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**In and Out of the Mist:  
An Artistic Investigation of  
Borderland and Community**

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# **In and Out of the Mist: An Artistic Investigation of Borderland and Community**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Bournemouth University for the degree  
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# Abstract

**Author: Yoong Wah Wong**

**Title: In and Out of the Mist: An Artistic Investigation of Borderland and Community.**

The main concern of this research is to initiate a new artistic approach, with photography as a medium and an artistic form of investigation, into the borderland and community that exists from Western China to the Himalayan Region, in order to distinguish it from traditional documentary photography.

The borderland exists as an ambiguous territory between governance structures, and the movements of the borderland community often seek to surpass the command of the states. The ideas of inclusion and exclusion, identity within one's community, and the relationship on the borderlands are hard to clearly define. This research develops the hypothesis that borderless borderland is possible with the intervention of fog and mist. This thesis encompasses creative ways to photograph borderlands under fog and mist conditions, creating a surrealistic, magical and meaningful representation of human and natural connections on borderlands, whilst contributing to the finding of new knowledge. It greatly differs from current approaches of documentary photographers and photojournalists, which mostly capture the real, sensational and horrifying moments at the borderlands.

The process of discovering new methods of visual representation is important. Therefore, various practical and artistic investigations through different ways of seeing the borderlands are explored. This critical and artistic study is to achieve a

hybrid photography style between traditional documentary and contemporary conceptual photography. The final outcome of this thesis showcases a series of practical photographic works at the continuously disputed territories, and to acknowledge the beauty of the borderlands and its peoples' peaceful way of life.

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

*“It is through living that we discover ourselves, at the same time as we discover the world around us.”* Henri Cartier-Bresson (Goodreads n.d).

From Western China to the Himalayan Region is a historically contingent society, developing both within the context of internal evolution and with the external effects of world history. The border takes on essential importance for China and neighbouring countries as it serves as the fundamental attribute for literal, symbolic, historical and psychological justifications of identity. Due to the different historical and geographical experiences, the condition and relationship of borders vary regionally. Nevertheless, I do not endeavour to make this thesis a conflict resolution, political science or borderland interrogation research. My background involves art, design and specialization in photography. Therefore my intention is to use photography to explore and investigate the aesthetic of the borderlands that stretch from Western China to the Himalayan Region.

Every border area is different from each bordering country, and every border area is unique. The main reason that I am determined and focussed on investigating and exploring Western China to the Himalayan Region is because Western China and the neighbouring Post-Soviet countries are rich in cultures. These interesting cultures differ in terms of art and traditional practice of daily life. Furthermore, as the roof of the world, the Himalayan region set a challenge for me to explore its rare and unique landscape which separates the plains of the Tibetan Plateau from the Indian and Nepalese subcontinent. The Himalayas also shaped the cultures of South Asia where many of the Himalayan peaks are considered holy sanctuaries to Buddhism and Hinduism. Photography enabled me to both capture and spend time understanding the different ethnic groups of people, religions, festivals and

traditional customs. My aim is to document the cultures, humans and nature, along these vast borderlands and to make a synthesis of the sense of fact and personal truth in producing creative artistic photographic works. The resultant photographic works are not the utmost important goal; rather, the process of discovery and reflection of the discovery are more crucial to me. I intend to explore and capture the moment of borderlands encounters in an ambiguous and irresistible way for the viewer to ponder, which no other photographers have yet done in borderland photography. I am also looking forward to seeing compositions that would never have occurred to me and which could help to open up new boundaries. The process of discovering a new way to interpret the borderland is of the utmost importance to me. I believe that only by such meticulous practical research can process and analytical method contribute valuable new knowledge to the field of practical photography.

If one had to identify and classify the current and future direction of photography, embarking on photography at all would be an arduous task. Technology constantly affects the photographic medium and artists continue to challenge the boundaries by utilising new technology in order to improve their artistic practice. In a sense, "Contemporary Photography" is "Modern Photography", where surreal, abstract or exceptional artistic and practical forms are experimented with and applied at the same pace as the society evolves. Cultural and historical remarks in contemporary photography are less noticeable due to the undisputed facts that are no longer relevant in this context, whereas methodology, style, structure and conceptual approach to creation are essential. Doubtless, the boundaries of the photographic medium, like those of the borderlands, will continue to be investigated, stretched, and redefined and surely, there will always be purists who only consider images created with or through the use of a camera as photography.

Across the field of psychology and sociology, it is widely acknowledged that community context serves a major aspect in the formation of identity: it is only with the help of "others" that we can truly "see" who we are. Through this continuous

process of reflexive recognition, we are constantly shaping who we are, how we see ourselves and how others perceive us (Wilska 2002, p.197), rather than how we see "others". According to Ilmonen (Ilmonen 2004, pp.27-50) and Belk (Belk 1992, pp.37-62), all the choices we make, whether they are related to our likes and dislikes or how we choose to present ourselves, are subject to social pressures. This visible outcome of one's identity shaped by social structures is what Bourdieu refers to as "habitus" (Bourdieu 1984, p.97). The "open set of dispositions" that Bourdieu mentions is continually altered or bolstered through perception and reality (Bourdieu 1984, p.122). These personal temperaments initiate individual understanding, approaches and points of view. He also mentioned such capability of creating diversity of perceptions and processes in scopes other than those in which they were initially acquired (Bourdieu 1984, p.113). The transformation of visual perception and scenario from "object to subject" is very similar to how we see "others" and how "others" see us. In order to continue and to better discuss the concept of duality, I would definitely include the relationship between the human and nature in the borderlands. Is it possible to discuss the borderlands without including the man-made objects left there and contributed solely by human activity? Surely not.

