

Tasneem Gallery, Barcelona presents

Traces : Landscapes in Transition on the Yellow River Basin by *Ian Teh*













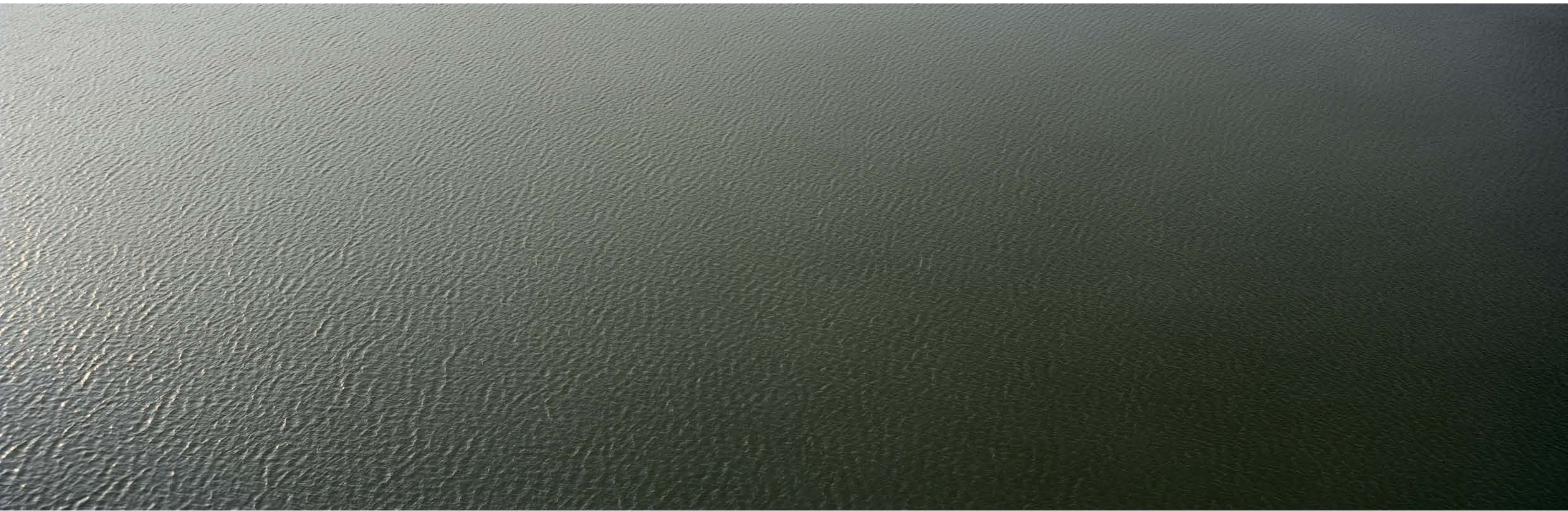












PICTURE CAPTIONS

1. Cityscape seen through a haze. Lanzhou, China.
2. Man in desert. Bayin, China.
3. Couple on the banks of the Yellow River. Hejin, China.
4. New highway on the edges of the city. Lanzhou, China.
5. Farmer's backyard. Lanzhou, China
6. Industrial waste. Bayin, China.
7. Temple and quarry. Bayin, China.
8. New residential compound in the countryside. Linfen, China.
9. Industrial sites on the banks of the Yellow River. Hejin, China.
10. New landfill. Hejin, China.
11. Power lines to factories in the desert. Bayin, China.
12. Yellow River seen from Sanmenxia dam. Sanmenxia, China.

Traces: Landscapes in transition on the Yellow River Basin

Few rivers have captured the soul of a nation more deeply than the Yellow River in China.

Historically a symbol of enduring glory, a force of nature both feared and revered the river in the 1990s, for many days, ceased to reach the sea at all. The environmental decline of this famous river is a tragedy whose consequences extend far beyond the 150 million people it directly sustains. The river's plight also underlines the dark side of China's economic miracle, an environmental crisis leading to scarcity of the one resource no nation can live without: water.

During the years I spent photographing the coal industry in China, I became interested in how economic development was affecting the country's landscape. I was less focused on the individual human stories and more interested in the marks left by man and how they affected communities undergoing radical transformation.

My photographs play with the tension between the Yellow River's place in Chinese culture and history and China's emergence as a major economic power. I have always been struck by how the nation's focus on getting ahead has marginalized other concerns. By using the landscape, I attempt to show what happens when an area that was largely rural becomes increasingly urban and industrial.

By depicting these landscapes as predominantly beautiful, almost dream-like, I seek resonance with some of the romantic notions about this once great river. At the same time, the images are meant to show the very negative physical impact of economic development. My images aim to reveal this disconnect and provide insight into the costs imposed on the environment and communities beyond the river's immediate surroundings.

Unshackled development has improved the lives of many Chinese, but has also fueled environmental collapse. These topographical changes hint at the underlying political and economic forces at play in today's China. There are appropriate laws to protect the environment and its people, but they are systematically overlooked as the ambitions of the state are prioritized over the rule of law.

These connections and the larger issues of development's impact are what make photographing this fabled river interesting to me. China's complex environmental problems go beyond linking pollution to its perpetrators. They are more deeply rooted in the way the country governs itself. By highlighting the challenges and contradictions of the Yellow River, I hope this work reveals the intricate forces driving China's economic development.

This work was made using an analogue panoramic camera that uses a lens that has a 5" x 7" coverage for excellent resolving detail. The works were designed to be printed large, to exhibit the epic scale of the landscapes. The purpose of using a panoramic format was for the work to have some subtle resonance to traditional Chinese paintings. My aim for the work is to tread a delicate balance, using aesthetic decisions, to express the transactional relationships of a nation realising a dream and the environmental costs involved.

