



Fig.111 Screenshot of the first headshots I took of my Chinese friends. Here the oval masking becomes some sort of a billboard inviting people to put their heads through it. Asian people in particular seem to perfectly fit such an ovality. Also the disposition of the faces in a vertical rather than an horizontal fashion resembles an Asian banner with characters. While not writing characters in a way, also my documenting the people I meet is also in itself a language accounting on my own person as reflected in the eyes of the other depicted persons.

PEOPLE 03

I initially started the project by making a painted portrait of my new acquaintances. I did so also to vary the kind of technique I adopted for this work in relation to the others. While living in Shanghai I consulted a Jewish American neighbor who ran a gallery there. The latter found most of my work too brainy but really enjoyed the drawings. The painted portraits however were not of his like and I from that moment on switched to photography. The first photographs then were taken of my new Chinese friends. Their Asian faces fully filled the oval mask that I use when extracting the background of each headshot. Living in North America and later in Europe I had more troubles fitting the longer Caucasian faces in such oval templates. Beside being a hairdresser then I also became a plastic surgeon digitally removing those facial features that made it outside the oval mask. Later when it became fashionable to be a hipster I also had to deal

with excessive beards and hairs which I have always managed to cut out.

Generally speaking it is not so much the style a person adopts that is so telling in his or her portraits but his or her gaze towards me, the photographer and subsequently towards the viewers of this work. There is on the other hand a tendency to focus on the style a person adopts to immediately categorize him or her and by doing so quickly dismiss him or her. Purposely in this work the faces are just faces and there are barely any other traces of the “uniform” a person wears in order to profile him or herself in a certain way. In the oval mask persons get in other words unmasked. At times of course they happen to wear sunglasses but very often they choose on their own to remove them so as to show their eyes to the camera. Now I do not mean to steal their souls by taking a picture of them. I would be in fact very ashamed to do so. As a matter of fact I think their souls as mine have already been stolen, stolen by the very bureaucratic system who has been identifying us since our birth.

The portrait I do can be in a way conceived as the very identity card photo taken by the system to file us but these photos bare no name nor any other information. They are totally depersonalized but in the context of all the other portraits standing on top of one another they come to constitute a humanity of its own, a humanity standing compact against a centralized system that otherwise tends to file it and forget about it. The humanity I depict is meant to stand up like giant totems facing one another, totems in which people are presented spatially, they are all there beaming their souls at the intimidated viewer walking through such a forest of monolithic trees. In reality then the portraits I gather are not there to be examined but they are there to examine. Beaming their humanity to the viewer, with all these gazes pointing in his or her direction may be in fact also a way not to just look at him or her but to look through him or her and in this in depth beaming being able to infuse all their humanity to him or her.

The monument depicting an autocrat severely looks down on the viewer infusing a sense of respect and smallness. The result is that whenever we see a statue of a king or an emperor on a horse with his sword out or whatever else, we just have to bend our head down and respect his or her majesty. With my portraying work I elevate any individual to become part of the monument. Actually the more he or she was not authorities in

their lives the more likely I was able to photograph them. In this respect I depict the so-called anti-heroes which in my view are heroes because they did not so much mingle with the so harmful social hierarchy. If tribal men and women of the past did not wish their souls to be taken by the photographer, I photograph people to recreate a savage dimension, making totems of their faces, creating a forest, a wilderness out of them. This process by now only occurs in my imagination yet I have often wished to actually unroll long strips of faces on the columns of some high bridges or either way in a street art-like fashion. I was however always hindered to do so with the hope that one day I might be able to build the memory theater with which I have conceived my work to begin with.

If there weren't laws to hinder me and I wouldn't immediately be arrested for it I certainly would have already commenced the building of such a theater with the faces I depict acting as the actual columns sustaining it all almost as if to indicate that society is as the basis of human life on earth but the creation of any organic society is hindered by a centralized bureaucracy keeping all us member into distinct units who may only get together in their free time and otherwise are more or less forced to collaborate in the inorganic setup of more or less commercial institutions that are certainly not so concern with the wellbeing of the local environment and its people. For all the people I met and photographed then there is a missed opportunity to get together and collaborate in the creation of a community. The alternative here is to just make a virtual one which however in one way or another never brings anything concrete to the table because it has to face not only a reality controlled by the system but also the very system provided by the network hosting the community, with all its nasty capitalist schemes.

So it is then my work of faces, faces that are silent, they do not talk with their mouths but I think have much to say with their eyes alone even though of course in the accounts I write for all the month productions of my project, even for this work I give a short introduction to the people I photograph. Interestingly the more they are outside the system the more I could write a book about them and the more they comply with the system the less I have to say anything but the usual criticism on how because of their regimented life they became quite vicious in this or that manner.