Through literature review I will be able to refer to and analyse past and existing works in various media that involve the usage of fog and mist. In order to set my own preferences and criteria of borderland photography in fog and mist conditions, it is very important for me to first find out and define different styles and categories of fog and mist photography. Understanding the technical specifications and types of fog and mist in nature would help me to locate and identify potential areas of fog and mist formation on the borderlands. To me, the process of witnessing, seeing and transforming photography into my own artistic interpretation is of the utmost importance. The synthesis of the sense of fact and personal truth in the borderlands encounter would lead me to explore various methods of photographing the borderlands with a surrealist style, yet in a realistic condition. By doing so, I would be able to conceptualise a new artistic approach to

photographing the borderlands to achieve my research objectives.

Firstly, I would explore the lifestyles, festivals and cultural activities like most of the documentary photographers who photographed the borderlands. This would allow me to examine the similarity and contrast with documentary photographers approaches, as well as enable me to discover the borderlands better in this region. Secondly, I would explore and try to photograph the borderlands in this region (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) from an aerial point of view, to find out the amalgamated landscape and nature formation in this complicated borders region that connects different neighboring countries. Thirdly, I would investigate the roads that connect different neighboring countries. My targeted investigation approaches could provide me a better picture of the relationship between borderlanders (human), man-made structures and nature.

The final intended artistic study and findings are to achieve a hybrid photography style between traditional documentary and contemporary conceptual photography. Utilising photography as the main medium in this practice-led PhD research, can shed some light on the past and current traditional documentary photography agenda, to urge a new artistic intervention and create visual representation beyond documentation. This research will continue to uncover the magical and mysterious effects of fog and mist, bringing a whole new sense to documentary photography and contemporary photography.

In my thesis, the discovery of such magical transformation from a realistic visual to an art form through fog and mist intervention would creatively define photography as more than a medium of documentary where fog and mist could transform a real-life moment to an imaginative surrealistic space, at the same time challenging the notion of "border", where borderless borderland is possible.



Fig. 1 - Photographing area from Western China to the Himalayan Region. (In red line)  
(China 1996)



## 1.1 Research Questions

When one tried to measure a moment, it would be gone. Time is fluid and incomplete. Memory of space can only be grasped through a simple intuition of the imagination. The atmosphere and human activity at the borderlands are different every time if one notices the unnoticed and continues to discover the undiscovered. Therefore, photography may not only help to document what we see every day and record images as our visual proof and archive of reference, it can also be used to express our visual aesthetic and experience according to what we encountered. The research questions below are important to assess how photography could be applied successfully in my thesis, and go hand in hand with writing the analytical research, as well as practical photography.

- Photography as a medium of documentation: Are documentary photographs art forms or straightforward recordings?
- How is photography being used to document the borderlands?
- How can one effectively photograph in fog and mist conditions at the borderlands?

## 1.2 Research Aim

*In and Out of the Mist: An Artistic Investigation of Borderland and Community from Western China to the Himalayan Region*, will underpin the conceptual and artistic exploration of borderlands by using photography as a medium and an art form to explore the borderlands, drawing interest and capturing attention in ways that differ noticeably from traditional documentary photography.

The aim of this research is to undertake a new artistic approach, with photography as a medium and an artistic form of investigation into the borderland and community that is located from Western China to the Himalayan region, in order to improve on and distinguish it from traditional documentary photography.

The final artworks strive to evoke the ambiguous connections between Western China, its neighbouring country, and one's own "local borders": ideas of inclusion and exclusion, identity within one's community and the relationship within the wider sphere of the Himalayan region.

This thesis aims to create a series of photographic works at the continuously disputed territories, so as to acknowledge the beauty of the borderlands and its peoples' peaceful way of life. The intended artistic study and the findings are to achieve a hybrid photography style between traditional documentary and contemporary conceptual photography.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The goal is important not because of what it can give us when we attain it, but because of the life it forces us to live as we approach. The research objectives do not only serve as my to-do list, but also as a compass and guide as I navigate into the unknown and undiscovered borderlands.

- To ascertain whether documentary photography could be displaced under the fog and mist intervention.
- To review the current approaches of documentary photographers and photojournalists photographing borderlands.
- To identify whether photography would instantly capture and transmit a visual language.
- To suggest creative ways to photograph borderlands, with a surrealistic style in a realistic condition.
- To combine the synthesis of the sense of fact, personal truth and artistic input and discovery in borderlands.
- To examine if borderless borderland is at all possible.

While the notion of the borderland typically indicates an uncertain, intermediate zone, a nondescript space in-between two separated entities, the borderland in fact exists as a multinational region characterised by movements of peoples and activities that flow across borders. In order to give a comprehensive picture of these areas, analytical writing and practical photography utilising "fog and mist" as the main metaphor will help to fulfil the research question, research aim and research objectives.

## Chapter 2

# Background and Literature Review

Ideas of separation and classification are always complicated and controversial in borderlands territory, and also in art. The idea of separating art into categories and sub-categories, classifying art styles with a direct approach, has been the foundation of western history of art. In recent years however, this segmented idea of art has been more difficult than before. Contemporary art is at a stage where many works do not fit into single category. How shall one interpret the artworks below (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4)? Is the work more of a photograph or more of an installation, or does its process relate better to the process of a painting? Both artworks (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4) are excellent examples related to my question, that artworks containing multiple processes and mixing media from photography, sketching, and digitised imaging to installation are often hard to categorise. For such photographs of things show how photography can fill objects with new meaning. Marina Warner (Booth 2004, p.7) declared that in these types of photographs consciousness and content are brought to mind and confer a different, new existence on them. In general, we relate to it as "Contemporary Art". Barbara E. Savedoff (Savedoff 2000, p.31) argues that the way we perceive and comprehend photographic images differs greatly from the way we look at other images. She mentioned that photography has the unusual ability to transform its subject from a realistic visual to an art form. A disregard for boundaries of category and style, would in turn allow creativity to flow through many possibilities of new channels.

With the examples (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4), could the meaning and purpose of photography change? In fog and mist conditions, could direct documentary - straightforward recording - meaning, too, blur away from its direct perception?