BIOGRAPHY

Ian Teh's concern for social, environmental and political issues is evident in much of his photography. Amongst selected works, his series, *The Vanishing: Altered Landscapes and Displaced Lives (1999-2003)*, records the devastating impact of the Three Gorges Dam on China's Yangtze River. In later works, such as *Dark Clouds (2006-2008)*, *Tainted Landscapes (2007-2008)* and *Traces (2009-)*, Teh explores the darker consequences of China's booming economy.

Teh has received numerous honours. He was recently awarded the Abigail Cohen Fellowship in Documentary Photography and selected by the *Open Society Foundation* to exhibit his work in New York for the 2013 Moving Walls. In 2011 he won the *Emergency Fund* from the *Magnum Foundation*. His work was also highly commended for the *Prix Pictet* prize in 2009 and he was awarded a place on the *Joop Swart Masterclass* in 2001. Teh has exhibited widely and featured in contemporary art publications such as Elena Ochoa Foster's *C-International Photo Magazine* as well as international current affairs magazines such as *Time* and *The New Yorker*. Selected solo shows include the *Jack Shainman Gallery* in New York in 2004, *Flowers* in London in 2011 and the *Kunsthal Museum* in Rotterdam in 2012. In 2010, the literary magazine *Granta* published a 10-year retrospective of his work in China.

He has published two monographs, *Undercurrents (2008)* and *Traces (2011)*. His work is also part of the permanent collection at the *Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)*, *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH)* and the *Hood Museum* in the USA.

CV

Solo Exhibitions

- 2012 ‘Traces’. Kunsthall Rotterdam, Rotterdam, Holland.
- 2011 ‘Traces’. Flowers East Gallery, London, UK.
- 2008 ‘Undercurrents’. Kiang Gallery, Atlanta, USA.
- 2008 ‘Undercurrents’. Paris Beijing Gallery, China.
- 2004 ‘The Vanishing’. Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, USA.
- 2003 ‘The Vanishing’. Photofusion, London.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2013 ‘Traces: Landscapes...’. Moving Walls, Open Society Foundations. NYC, USA.
- 2013 ‘Traces’. Obscura. Penang, Malaysia
- 2012 ‘Traces’. The Singapore International Photography Festival, Singapore.
- 2012 ‘Looking back at Earth’. Hood Museum, Dartmouth, USA.
- 2011 ‘Coal & Ice’. Three Shadows. Beijing, China.
- 2011 ‘Traces’. Flowers at Paris Photo, Grand Palais. Paris, France.
- 2010 ‘Traces’. Noordelicht Festival. Groningen, Holland.
- 2010 ‘Earth Alert’. Korean Cultural Centre, London.
- 2009 ‘Dark Clouds’, multimedia projection. La Fabrica, Barcelona, Spain.
- 2008 ‘Made in China’, at Houston Foto Fest. Houston Center of Photography, USA.
- 2008 ‘Dark Clouds’, Ping Yao Photo Festival, China.
- 2007 ‘Three Gorges’, Minnesota Centre of Photography (MCP), USA.
- 2007 ‘Chai-Na China’, with Thinking Hands. Les Recontres Arles, France.
- 2006 ‘Air de Paris’ VU. London, Paris, New York, Berlin, Hong Kong, Singapore.
- 2006 ‘VU by Robert Delpire’. VU Gallery, Paris, France.
- 2004 ‘The Vanishing’. Art Commune, Hong Kong.
- 2002 ‘Blackpool Weekend’. Visa Pour L’Image. Perpignan, France.
- 2001 ‘ID: Worldpress Masterclass’. Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- 2001 ‘ID: Worldpress Masterclass’. Netherlands Photography Institute, Rotterdam.

Awards and Honours

- 2014 Abigail Cohen Grant Fellowship in Documentary Photography
- 2011 Winner of Magnum Foundation: Emergency Fund
- 2011 Member of Grand Jury for India Future of Change Competition
- 2010 Lens Culture Finalist
- 2009 Nikon Thursday Awards Finalist
- 2009 High Commendation for Prix Pictet Prize.
- 2009 Winner of SOPA Award for Excellence in Feature Photography
- 2004 HSBC Foundation for Photography: Finalist
- 2001 Joop World Press Masterclass

Collections

- Open Society Foundations (OSF), USA.
- Los Angeles County of Modern Art (LACMA), USA.
- Hood Museum of Art, USA.
- Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. London, UK.
- Howard Stein Collection, USA.

Monographs

- Confluence. Monsoon. (To be released March 2014)
- Undercurrents. Timezone 8.
- Traces. Deep Sleep Editions

Selected Book Publications

- Earth. Prix Pictet exhibit. Te Neues.
- C-International Photo No. 5. Ivory Press.
- World’s Top Photographers: Photojournalism. Rotovision.
- VU’ à Paris. Panini Books.
- Agence VU’ Galerie. Photo Poche.
- Pandamic: Facing AIDS. Umbrage Editions.

Other Experiences

- 2013 Masterclass Workshop at Obscura Festival. Penang, Malaysia.
- 2012 Lecturer and visiting tutor at Bath University.
- 2011 Indialogue conference in Delhi, India.
- 2011 Photowalk workshop at IIT Bombay with Third Eye.
- 2011 Conference and Workshop at Seville University (May)

Education

- 1994 Bath University (BA Honours: Graphic Design)