

Song Dong *Same Bed Different Dreams*

6 Burlington Gardens, London W1S 3ET
1 October – 5 November 2019

Opening Reception
Monday 30 September 2019, 6-8 PM



"The purpose of my work is for the city I build to be destroyed... As cities in Asia grow, old quarter and buildings are knocked down and new ones built, almost every day. Some cities have even been built from scratch in twenty years... My "sweet" city will be built of biscuits and candies, making it tempting and delicious. I call these candies "gorgeous poisons". Being pleasurable tasty but harmful of overeating, their features correspond to some of the characters of our city today. We eat the city we have built and tasted through our desires and demolished it at the same time until it became a ruin."

– Song Dong, 2006

London—Pace Gallery is honoured to present *Same Bed Different Dreams*, the first solo exhibition of Chinese artist Song Dong at Pace in London. Conceived as a survey exhibition, this is the artist's first opportunity to present significant works from 1995 to the present day in the UK. The exhibition will be on view at 6 Burlington Gardens from 1 October to 5 November and will coincide with both Frieze Art Fair and Asian Art in London.

The opening week of the exhibition will feature a site-specific installation and interactive performance of *Eating the City* (2019), in which visitors are invited to consume the installation itself.

For three decades, Song Dong has been at the forefront of Chinese contemporary art. Since graduating from art school in 1989, Song's artistic career has developed during a period of great political and social changes in China. Modernization modified the face of cities and the lives of their citizens. In response to this provocative atmosphere, Song Dong's art confronts notions of memory, impermanence, waste, consumerism and the urban environment. Simultaneously poetic and political, personal and global, his work explores the intricate connection between life and art. In addition, through a kind of "hidden form", his practices are imbued with doubt and reflection, criticism and introspection.

Same Bed Different Dreams, refers to Song Dong's continual return to the same core ideas via a variety of methods. His practice embraces a wide range of media; performance, photography, video, sculpture, installation and calligraphy, often within a single work. Song's radical approach blurs the lines between past and present, fact and memory, humour and trauma.

In *Broken Mirror* (1999) and *Crumpling Shanghai* (2000), Song Dong uses video to capture the impermanent. Everyday street scenes in China unfolds, with passersby going about their business, only for their reflection in a mirror or their projection on a piece of paper, to be smashed or crumpled by the hand of the artist. With these

destructive acts, Song comments on the rampant industrial growth of the modern city he is concerned with the fragility of things, of the fast-paced world that feels increasingly impossible to hold on to. Much like the rapid build and destruction of his edible cities, Song's video works and performance photographs such as *Writing Time with Water Beijing* (1995) seek to capture a fleeting moment in a world of constant change.

Always working with the humblest of materials, Song Dong constructs installations using the detritus of old Beijing. Discarded furniture, and parts of demolished courtyard homes can all be easily identified in Song Dong's most recent body of works. Taking centerstage in the exhibition, *Same Bed Different Dreams No. 3* (2018) has been created using everyday household objects, such as crockery, pendant lights and decorative knick-knacks. These mundane objects are presented on a double bed carrying the memory of the rise of his generation, behind a polished case composed of salvaged window panels, the useless byproduct of modernization. Though each window has been carefully enhanced by Song Dong with vibrantly coloured mirror or glass, their recycled nature is nevertheless evident from the still flaking paint and rusting latches. These collaged remnants of people's homes carry with them the history of a city and the lives of its people. As viewers are invited to peek inside, they are transformed into voyeurs: imagining their homes, their stories and perhaps identifying shared experiences, and primed to think of the future.

Food is a shared experience for all, it sustains life while creating culture and ritual. Song Dong has turned to food as a medium and subject throughout his career, utilizing its common nature to resonate with the broadest audience. *Edible Penjing No.1 to 4* (2000), is a set of documentary photographs taken before the interactive performance of the same title, held at Gasworks, London in 2000. These images remain the only remnants of the edible sceneries after audience gluttonized them. In imitation of traditional painting and Penjing (bonsai) art in China, Song used basic foodstuffs such as salmon, chicken thighs, minced meat and broccoli to create four miniature landscapes, accompanied by calligraphic inscriptions intentionally written in crude brushstrokes. Non-Chinese speakers may assume these are lines of elegant Chinese poetry, in fact a list of ingredients and cooking methods used to create the artwork: "three salmon heads, cooked in a microwave, and a little bit of skin, embellished with green cauliflower, pour on soy sauce; other seasonings, add to taste".

Song Dong relies on this assumption by Western audiences in order to fulfill his intention of humorously juxtaposing two contrasting cultures and stimulating curiosity. Such playfulness is a recurring theme in Song's practice as he strives to comment on East-West dynamics against the increasingly globalised modern world.

In the *Mandala* (2015) series, Song Dong takes inspiration from "Mandala", the Buddhist ritual where a circular image is created in a painstaking process of laying down granules of crushed coloured stone in an intricate pattern, only to be swept away once completed. Song subverts this tradition by creating his Mandalas using pulses, seeds and spices from around the world. The use of seasoning as a medium exemplifies how Song elevates both the everyday and the ephemeral to the status of high art.

Coinciding with *Same Bed Different Dreams*, Pace Live at 540 W 25th Street, will present a weeklong screening of video works and films that document his ongoing performance practice from the 1990s to the present. Among the works featured in the presentation are *Broken Mirror* (1999)—a film comprised of opposing images that together expose the struggle of Beijing culture to maintain its traditions despite the inevitable forces of urbanization—and *Touching My Father* (1998), a video in which Song projects an image of his own hand onto his father's body, alluding to traditional relationships between fathers and sons and offering a metaphorical bridge across the generation gaps that have marked China's recent development.

Song Dong is currently included in *The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China*, an exhibition presented at LACMA until 5 January 2020. His work will be included in the *Borderless Architectural Season staged* at Fei Art Museum, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China, and in *The Way of Chopsticks*, at Chambers Fine Art Beijing at Shanghai Urban Space Art Season 2019.

Song Dong (b. 1966, Beijing, China) emerged from a strong Chinese avant-garde performing arts community, to become a pioneering figure of Chinese conceptual art. He graduated from the fine arts department of Capital Normal University in Beijing in 1989.

Song has been the subject of many solo exhibitions at international museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2009), Curve Gallery, Barbican Center (2012), Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2015), Groningen Museum (2015) and Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2017). He has been included in prestigious group shows, including dOCUMENTA 13 (2012), 54th Venice Biennale (2011) and Gwangju Biennale (1995, 2002, 2006). More recently, Song Dong was part of the major group exhibition *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Song Dong's work can be found in the illustrious collections of the Museum of Modern Art, USA; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA; Museum Voorlinden, Netherlands; Tate Modern, UK; Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, China; and M+ Museum, Hong Kong. Song is the co-founder of artist collective "Polit-Sheer-Form Office", established in 2005 with Hong Hao, Xiao Yu, Liu Jianhua and Leng Lin.

Song Dong lives and works in his native Beijing with his wife and frequent collaborator, artist Yin Xiuzhen.

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Image: Song Dong, *Usefulness of Uselessness - Varied Window No. 12*, 2018-2019; Installation; old wooden windows, mirror, mirror panel, glass © Song Dong, Courtesy Pace Gallery.

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