

TIANZHUO CHEN

ASIAN DOPE BOYS

Meet Tianzhuo Chen, the man behind one of the largest underground parties in China. Born in Beijing in 1985, Chen was fresh out of high school when he decided to study abroad in London. He lived there for seven years before returning home with his Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Design and Master's in Fine Art. At the time, the Chinese art market was saturated with tradition and no match for containing Chen's creative expression. In 2015, he stepped outside of that box, amassing a multidisciplinary label of visual artists, musicians, dancers and actors collectively known as Asian Dope Boys. Their performances explore the many forms of worship, from club culture rituals and the use of Tibetan Buddhist iconography to the sanctity of the "wake and bake". Taking on his final form as pop surrealist, Chen conflates it all with our reverence for celebrity and consumerism. The result? A new religion.

PHOTOGRAPHS REN WEIXING

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How would you explain Asian Dope Boys to someone that's never seen or heard of them?

I don't like to explain what I'm doing or what ADB is about, I always feel that once I try to do that it turns out pretty boring. I'm bad with explaining things. All I can say is, "We make performances, parties, artworks and sometimes other shit..." Most of the time I just say, "Follow us on Instagram" instead of trying to explain something.

Is this world that you've created inhabitable all the time or is it more of an escape?

I guess it is a bit of both. ADB was my escape from my everyday artist job. Sometimes you feel like you've been living in the same world too long, with a lack of expectations and passion. After three years with ADB, I feel that I was in that escape for too long and it became another comfortable habitat. I think it is time to escape a bit from that too.

What did your artistic career look like before Asian Dope Boys was formed in 2015?

Not so different from now. I started doing performance and art under my own name and later just parties under ADB's name. People started to get confused about my own projects and ADB, so they started to call me Asiandopeboys. I'm fine with it, I kinda like it, so I let them call me whatever.

What solo projects have you been pursuing outside of Asian Dope Boys?

I have more solo projects this year than ADB Parties. I have a few solo exhibitions opening this year and the 12-hour performance I've been working on for almost a year will finally premiere in Beijing this October. That will be like a dream. I'm going to continue touring the UK and Venice with one of my theater pieces called *An Atypical Brain Damage*. Apart from that, our ADB third year anniversary party will take place in Shanghai.

In the past, you've voiced your frustration with the Chinese art market. What is your view of the Western art world?

They are both conservative and boring.

Where has your work been most well received and why do you think that is?

The audience's reaction is quite hard to predicate and I never understand why. Germany has a good reaction to it in general because part of my work is with rave culture and the German audience definitely gets that part. Japan is well receiving, I guess they understand the Asian part of my work and they are always curious to see something different.

Are you ever worried that your use of religious iconography can be misconstrued as blasphemous? What are your intentions when you incorporate the element of religion into your work?

No, I don't see how anything to do with religion can be seen as blasphemous. It's an interpretation and has been misconstrued in different ways over and over again in the last few centuries. Religion is reborn from that and becomes vivid again. The religious element is more about personal experience and I'm always trying to understand the boundary and absurdity between my moral side and my religious beliefs [as a Buddhist].

What are some of the steadfast themes that you explore in all of your work?

It is all about an anxiety of existing boundaries, rationality and absurdity, secular and divine, the boundaries of different kinds—people and bodies.

What is the end goal for your career?

I never had one.

What can we expect to see from Tianzhuo Chen in the future?

More unexpected things made by me.



KSANA BY TIANZHUO CHEN
2018 PERFORMANCES BY BEIO, BABY CHINAYU, NDOHO

Ksana is an excerpt of a larger 12-hour performance that Tianzhuo Chen is currently developing. The 3-hour performance takes its title from the "900 arisings and ceasings" in each ksana (the shortest unit of time in Buddhist philosophy) as mentioned in the "The Humane King Sutra." The piece is a semi-improvised experiment in physical performance, differing from the extensive planning behind Chen's previous theatrical work. The audience may freely move around the installation space as they experience the piece, encountering the symbolic bodies of the half-human, half-god performers. Calm, atmospheric music and piercing metal guitar alternately resonate, creating a fierce shamanic ritual that is almost like a contemporary exorcism. The performers express and confront desires from the viewer's own hearts, just like the wrathful deity Makahala.

GARÇON





