

## **SAANA WANG / Statement**

Hujialou is a centrally located district in Beijing. In her series with the same name, Saana Wang shows an old Chinese neighborhood, a communist-built housing block that is faced with the rapid change of modernization. The houses, once celebrated as the realization of the idea of equality, are today earmarked for demolition and will be replaced by new buildings.

Thus, Wang stands in a direct line with the tradition of social-critical urban photography. In Wang's photos of interiors, it is the most empty walls, with traces from posters and damages to the plaster, that tell of constantly recycled change. Wang wanted to document these vanishing surroundings before they are forgotten.

However, at the same time, the photographer's work contrasts with documentary tradition when she uses the masks of the traditional Beijing opera to transform the residents into fictional characters. As a decisive step towards defamiliarization, she turns the people's spare living rooms into a stage.

More than a purely documentary approach could this staging and fictionalization of the residents allow us to see them as human beings with dreams, hopes, and expectations. And yet, the stylized, painted faces - in which pride, longing, or sheer joy in life can be seen - are only one part of the reductive stage setting. The typical masks allude to a Chinese art form, which is rich in tradition but also somewhat anachronistic, clichéd, and likewise threatened with extinction. Through the interplay with the concrete image of the real world - as seen in the everyday clothing, spare furnishings, and props of modern consumer and pop culture such as posters or toys - a picture of contemporary Chinese society emerges, both nostalgic and fractured.

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