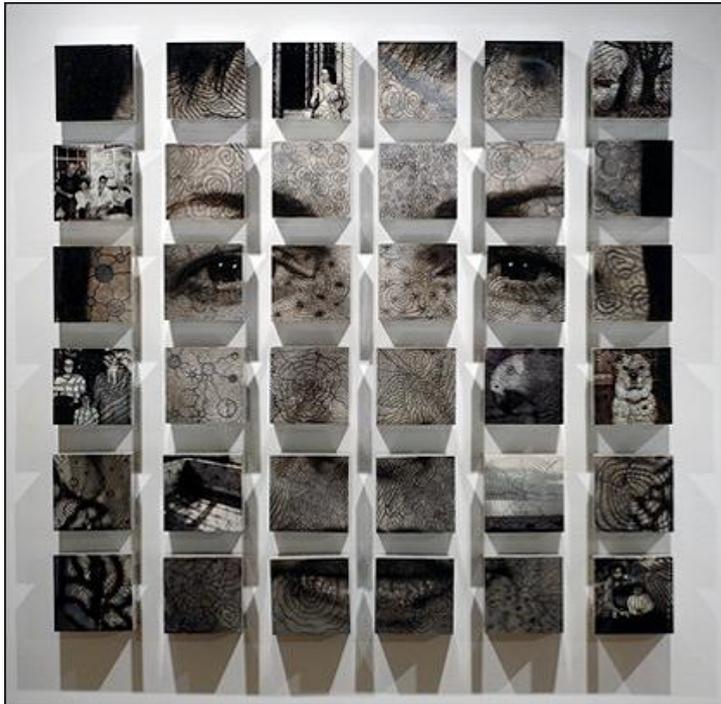


Fig. 3 - Journey Within by Luisa Mesa (Mesa 2007)  
Mixed Media on Wood Panels.  
46"x 46" x 4", 2007.

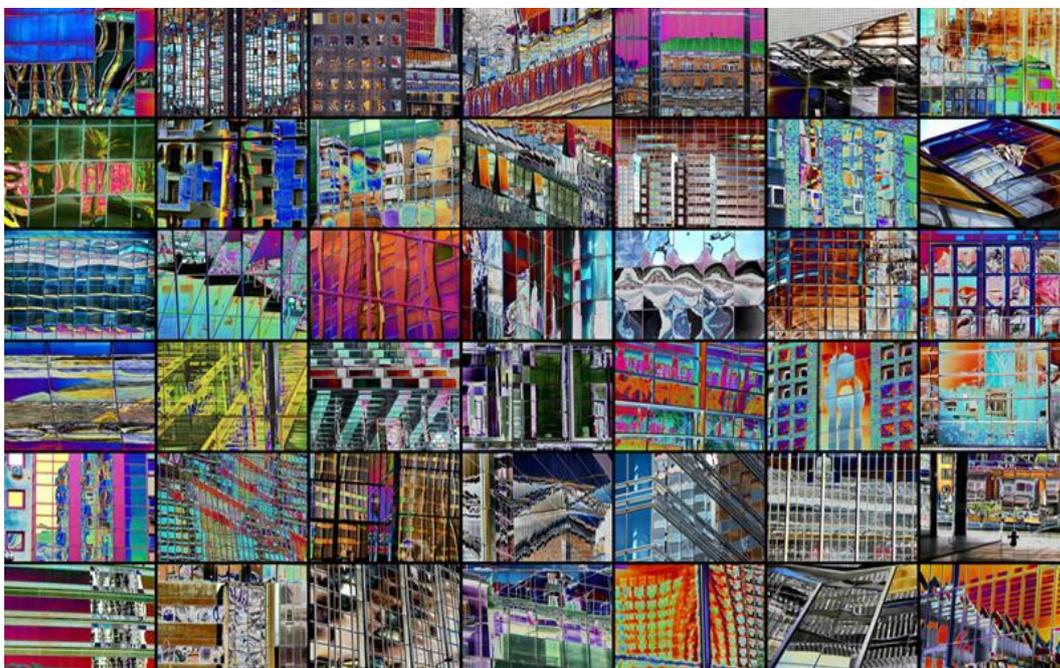


Fig. 4 - Rhythm, Repetition and Sequence - Reflection Within.  
Photographic print.  
170cm x 120cm, 2011.

*“The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera.”*

Dorothea Lange. (Vernon 2010)

The credibility of photography as a valid art form is the subject of an ongoing discussion in the in academia (Lieu 2013) and photography forum (Prodger 2012). Nonetheless, Jonathan Jones (Jones 2014) dictates that photography is not an art form, it is technology. He claims that a photographer is not in full command of the outcome when an intermediary device is used in creating the visual. Thus, an artist’s talent cannot be completely manifested in a photograph he or she captures. Professional photographers like Sebastiao Salgado (Genesis series) who have laboured for hours and years to capture an image in their mind's perception know that this not true (Lacayo 2013).

## **2.1 Photography as a medium of documentation: Are documentary photographs art forms or straightforward recordings?**

Documentary photography continues to arouse questions of artistic value and the purpose of its endeavour. Can it be considered art, or is it very simply straightforward recordings of its subjects?

Liz Wells (Wells 1997, p.20) claimed that when a technology exits it can become acquainted and initiated into civil use in a diversity of both anticipated and unexpected directions. Photography is akin to the language of visualising. The same photograph cannot be reproduced unless one is purposely imitating the work in the exact timing and composition. Besides where one "stands", what one "sees" is supposedly an experience of communication.

We communicate with verbal language each day. Some of us are able to communicate in multiple languages. In order to communicate in a second language besides the mother tongue requires training and understanding of

everyday happenings and cultural events. We usually relate visuals to the idea of language: a kind of nonverbal communication that can be understood, interpreted and decrypted by visual appearance. This visual information and memory accumulated over time become one's registered knowledge and experience.

