

Critic Note

Chinese artist Han Bing (1974—) has long been preoccupied with the human costs and consequences of the contemporary obsession with consumption as a dominant standard of value in so-called "modern society." His performative interventions in public space, and multimedia performance installations, as well as photography, video, painting and sculpture works, frequently engage questions revolving around the larger fallout of China's "modernisation" as a metonym for existential, social and environmental predicaments facing human societies in the throes and thrall of "development" everywhere. Having performed widely in across China, and in the US, Europe, Japan and the UK, Han Bing joins Khoj on 11 March, at 8:30 pm as a guest artist to present his first site-specific performative intervention in India, Om: Mating Season, No. 11.

Han Bing's series of performative intervention, installation, video and photography works, Mating Season (2001—), is an ongoing exploration of the gulf between social classes, shifting contemporary values and power relations in society and explores the boundaries between profane and sacred, platonic and erotic, in relation to material culture. Many works in this series involves the eroticisation and celebration of the ordinary, quotidian, objects that sustain the lives of common people in China and elsewhere, such as red bricks, shovels and other tools of manual labour, coal briquettes, cabbages—the cheap staple food of the poor that are seen as unglamorous signs of being backward, rural, poor, hick, and marginal.

Conversely, this new iteration of Mating Season offers a parodic exploration of the ecological consequences of our contemporary deification of products and fetishisation of consumptive excess, focusing in particular upon the waste produced by the frenzied consumption of our societies. For this work, Han Bing has sourced non-biodegradable plastic and other kinds of garbage from local garbage pickers who work Delhi's sprawling landfills—and for whom, ironically, recyclable garbage is a source of material sustenance in the short-term, even as the out-of-control proliferation of plastic and other waste threatens us and our planet in the long-term. Using this mound of trash as an erotic interlocutor, Han Bing asks us to think about the production of desire and value-standards, the niche practices of consumption and waste that they constitute and perpetuate, and their larger consequences for our world and for us individually and collectively.

—Maya Kóvskaya PhD Khoj Critic in Residence