenty self-produced books, which have now become collector items, including "Ren Hang 2009-2011" (2011) and "Son of a Bitch" (2013). In 2016 he decided to publish 12 books, one for each month, dedicated, as he explained on Instagram, to "survival and love". The first international publishing house to take an interest in his work was Edition du Lic in Oslo which published in 2013 the monograph "Republic", considered by the photographer himself to be his best book.

He used to have a blog, "My depression", which he updated almost daily from 2007 to 2016 with a diary of Mandarin poems. These were published for the first time in English by the Hong Kong publisher BHKM with the title "word or two" in 2017. Ren's depression, that he called "My dog", would lead him to suicide in 2017.

Ren Hang has collaborated on fashion campaigns with some well-known contemporary brands, always maintaining his personal gaze. His work has been published by the international fashion magazines *Antidote*, *Beauty Papers*, *Numéro China*, *Purple Fashion*, *Tank*, and collected by the Fondazione Sozzani in a specific focus of the photographer's work.

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Ren Hang (Chang Chun, 1987- Beijing, 2017) was a photographer and a poet. He studied advertising at the Beijing University and produced numerous photo books at a very young age, working for international fashion magazines, and publishing on his website, Facebook, Instagram Weibo and Flickr.

His work has gained growing posthumous favour and popularity worldwide. From a very young age Hang collaborated with dozens of western galleries and institutions. In 2010 he received the Terna Third Annual Prize in contemporary art for the theme "Connectivity", exhibited at the Multimedia Art Museum (Moscow) two years later. In 2012 he exhibited at the Oriental Museum (Stockholm), the CAFA Art Museum (Beijing), the Iberia Center for Contemporary Art (Beijing). In 2013 he participated in the group exhibition curated by Ai Wei Wei, Fuck Off 2 at the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands and at the Ostlicht, Gallery for Photography in Vienna (2015). In 2017, a few months before his death, the Foam, Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam hosted a major solo exhibition in Europe.

Relevant retrospectives were at MdbK, Museum der Bildende Künste in Leipzig (2017), at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (2019), at the C/O Gallery in Berlin (2019), and this year in Italy at the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato (2020).

Among the main publications, "Republic", Edition du Lic (Oslo, 2013); "Wild", dienacht Publishing (Leipzig 2015), "Food Issue", Same Paper (Shanghai, 2015); "Athens Love", Session Press (New York, 2016), "Ren Hang", Taschen (New York, 2019); "Ren Hang: for my mother", Hopper & Fuchs; and Stieglitz19 (Antwerp, 2019).

Fondazione Sozzani

The Fondazione Sozzani was established in 2016 by Carla Sozzani in Milan and is dedicated to the promotion of culture through photography, fashion, the fine arts, and applied arts. The Foundation has assumed the patronage of Galleria Carla Sozzani and continues all relevant public functions that the Galleria has supported for the past 30 years.

www.fondazionesozzani.org



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In collaboration with

Antidote Magazine
Beauty Papers
Elsewhere
FFF Zine
Modern Weekly
Numéro China
Purple Fashion
Tank

Ren Hang's exhibition is accompanied in the small gallery by a selection of eighty layouts commissioned by several well recognized international fashion magazines between 2014 and 2017, together with rare paper copies and contact sheets. It is clear how even as a new, young photographer, he always kept his own unmistakable vision, leading fashion photography in new and unexplored directions.

“And since one of the pillars of freedom is the right to choose, I started by selecting Ren Hang. For me, this Chinese photographer, who is based in Beijing, embodies this notion of freedom, freedom of the body, freedom of expression but also the freedom to work itself.” Thus wrote Yan Weber in 2016. Founder and creative director of the French magazine **Antidote** which dedicates each issue to a theme interpreted by a single photographer, Weber gave the twelfth issue "Freedom" to Ren Hang to investigate the concept of freedom in all its forms.

“His nudes often explore the essence of human nature rather than sexuality” wrote **Beauty Papers**, the English semi-annual that specializes in beauty, when it introduced the Ren Hang feature in 2016 where the saturated colors of the make-up accompanied the sinuous compositions of the bodies.

In 2014, **Elsewhere**, an independent voice of Chinese fashion, commissioned Ren Hang for the cover story of the issue dedicated to the nude, “Naked”. “In this era that we live in, being censored by the Chinese government has almost become a stamp of approval for contemporary artists. Ren Hang, a young man with a mature look and tanned skin, hair as short as a Chinese soldier, always carrying an irresistibly cute and innocent smile on his face is, perhaps, the sole artist and photographer with the most edgy outlook towards the naked human body.”

FFF Zine, an independent magazine based in Sydney, invites photographers, artists and stylists to explore the irreverence of the fashion – food combination. In 2016, for the issue "Gorge!" Ren Hang dedicated his spread entirely to fruit, "Fruits", was shot in a decadent restaurant in Beijing.

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Between 2015 and 2016 Ren Hang also collaborated with the widely recognized and prestigious Chinese fashion magazines too, such as **Numéro China**, or the weekly magazine **Modern Weekly**.

Purple Fashion, the cult French magazine, presented Ren Hang to its readers early on in 2014, with a selection of photographs. In 2016 they again commissioned a shoot for Purple Sex, "Harmony Exercises" with some of his most famous pictures, and in 2017 Ren Hang realized the fashion shoot, "Endgame".

For **Tank**, the English independent quarterly, Ren Hang photographed in 2015 a fashion feature for the "Reality" issue dedicated to the darkest meanders, nightmares, hallucinations, and lies of reality, entitled: *Horror Eats the Light and Digest it into Darkness* from the book "The Conspiracy Against the Human Race" by Thomas Ligotti, American writer of horror literature.

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