In photography, visual interpretation, visual reality and documentary studies are typically based on "photojournalism". Photographers like Sebastiao Salgado and Amy Vitale who enter the borderland come equipped with a documentary approach from a photojournalism background. This means photojournalists take what they see. The utmost importance in storytelling and reporting is the fact and truth. Manipulations of imagery are not permitted in photojournalism (NPPA 2012). On the other hand, the studies of fine art and contemporary photography maintain a rare presence in borderland research.

Photography as an art form has been thoroughly and continually debated due to its chemical and mechanical nature. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, photographs were mainly found in historical records and archives; they were also frequently used as a tool to inform the public of daily and ongoing issues as a way to improve social transformation. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, we find the line blurred between fine art and documentary visuals. As an art form that depicts diversified agendas significantly different from other forms of art, photography now draws interest and attention in a drastically new way. Martha Rosler (Linfield 2012) proclaimed, "Imperialism breeds an imperialist sensibility in all phases of cultural life"; and photographs appeared as the most imperialist of all, as it detains a fraction of time.

Nevertheless, photography critics like Susan Sontag (Sontag 2011) think documentary photography is not an art form because it is directly related to and revealing the occurrence of an event. A piece of photographic art usually contains hidden meaning and conceptual representation that urges the audience to discover and puzzle out according to their own interpretation and experience.

## **2.2 Photography in Practice (Fog and Mist Photography)**

*“The painter constructs, the photographer discloses.”*

Susan Sontag (Goodreads n.d).

In practical photography, fog and mist photographs often occur in landscape and environmental photography, photojournalism and artistic photography. Fog and mist remain the main metaphor and component of the subjects in these forms of photography; however, their content greatly differs, one from another.

### **2.2.1 Landscape Photography**

Landscape photography generally showcases the essence of sheer beauty in nature, often free of man-made structures. I would define landscape photography's aim as capturing marvellous nature and appreciating its beauty as the key aesthetic goal. Together with portraiture, landscape photography dominated photography's content from its beginnings. Photography has had an intimate relationship with the landscape aesthetic, similar to portraiture's core interest in human faces and figures (Gilbert 2012, p.15). Portraiture is usually taken in vertical (portrait) format, tending to focus on facial and figure expression, but the unique characteristics in each person's expression and the ever-changing human condition have allowed its theme to continue to flourish, likewise with landscape photography. Till now, almost all cameras' viewfinders have been produced in "landscape" - horizontal format. It is also the norm and basis of decent landscape photography. This is mainly because the landscape format allows photographers to better capture the horizon, allowing viewers to see and sense the space better

and to a greater extent when the image is displayed. Therefore, the portrait format is not usually an ideal format for landscape photography, but much more suitable for portraiture.

Landscape does not fit exactly into any object or subject classification; it rather relates to how human's visualise the land form (Gilbert 2012, p.55). The visual experience and picturesque quality of landscape rest well as an aesthetic category. Similar to any aesthetic category, the ideas of segregation and scrutiny are the fundamental departure points in landscape photography. First, there is the distinction between object and subject in landscape, then the selection process of pleasing and quaint beauty in nature. The perception of landscape photography makes the photographer observe, distinguish and often be alienated from nature. Pure landscape photography tends to focus solely on the land, without human and man-made objects. Pure landscape photographers like David Ward and Joseph Meehan, strive to explore and showcase the untouched and rare natural landscape beauty (see p.22 & 27). Certainly there are many undiscovered natural wonders in different continents beyond our imagination that we have yet to come across. Magical nature continues to surprise and amaze us in different seasons, climates and horizons.

While photography was produced for landscape, landscapes have been remade for photography; and landscape photography changes the way humans see the earth's surface, while photographers continue to explore the notion of landscapes. Landscape photographers predominantly show landforms, light and weather conditions as their content in photography. Therefore, landscape photography covers a broad definition, such as seascapes, waterfalls, mountains, lakes, rivers, and forests, which are especially popular in classical landscape photography. Aside from nature it now also includes urban settings and industrial areas, especially in much contemporary landscape photography works like Yann Arthus Bertrand, Andrew McConnell and Daesung Lee (see p.17-18). Classical landscape photography is mostly inspired by traditional landscape paintings, whereas still life

painting correlates to still life photography, and portrait painting correlates to portrait photography, although the techniques can be applied to other photographic subjects as well. There is a significant shift in landscape photography where notable photographers like Edward Weston and Ansel Adams often use different representation to direct the relationship between man and nature, rather than capturing pure nature and environment only.

During the fifteenth-century, landscapes were painted as backdrops in biblical or mythical storytelling, such as in Jan van Eyck's *The Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1432 and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1485. Most of these "prospect" landscape paintings depict a rich, fertile and marvellous environment, while the foreground is filled with mythical characters. This contrasts with the late Renaissance period (17<sup>th</sup> century), by which time landscape paintings appear to encompass a lot of human activity in rural areas and battlefields such as Pieter Brueghel the Younger's *Crucifixion*, c. 1617 and Peter Paul Rubens's *The Battle of the Amazons*, c. 1615. Most of these landscape paintings were filled with heavy and dramatic clouds, as if the future was uncertain. The green space - Landscape - is shrinking in size tremendously century by century and day by day, losing to the human social and economic system. This pushes landscape photographers to divert and explore new courses. Eugenie Shinkle claims that the close future of contemporary landscape photography is a thrusting out of spaces and systems that dominated the green environment - Cityscape (Deriu 2012, pp.32-36). Such populated environments only add and intensify the sense of disaffection and hostility. Not only do humans alter the landscape for their own comfort, but many irresponsible and uncontrolled corporations, factories and individuals contaminate the landscape and ecological environment continuously. Certainly the future of landscape is reflected in such worrying conditions as much as in landscape photography. What is there left in the future to be photographed as pure "landscape"? What was once exuberant and aesthetic in landscape photography could shift its position into a scientific archival category when all landscapes are dominated by cityscapes in the future.

