

YIN XIUZHEN

BORN 1963, CHINA; LIVES AND WORKS IN BEIJING, CHINA

Yin Xiuzhen's work embraces the notion of memory, whatever its form might be. In her work, memory becomes a critical tool that allows her to discuss and examine the political, social, historical, environmental, and human constructs that surround her. Urbanization is a seminal part of Yin's daily life and is often a focal point of her work. In her sculpture *Beijing* (1999), she reconfigures the roof of a traditional house in Beijing and covers it with tiles and photographs of neighborhoods destroyed for the sake of voracious corporate development. The fading of the city stands here for the fading of memory and, to a certain extent, part of civilization. The ruins she has modeled stand firmly in the tension between something that was and something to come; the questions she raises address the nature of what is yet to come.

Yin's methodology pulls detritus—whether clothes, shoes, or rubble from demolished buildings—toward a metaphorical level. In her eyes and by passing through her hands, people's discarded items are imbued with a sense of history and experience; as sculptural documents of memory, they give her work a "spirit nature." In addition, these objects evoke the presence of the body and of individual lives, both often overlooked in the rush toward architectural modernization, rapid urban development, and a growing global economy.

Yin's suitcase series—models of various cities in old suitcases made from the used clothes of residents of those cities—are, in the artist's words, "a tangible symbol of the moving spirit of contemporary life." She says that "people in our contemporary setting have moved from residing in a static environment to becoming souls in a constantly shifting transience. ... The suitcase becomes the life support container of modern living ... the holder of the continuous construction of a human entity." She interjects the personal and the vernacular as an intervention against a growing global culture.

Yin's poetics rely heavily on their capacity to create content from almost nothing. Her aesthetic is one of frailty, modesty, and especially vulnerability, which she at times forces toward the absurd. In her performance *Washing River* (1995), she gave passers-by brushes, plastic pails, and fresh water in an attempt to clean ten cubic millimeters of polluted water from a nearby river. The performance lasted two days and the cleansed water went back into the polluted river. The consequences of her gesture are pragmatically microscopic, but the ambition of the project is scaleless.

Yin has exhibited her work in Beijing and internationally. Recent solo exhibition venues include the Manchester Craft Centre in Manchester, England (1998), and the Beijing Contemporary Art Museum (1995). She was included in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998), organized by the Asia Society Galleries, New York, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; and *Transience: Chinese Art at the End of the 20th Century* (1991), organized by the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago, Illinois. She also exhibited in the 2002 Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; the Second Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Japan (2002); the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia (1999); and *Cities on the Move*, Vienna, Austria (1999).

—Aimee Chang