

VARVARA SHAVROVA

**'PORTRAITS AND STILL LIVES'**

PHOTO AND INSTALLATION AT 'CHINA/CHAI-NA' GROUP EXHIBITION  
'BEIJING/BACKGROUND' 2006 Dashanzi International Art Festival  
Opens on **Saturday May 13th 3 pm at 706 East Space (inside 798)**

**'INTERFERENCES'**

PHOTO DOCUMENTATION OF ON SITE INSTALLATION  
Continues until **May 21st at officina (inside 798)**

While the 'Interferences' exhibition is on display at officina (opened on April 29th and running until May 21st) in conjunction with the 3rd Dashanzi International Art Festival - Beijing/Background, Varvara Shavrova participates in the group exhibition 'China/Chai-na' which opens at 706 East Space on **Saturday May 13th at 3 pm.**

Within the vast, still not renovated, bewildering space of 706, the Russian-born, London and Ireland-based artist - now living and working in Beijing - will install 'Portraits and Still Lives', a series of 76 photographs and a mixed media on site installation she has produced in 2006.

Soon after her arrival in Beijing, about one year ago, the artist wandered one day around one of the city's popular hutong and courtyard area, filled with the typical bustling street life. One year later, she accidentally visits the same area to discover that everything has gone. The crowded, lively lanes have left space to deserted ruins, lacerations and silence.

Instead of engaging in the nostalgic documentation of what has gone by taking sympathetic pictures of the urban remains and of the surviving dwellers, Shavrova strolls on the ruins asking people she meets at the demolished sites to take pictures of herself. Her walk among the ruins grows slowly into an intense human experience taking shape through the episodic encounter with dwellers and passers-by. Through the photo action, the artist engages in a short yet intense relationship with members of a displaced community.

The 'Portraits and Still Lives' project displays those photos and recreate within the space of 706 almost an archeological site-specific installation of the objects Shavrova collected directly on the urban ruins.

The exhibition 'Interferences' at officina is a photo documentation of an ongoing project  
Shavrova started on an archaeological site in England where she created site-specific installations on four trenches that highlights the process of man and archaeological intervention over territory. Archaeological excavation and interference with the earth is a process comparable to medical surgery performed on human body involving cutting, removing, cleaning and stitching back. After the

artist's personal interference, by using objects and tools usually implemented by archaeologists, the excavation sites appear wrapped, bounded, sewed and stitched. Besides the photo documentation of each trench, the exhibition presents a photographic collage of the details of each specific interference action within the trenches.

'Portraits and Still Lives' is in many ways a logical progression from the 'Interferences'. It is a reflection on archaeology of the fast changing city, a kind of 'trench' that unveils the objects and utensils collected by the artists and reconnected, sewn inside black demolition net and bound up by red string. The objects - a bed, a sofa, an arm chair, a fan, a lantern, a pair of shoes, etc. - once part of daily existence in the hutong, part of life of anonymous city dwellers, rest silently in the earth, black corpses, vulnerable organs sown together, memory of the soil.

As Shavrova writes in the text she has written for the catalogue of the 'China/Chai-na' exhibition:

"Observing old courtyard houses going through different phases of demolition made me think of old people crowding in hospital corridors, waiting their turn to be called into an operating theatre, to undergo a medical surgery.

The stages of the 'surgery' vary. It starts with removal of the walls, comparable to removal of protective 'clothing'. Then partial demolition of roofs and walls takes place, leaving the white interior walls to stand in the open, vulnerable in their naked exposure, with wooden beams and joists punctuating the wall surfaces like scars and blemishes punctuate a human body, embarrassed by its nakedness in front of the prying eyes.

During the final phases of this 'surgery' the buildings are leveled with the ground, the houses are literally taken apart, brick by brick, all good materials recycled in the process, and all that remains is dust and rubble, forming man-made mounds. New temporary landscapes are created inside the demolition zone. These miniature mounds are then covered with black netting, in order to prevent spreading of the dust. The netting looks like bandages wrapping wounds. Comparable to a Tibetan sky burial, these buildings are returning to where they came from. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Also the 76 'Portraits', assembled together inside a patchwork structure, echo the mosaic framing of the details of Shavrova's 'Interferences'. Each piece is an individual moment of the artist's dense human experience in the hutongs, one detail of everlasting memories.

**'Portraits and Still Lives'**

**13-28 May 2006**

**706 East Space (inside Factory 798)**

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'Interferences'  
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