The context of “contemporary” landscape photography pronounced a juncture in the worldwide phantasmal, that the “unreal, culmination, homeliness and annoyance” of pessimistic abstraction and metaphor are applied with landscape as a cultural backdrop and conceptual ground of (Fig. 5 - Fig. 7) recent photographic projects (Roberts 2010, p.137). Landscape photography that was once focussed on inviting, pure and virgin land form would be considered a luxury for mere admiration; instead, it is as if a hostile environment and inhabited landscape are much more welcome in contemporary landscape photography. Why? It is not only because of environmental decline, but such problematic environments need immediate reconciliation before all hope and natural green is gone. It is evident in many contemporary landscape photographs that apocalyptic environments are conceptually captured and displayed by current photographers for immediate meditation and reflection on such drastic environmental and pollution issues.

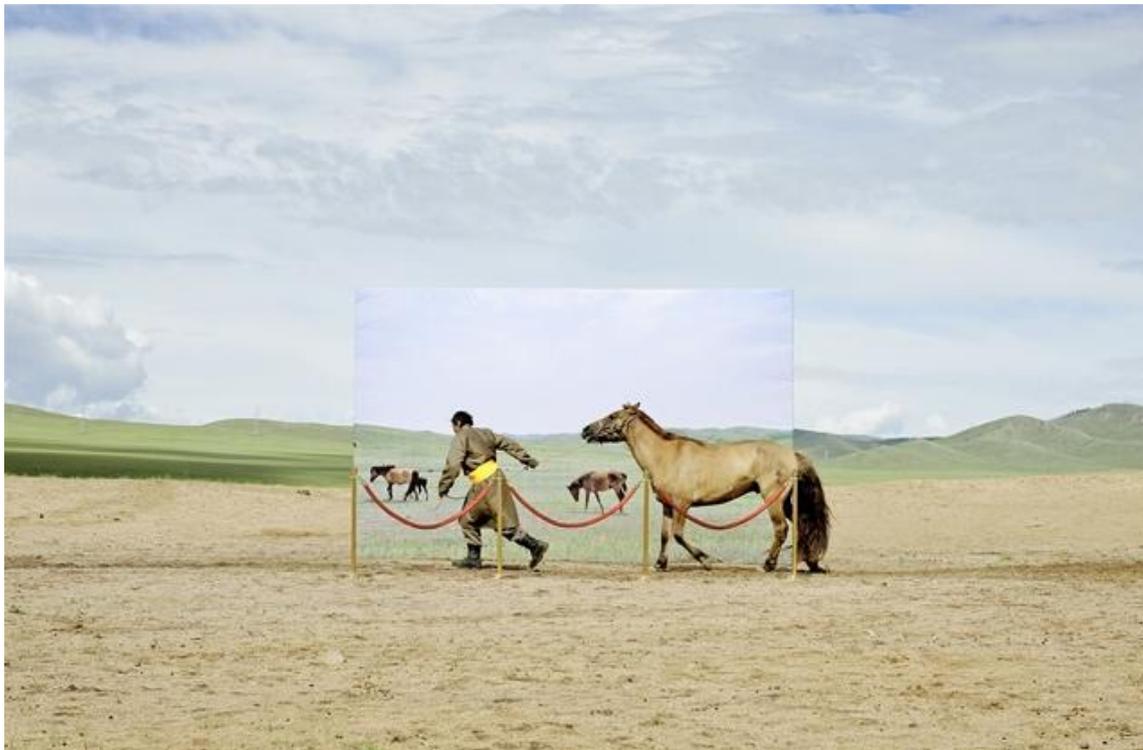


Fig. 5 - *Futuristic Archaeology* by Daesung Lee, 2014. (Lee 2014)



Fig. 6 - Village in the swamps, Joglei, South Sudan by Yann Arthus Bertrand, 2011. (Bertrand 2011)



Fig. 7 - *Rubbish Dump*, Agbogbloshie, Ghana by Andrew McConnell, 2009. (McConnell 2009)

Photographs seize an open space into a specific location; the earth's surface is arrested as landscape. Photographs enfold reality; they turn into an act of colonisation (Wells 2011, p.56). The entrapment of a single frame of landscape would only allow viewers to see and understand a limited prospect compared to the photographer who has actually been to the site. The perceived subject in landscape photography is of course a subjective representation according to one's knowledge, cultural background and preconceived ideas. Nonetheless, photography provides and extends our sense of knowledge, not only by bringing us to nature as a witness, but also sharing awareness of the human and landscape relationship, as well as geographical and historical facts. When humans continue to discover the undiscovered, the discovery usually leads humans to alter reality (landscape and landform) and push the boundary to a new horizon. The thirst for more and better, leads humans to a self-conflicting dilemma with the limited green. Many times, during the interventions between land and space which mostly resulted from human activity, we feel sorry, apologise, feel remembered and forgotten. In urban areas and cities, we may only find artificial green when new humanscapes continue to spread at speed, eliminating the natural green space. As humans colonised the land over and over, the modified landscape resulted in a paradox of the divine and the repulsive, serenity and agony.

Landscape photography itself has evolved as a powerful phenomenon since the invention of photography: from admiration of the sheer joy of beauty in landscape to a melancholic struggle of humans to maintain the green environment. Land matters. From the ecological standpoint it matters too, and concerns political, social and economic development. (Wells 2011, pp.301-302) Contemporary landscape photography, exercised by current emerging photographers like Yann Arthus Bertrand, Andrew McConnell, Daesung Lee, Christian Fletcher, Edward Burtynsky, Adam Jeppesen and Todd Hido, urges us to have confidence in our own awareness and bring landscape into focus for critical evaluation in regards to methods, contexts, topics and creative results. If viewers cannot give in to the idea of admiration of sheer beauty for the remaining natural green space, at least the

critical and shameful act of human photographs would help to provoke and reflect the attention needed to protect the landscape.

