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Mon Feb 10 | 8:30 |

Jack H. Skirball Series
\$10.00 [members \$8.00]

Far from Beijing The State of Chinese Independent Cinema

J.P. Sniadecki, Xu Ruoto and Huang Xiang: *Yumen*

Jury Award, FICUNAM, Mexico City

preceded by:

Zhu Rikun: *Cha Fang (The Questioning)*

Special Mention: International Short Film Competition, Cinéma du Réel, Paris

Best Documentary Short, Festival dei Popoli, Florence

Los Angeles Premieres

Screening organized in collaboration with Los Angeles Filmforum

Two startling new documentaries attest to the growing decentralization of Chinese independent film. In *Cha Fang* (2013, 21 min. digital video), producer, festival programmer and distributor Zhu Rikun expands the seminal role he has played in independent cinema by turning filmmaker; his camera records an absurd confrontation with policemen inside his hotel room as he visits with human rights activists in southeastern Jiangxi Province. In *Yumen* (2013, 65 min., 16mm transferred to HD), member of Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab J.P. Sniadecki teams with avant-garde artists/filmmakers Xu Ruotao and Huang Ziang for an uncanny expressionist portrait of a largely abandoned oil-drilling town in the highlands of northwestern Gansu Province. The filmmakers describe the work as "a fragmented tale of hungry souls and restless youth, bringing together narrative gesture, performance art and socialist realism into a crude and radiant collage."

Los Angeles Premieres

In Person: J.P. Sniadecki

"*Cha Fang* challenges the bounds of documentation and critique, revealing how these can be one and the same in the hands a skilled political artist."—*Senses of Cinema*

"*Yumen* was the finest piece of cinematic portraiture I witnessed at [the 2013] Berlinale."—Travis Jeppesen, *Artforum*

"The recent breakthroughs of Chinese documentary are the ones that seem to have broken documentary altogether. *Yumen* looks at the rubble and dances in it."—Brian Hu

Cha Fang (The Questioning)

(2013, 21 minute, DCP)

On July 24th, 2012, I drove to Xinyu, Jiangxi Province to cheer Liu Ping and two other local independent candidates and human right activists. While doing these things, we found ourselves tailed. At 12 o'clock at night, some policemen came to our room and started the so-called "room inspection". As they began to knock at the door, I turned on a small camcorder which was prepared in advance. So this short film is the record of such a moment. – Zhu Rikun.

Shot in exceptional and unique circumstances, the film shows a tense exchange between Power –the police – and Individual – the director himself, who is in a hotel room in the middle of the night. Like in a game of chess laid with inscrutable rules, the players make moves and counter-moves on the crazy chessboard of the strict control procedures that the Chinese police adopt with non-residents. An enclosed and claustrophobic film: an example of *cinéma vérité* in a Kafkaesque absurd – Festival dei Popoli

Yumen

(2013, 65 min., 16mm transferred to HD)

This highly experimental twist on the ethnographic documentary visits the town of Yumen, in China's northwest Gansu province, a once-thriving, oil-rich community in the 1980s that has been left depleted and derelict. Strikingly shot on film, *Yumen* tells the story of this ghost

town through a series of wandering characters and inventive vignettes in which even the spirit of Bruce Springsteen is summoned to comment on a world in ruins. A collaboration between Chinese and American filmmakers, *Yumen* pushes the boundaries of the documentary aesthetic in depicting China's past and present.

– NY Museum of Modern Art

The filmmakers

Zhu Rikun was born in Guangdong province in 1976. He studied finance in Guanghua School of Management in Beijing University from 1996 to 2000. In 2001 he founded Fanhall Films for film production, distribution and film festival organizing. Then he ran the Beijing Independent Film Festival and the Songzhuang Documentary Film Festival, a position he assumed for almost a decade.

A major figure in contemporary Chinese independent film, he produced such acclaimed films as Guangyi's *Timber Gang* (2006), Cui Zi'en's *Queer China* (2008), Li Hongqi's *Winter Vacation* (2010), Xu Xin's *Karamay* (2010) and *Pathway* (2011) etc.... He has been on the jury at the Hong Kong International Film Festival (2012), Locarno Film Festival (2011), CinDi-Seoul Digital Cinema Film Festival, and has served as advisor and co-curator on many series of Chinese independent cinema such as NYU's "Reel China" and "Hidden Histories" at the Rotterdam International Film Festival. *The Questioning* is his directing debut.

Xu Ruotao, born in 1968 in Shenyang, China, is a visual artist and film director who lives and works in Songzhuang, a growing artist village on the outskirts of the Beijing municipality. Xu began his career in the creative community of Yuanmingyuan, China's first independent artist village. He started making films in 2000 and directed *Rumination* (2009) before working on *Yumen*.

Huang Xiang, born in 1974 in southern China, lives and works in Songzhuang, Beijing. Due to his performance art piece *Jasmine Flower*, he was placed under criminal detention for 30 days and was restricted from pursuing artistic production and exhibition. Now Huang Xiang is primarily engaged in independent filmmaking, and has produced and directed his first feature, *Roast Chicken* (2012), prior to co-directing *Yumen*.

J.P. Sniadecki was born on a goat farm in Michigan, grew up in the industrial rustbelt of Northern Indiana, and has lived and

worked for several years in China. A filmmaker and Assistant Professor of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University, he produces work at the intersection of cinema and ethnography. His films screen at festivals such as the Berlinale, the New York Film Festival, and Edinburgh International Film Festival, and have received several awards, including the Joris Ivens Award at Cinema du Réel for *Chaiqian/Demolition* (2008), a Jury Award at FICUNAM for *Yumen* (2013), as well as a Golden Leopard and a Special Jury Prize at the Locarno for *Foreign Parts* (2010), co-directed with Verena Paravel. His most recent documentary, *People's Park* (2012) co-directed with Libbie Cohn, won the Best Anthropological Film award at Festival dei Popoli and Best Cinematography award at the Ann Arbor Film Festival, and had its New York City premiere at New Directors/New Films.

His filmography includes: *Yumen* (2013), *People's Park* (2012), *Foreign Parts* (2010), *The Yellow Bank* (2010), *Chaiqian/Demolition* (2008), and *Songhua* (2007). He is also founder of *Emergent Visions*, a film series that screens new independent cinema from China.

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

J.P. Sniadecki will show *Demolition* (*Chaiqian*, 2008) and *Songhua* (2007) at **Clockshop** on **Saturday Feb 8 at 7:30 pm**. See <http://clockshop.org/> for information.

J.P. Sniadecki will be presenting the Los Angeles premiere of *People's Park* (2012), by Sniadecki and Libbie D. Cohn at **Los Angeles Filmforum** on **Sunday February 9 at 7:30 pm**.

See www.lafilmforum.org for information.