



## Mo Yi: Me in My Landscape

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### Exhibition Period:

2024.9.28 – 2024.12.29

### Location:

New, Central, West Galleries

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UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents “Mo Yi: Me in My Landscape” between September 28 and December 29, 2024. The first institutional survey of Chinese artist Mo Yi, this exhibition unfolds across UCCA Beijing’s Central, West, and New Galleries with a focus on the artist’s pioneering conceptual photography of late 1980s to early 2000s, showcasing an artist whose work has had a profound, if underrecognized, impact on the development of contemporary art in China.

BEIJING, China—From September 28 to December 29, 2024, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents “Mo Yi: Me in My Landscape,” the first institutional survey of the Chinese artist, Mo Yi (b. 1958, Shaanxi). An outsider and an autodidact photographer, Mo Yi’s images of the streets have become iconic for capturing the energy and melancholy of China’s evolving social fabric at the turn of the century. Working in a variety of registers over his four-decade career, Mo Yi has consistently surprised and challenged viewers, revisiting the visual syntax of his times to critique the function of art. At first glance, his early photographs of public transport, pedestrian crossings, parks, and shopping streets may seem like “traditional” documents. Despite their familiar content, many of these pictures were made in experimental ways, and Mo Yi’s innovative methodologies set him apart from other photographers of late 1980s to early 2000s. Although little-known to the general public, and only seldom recognized in specialist circles, his work played a critical role in the development of Chinese conceptual photography. “Mo Yi: Me in My Landscape” is curated by UCCA Curator Holly Rousell and organized in collaboration with Rencontres d’Arles International Photography Festival, where a version premiered in July.

The exhibition presents more than 300 black-and-white as well as color photographs from his major series including “1m – The Scenery Behind Me” (1988), “Landscape Outside the Bus” (1995), “I am a Street Dog” (1995), “Dancing Streets” (1998), and “Red Streets” (2003), along with numerous self-portraits (1987-2003). These works represent the beginning of a visible articulation of Mo Yi’s questioning of photography, its form, its definition, and its reception. The artist has also conceived a site-specific installation, “River of Time” (2024) for the UCCA West Gallery space. To enhance the understanding of Mo Yi’s artistic process, select archival materials, including handmade artist books, personal journals, and original contact sheets, are exhibited for the first time alongside the photographic installations.



Mo Yi rethinks the possibilities of social documentary photography and ruminates on the question of whether photography can properly be art. Some of his best-known works employ inventive methods for taking pictures. The series “1m - Scenery Behind Me” (1988-1989) can be seen as Mo Yi's first attempt to use a camera as a prop, integrating performance art with photography. For the “I am a Street Dog” (1995) series, he fixed the camera at the end of a modified tripod (monopod) and carried it upside down while walking down a busy commercial street. Randomly pressing the shutter release while walking, the artist's resulting images convey a hurried, disorderly, off-kilter panorama. With this almost “game-like” approach, Mo Yi flirts with and provokes the pervasive photographic didacticism of his time, creating a body of work far estranged from the mainstream aesthetic. His creative method may seem cynical or anachronistic, but according to the artist, it felt like a true reflection of people's living conditions.

A decade later, “Dancing Streets” (1998) conveys movement, rhythm, and the pulse of the city at the transition between day and night. Bicycles feature across the series as they were omnipresent in China's cities during this period – their wheels serve as a frame through which we discover this metropolis in another register. To create these works, the artist fixed the camera to the end of a stick and carries it upside down while walking down a busy intersection. Pressing the shutter release while walking, the resulting images convey a hurried, disorderly, tilted panorama. This series, and its predecessor, “I am a Street Dog” (1995), convey visibly the artist's dislocation from the documentary photography tradition and his heightened emphasis on engaging in actions and conceptual processes as part of the artwork.

Mo Yi's work and approach suggest that, like a musician or a painter, the photographer can move with their medium and engage emotion, feeling, and gesture, rather than exclusively relying on their eyes. He also challenges the idea of the photographic image as a singular document, sometimes using groups of pictures to represent a subject. Seen today, these groupings serve as both archival records and expanded expressions of a special historical moment.

#### **About the Artist**

Mo Yi (b. 1958, lives and works in a secluded town of Jiangxi Province) is widely recognized as one of the most important artists in Chinese Contemporary Photography since the 1980s. A professional football player turned artist, his work takes the city as inspiration, often with the artist intervening and appearing in the image – capturing the experience of rapid urban



development and alienation during China's Reform and Opening years. Mo Yi has held solo exhibitions domestically at the Lianzhou Photography Festival, and Three Shadows Photography Art Center, as well as internationally at ZenFoto Gallery (Tokyo) and Walsh Gallery (Chicago, USA). His works have been featured in group exhibitions on the history of photography in China, including the "40 Years of Chinese Contemporary Photography" (Three Shadow Photography Art Centre, 2017) and "Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China" (International Center of Photography, New York, USA, 2004-2006), and have been collected by the Archive of Modern Conflict (London, United Kingdom), Guangdong Museum of Art (China), Museum of Fine Arts (Houston, U.S.A), and the Walther Collection (USA).

### **Public Programs**

On the occasion of the exhibition's opening weekend, UCCA Curator Holly Rousell will present a guided tour of the exhibition, "Mo Yi: Me in My Landscape," introducing iconic series such as "1m – The Scenery Behind Me" (1988), "Landscape Outside the Bus" (1995), "I am a Street Dog" (1995), "Dancing Streets" (1998), "Red Street" (2003), and more, as well as primary archival materials to elucidate this footballer-turned-artist's significance within the global history of photography and Chinese experimental art. Later in the exhibition period, Professor Yang Yunchang, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Peking University, has been invited to speak on the development of contemporary Chinese photography against urbanization in China. His talk will also include an interpretation of urban development.

### **Support and Sponsorship**

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### **About UCCA**

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art works to bring the best in art to ever wider audiences, global dialogue, and cultural exchange. Opened in 2007, its Beijing flagship is registered as a non-profit museum, occupying over 10,000 square meters of regenerated factory space at the heart of the 798 Art District. UCCA also operates UCCA Dune in Beidaihe, UCCA Edge in Shanghai, and UCCA Clay in Yixing, Jiangsu Province. In addition to its exhibitions, public programs, and research initiatives, UCCA includes a charitable foundation (UCCA Foundation), a comprehensive children's art education program (UCCA Kids), and a platform



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