Viewing and analysing some of the practical landscape photographs captured during fog and mist presence could help to navigate the unfinished contexts and uncover the potential of new landscape charm. In my landscape photographs, I often see that what is less is more. When fog and mist surround the landscape, low visibility could push photographers to unwrap the mysteriously unexpected beauty in the landscape, as compared to the clear and bright day. The ordinariness in borderlands is once again brought to light for the re-examination of territorial and new frontier relationships. It is another way of suggesting the need for attention to landscape at the borderland region, while conflict continues to damage universal open or green space. I envision this would be how I should strive to photograph the landscape from Western China to the Himalayan region during this research, in order to relate and create multiple dimensions of social context that would break the framed, motionless landscape aesthetic.

*“If photographs are messages, the message is both transparent and mysterious.”*  
Susan Sontag (Sontag 2001, p.111)

By reviewing the “lines of sight” evident in the *geographic* photograph of the non-Westerner, we become aware that it is not simply a captured view of *other*, but rather a dynamic site at which many gazes or viewpoints intersect. (Lutz 1993, p.187). However, often the gaze through the camera viewfinder from the photographer in the actual space (landscape), is very different than the viewer’s gaze at the photographed landscape. Firstly, the sense of location between the photographer and the viewer is different: the photographer being on the actual site, and the viewer being off-site, possibly in the gallery to view the arrested landscape. Secondly, the moment of the landscape is ever-changing until the photographer freezes it. However, the viewer is looking at the framed, deceased, still moment of the landscape. Thirdly, the landscape photographer obtains the

power to control and determine the captured moment, but the viewer can only gaze from a predetermined moment of the landscape captured by the photographer. The landscape photographer would conceptualise, share new sight and contribute knowledge as the primary provider, whereas the viewer would be the receiver and beneficiary. Each would interpret the landscape differently from their own point of view, preconceived knowledge and cultural background. It is very rare that the photographer and the viewer depict and interpret a landscape photograph in the same way.

Landscape photographers are given the opportunity to examine the environment from various points of view: 1. Standpoint and 2. Narration, both of which lead to a different perception and its significance. Each standpoint to the landscape provides different sights and scenes. The act of what the photographer will be able to gaze upon depends very much on his/her standpoint. Each standpoint has its own advantages and disadvantages, because the higher one stands, the more one may see, but may not know what is at the bottom of the landscape until the photographer reaches it. The standpoint provides the fundamental base to allow the photographer to narrate his/her own points of view regarding to the journey and borderland geography. The photographer would proceed to envision and capture the landscape in the composition he/she desired in order to narrate the facts or to conceptualise his/her context and idea. The Westerner who explores these landscapes (From Western China to the Himalayan Region) brings important input and output of different interpretations of the region as compared to the local or Non-Westerner. The Western photographers would tend to capture the significance and appealing yet distant visual as their content. However, the local and Non-Westerner tend to witness and spend their time well to capture the ordinariness, yet to bring out the extraordinary. Often the same landscape may be photographed and perceived uniquely differently by the Westerner and Non-Westerner in their own experience, standpoint and narration. Nonetheless, the photographer's gaze and the gaze of the viewers (Borderlanders) overlap in most situations; only the landscapes remain the same as the foreground or backdrop

which indicate the possible sense of location and geography. Landscapes from Western China to the Himalayan Region continue to stimulate different experiences as an ideal ideological and ecological space to inspire and to dream beyond the borders.

Could there be more beyond the expression of sheer beauty in landscape photography? How can photographers break through the ordinariness of the misty and foggy landscape photography?



Fig. 8 - Nearly Monochrome by David Ward (Ward n.d)

Of course, there is plenty of innovative work in the landscape genre, such as David Ward's mesmerising work on small-scale scenes. Almost monochromatic subjects (Fig. 8) are what he focusses on. The photographic works are in colour, but looking almost monochromatic, display a positive result and inspiration to my practical photography research work on borderlands. When fog and mist enter a colour scene, it also results in a similar grey tone, but still in colour. David Ward's works also urged me to look at small and critical details existing in the environment.



Fig. 9 - Morning Mist by Jan Töve (Tove 2013)

Jan Töve's intricate Nordic landscapes (Fig. 9) that resemble Chinese watercolour or Chinese national painting show me that I can take a photograph in any location and weather condition, pushing the art forward with his cleverly-conceived and subtle compositions.

Yet, at the more commercial end of professional landscape photography, and even more so on the amateur side, the photographic style remain confined neither leading to a significant leap in creativity nor breaking the current stylistic mould. This is why we encounter repeated ideas and similar visuals frequently. Could it simply be that photographers are reacting to their customers' tastes? In many cases I am sure this is so. Or maybe it is down to the mainstream photographic press which has never really been able to see beyond this style. It is, rather depressing that very little seems to have changed in landscape imagery unless photographers have been willing to explore a much deeper meaning. Until today, the vast majority of landscape photography continues to appear in a classical landscape style which was innovative 150 years ago.



Fig. 10 - Animal inclusion - Serenity. (Outdoor n.d)

I am exploring landscapes to understand what makes them photographically interesting or at least different from the usual repeated imagery. Images with animals' inclusion (Fig. 10) express serenity and quietness in the landscape. This image (Fig. 11) is considered a typically "romantic" landscape when couples express their loving relationship in parkland. On the other hand, a similar image (Fig. 12) is also in parkland, but free from our notion of romanticism due to the lonely human appearance and action in the composition. The fog and mist help to enhance the content dramatically in terms of nature's beauty from an ordinary place. Besides the dramatic fog and mist in the landscape, the action and expression of the characters are important factors in depicting the content. The two photographs below urge me to pay attention to simultaneously occurring actions that may lead to defining the content of the moment. Another way of expressing this is to say "content free", such that only the form carries the interest with the inclusion of the human in the composition.



Fig. 11 - Human inclusion - Romanticism. (Couple n.d)



Fig. 12 - Human inclusion - Lost and Desperate. (Christopher n.d)



Fig. 13 - Industrial Pollution - Environment Proof by Peter Baas. (Baas n.d)

Landscape photography also includes the controversial topic of environmental air pollution. Air pollution (Fig. 13) is harmful substances and toxic chemicals emitted to the air, resulting in contamination on earth. Heavy industries are considered the primary contributing factor to air pollution. Such devastating events may remind us of foggy and misty days.



Fig. 14 - Natural Pollution, Mount Bromo. (Mount 2012)

Both the natural gases and the toxic chemicals released to the air resulted in resemblance to fog and mist effects. The forces of nature, like tsunamis, earthquakes, storms and volcanic eruptions (Fig. 14) are some of the most dangerous and deadly natural disasters. The resulting fog can be a quiet and deadly act of nature.



Fig. 15 - Fog and mist photography by Joseph Meehan. (Meehan n.d)

The final practical work of the thesis, *In and Out of the Mist* will explore the balance of monochromes and the limited usage of achromatic values, while capturing borderland activities from Western China to the Himalayan Region (which include landscape activities and puzzling human activities) by challenging the mind's neutral grey balance. A surrealistic style will be brought into the reality of an elusive moment. As compared to the above images (Fig. 15) from Joseph Meehan's fog and mist landscape photography, which takes place in vibrant colours and detail, resting calmly in perfect composition, my borderlands final photography series will demonstrate the opposite, suggesting the unfinished, the ongoing, the imperfect composition and the lost track of location and time in the borderlands.

## **2.2.2 Documentary Photography**

During the late 19th century, the documentary photography genre was born. Timothy O'Sullivan, Karl Bulla, Edward Curtis, William Henry Jackson and Peter Henry Emerson are the most notable early period documentary photographers. Documentary photography normally relates closely to photojournalism. Both documentary photography and photojournalism involve the quest of who, where, when and how. They remind us to look at place, time and subject. However, there are differences between photo documentaries and photojournalism: similar media, nonetheless sending different modes of message. The documentary work can be completed in a short period or over stretches of long periods of time that last for decades; documentary photographers reveal life. On the other hand, photojournalists reveal moments of life. Photojournalism images are constructed for temporary audience involvement, whilst documentary photography images are for long term critical research. Photojournalists capture frozen instants of "moment" rather than revealing layers of antiquity and the passage of time - "life". Photojournalists sometimes leave viewers with unfinished context and incomplete storytelling; they leave the viewers with incomplete evidence, leading viewers with biased, different and unsettling opinion. Photojournalism images are usually published in newspapers which are for short-term consumption and purposes.

The documentary photographer is given more time and space to show the interlacing layers of life, aspects of everyday existence, and various conditions of people's emotions over different periods of transition. When exhibited and presented, viewers are emboldened to analyse according to their own experience and knowledge. Documentary photography images are published in higher quality magazines such as National Geographic, Life and Time, or books from renowned publishers such as Magnum, Phaidon and Taschen.

The motivation, reaction and relationship each attach to the images created is the core distinction between documentary photography and photojournalism. The documentary photographer studies his or her subject as an extension of research and calculation; the photojournalist usually reacts instinctively and intuitively to an incident and situation. The documentary photographer creates and uses the images as a form of storytelling, to understand and elaborate the study beyond the camera viewfinder, while the photojournalist captures the moments that appeal to him or her. It is because of time constraints that photojournalists capture the essential images by juxtaposing the direct messages and images in a short period, rather than the interpretation with elaborate words and exquisite images that require time and witness by the documentary photographer to disclose the undiscovered aspect of life.

Photojournalism is usually not for artistic pursuit or aesthetic indulgence: it can be used to promote political propaganda, social change, cultural festivals and celebrations. Its main objective is to record the evidence of fractions of time and moments of a specific situation.

Documentary photography may be presented in a single image or more often presented in a series accompanied by text to describe the event, time and location with thorough research and in-depth articulation. Documentary photographers transform, create and accumulate meticulous moments of timeless impression of the truth.

Of course, there are photographers who publish books and exhibit their photojournalistic photographs, yet what is attained is simply astounding and nothing more. Having travelled extensively in this region (from Western China to the Himalayan region), I am sure these sensational, momentary flashes do happen in many other critical and conflict-driven borderlands. Angry borderlanders, poor and starving refugees, destroyed homeland and communities in pain are not new to me. However, there is much more subtle unfinished content in life, than “how”

and “why” behind the scenes which is untold or unexplored, and needs further research or to be rediscovered in a different way than attention grabbing and pounding images of the helpless. For example (Fig. 16), Timothy O'Sullivan's prominent photos on subjects in the American Civil War were circulated for many years.

Timothy H. O'Sullivan's Civil War photographs are difficult to fit into any aesthetic category. The main reason is because of his involvement in exploratory expeditions in the Civil War as a documentary photographer. Another reason is because his photographs often evoke the mystery, inhospitable landscape and horrors of war. It is for these reasons that his works are often categorised as scientific photography (Giblett 2012, P. 79).



Fig. 16 - Battle of Gettysburg, American Civil War 1863 by Timothy H. O'Sullivan. (Sandler 1989)

The above photo, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, photographed by Timothy H. O'Sullivan, became well known many years later because it reflected the true extent of the Civil War. The photograph shows dead soldiers on the battleground.

This became such an iconic photograph that many photojournalists today are still trying to capture the same sensational moment. It was unlike any landscape and artistic photography, which usually depicted a calm and peaceful imagery. The smoke from the battleground creates a sense of horror and a devastated scene of human conflict and dispute over territory.

Documentary photography such as war photography usually contained vivid, shocking and intense imagery to evoke the viewer's and reader's emotions. The public learns ongoing information, such as cultural, political and environmental issues, through documentary photography. In order to show and publish injustice around the world, the Magnum international cooperative agency was founded by pioneer photojournalists after World War II, in 1947, in Paris. The highly regarded masters and pioneers of documentary Magnum photographers are Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, David Seymour and George Rodger. All of their works are unique and provide historical evidence resulting in the archive of time.

During the 1970s, photographers such as Bernd and Hilla Becher started to gain interest in industrial conceptual art through documentary photography. They are renowned for their articulate documentation of manmade industrial structures, such as water towers (Fig. 17), blast furnaces, mine heads, gas tanks, etc. Both photographers incorporate non-distorted angles, repetitive objects and documented structures as their basis in compiling subjective and conceptual works of art.



Fig. 17 - Water Towers by Bernd and Hilla Becher Germany, 1980-1989. (Guggenheim 2013)

Bernd and Hilla Becher's rare approach and unique concept in documentary photographs were defined as works of art rather than mere historical documents. Instead of solely and directly capturing an event, Bernd and Hilla Becher inspired many photographers to approach documentary images from a personal interest, unique style, subjective and artistic dimension, by amplifying the documentary value with an individual view. An "intellectual" documentary photography work does not only capture the direct and present moment which requires well trained

technical skill and observation, it also requires analysis, research and long periods of study by producing a series of works that take a concept as a starting point into a new artistic form. The traditional distinction between documentary image and work of art has become harder to define when objective representation and subjective meaning synthesise into a new visual interpretation. Nowadays, documentary works are being recorded in a creative way and style. Nonetheless, the main goal of documentary should be to achieve the same function - to provide information. The provided visual information should be correct, truthful and original.



Fig. 18 - Helicopter to evacuate a fallen soldier, Long Khanh Province, Vietnam War, 1966. (Epley 1966)



Fig. 19 - The Iraq War by Carolyn Cole, 6 April, 2003. (Cole 2003)

At first glance, from a photographic and chaotic devastation point of view, there seems not much difference (photographically) between the Vietnam War in 1966 (Fig. 18) and Iraq War 2003 (Fig. 19), although these historical events are 37 years apart. Even though the motivation, reasons for war and geographical location appear very different, the battlefield flame and horrifying imagery are similar, and the way of dying remains the same. The smoke and flame are everywhere; many local residents are homeless in their own homeland. The smoke and flame seem to find their way to replay again and again, as an important role in the epic struggle of human history. The recent war photographs below (Fig. 20 and Fig. 21) by Zorah Miller demonstrate the ongoing lethal and devastating effects of war.



Fig. 20 - War Photography by Zoriah Miller. (Miller n.d)



Fig. 21 - War Photography by Zoriah Miller. (Miller n.d.)

Military administrations and governments release war photographs according to their own preferred content and practice. The main purpose is to renounce the death toll in armed conflicts as the result of history. The "nature" of death and the

"nature" of modern weaponry are collapsed into each other. These elements of "nature" are bolstered by the obvious realism of photography. Faced with these representations of the "steps" of the war, based upon the commonly accepted truth-value of the documentary photograph, readers are encouraged to think of the war in these terms, but not in any others. Nothing has changed: the heat, the flame and the smoke still occur in every war zone. In reality, technology changed everything; death remains the only constant.

When stylistic innovation is no longer possible in the world, what remains is an imitation of dead styles (Foster 1985, p.17). Whether it is the first testing rocket launch (Fig. 22) or the unauthorised and threatening launch of a satellite (Fig. 23), the massive heat, flame and gas emitted from the rocket creates a false natural effect of fog and mist that pollutes the earth. It also depletes the stratospheric ozone. Without mentioning the failed rocket launch that also polluted the earth and space, the reactive gases emitted from the rocket into space, too, cause ozone molecules to break apart. The "cost" we pay for each rocket launch is high.



Fig. 22 - The Bumper C-2, July, 1950. The First Rocket Launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida, USA. Rocket testing systems and research on the upper atmosphere. (Grinter 1950)



Fig. 23 - North Korea, satellite Kwangmyongsong-3 launch, 2012. (Ians 2012)

The mass protest on the street (Fig. 24) in Taksim Square, Istanbul, Turkey, proves that the use of tear gas, water cannon, pepper spray and rubber bullets are effective enough to disperse and diffuse the massive rallying crowds. However, there are many questions, such as the use of chemical material causing side effects to the local citizens. Tear gas and pepper spray, also known as a lachrymator, are non-lethal chemical weapons that cause pain in the respiratory and nervous system, as well as tears and blindness in the eyes. The temporary effects of tear gas and memorable acts from the public are direct conflicts between government and citizens who demand transparency in democracy. The hazy gas diffused the tension, makes the documentary photography below impactful when the surroundings become chaotic and confusing.



Fig. 24 - Street Protest on 11 June 2013 by Hurriyet Newspaper Online Photo Gallery. (Dogan 2013)

Through understanding the nature of documentary photography, my latest photography series, *In and Out of the Mist* will be different compared to pure documentary of political conflict and violence. All of the above samples show similar effects of fog and mist by capturing the most devastating moment or provocative fragment of unrest. However, in contrast, the *In and Out of the Mist* series will depict the surreal moment and explore documentary method by capturing moments of silence at borderlands from Western China to the Himalayan Region, without having any intensely bombarded visual. It will, instead, be peaceful and calm, motivated and quietly urging understanding of borderlands harmony. The fog and mist are more than an appearance and effect on the borderland; they also represent the philosophical intervention of natural senses and instincts. The *In and Out of the Mist* series suggests to us to photograph in the unknown borderland, and to look at iconic subjects and content with fresh thoughts. It also challenges us to try to understand and feel a reaction and consequence within us, as we understand the meaning of that impact. Seeing and hearing the reality may differ from the sudden dream states that we encountered.

### **2.2.3 Fine Art Photography**

"Art Photography" and "Fine Art photography" have no universally accepted terminology. These types of photography works are created to support and satisfy the photographers' creative vision. The resulting artistic values are very much associated with the eyes of beholder. Unlike commercial photography and photojournalism, artistic photography does not necessarily need to serve a function or provide information. A fine art photographer is free to express his or her own metaphor, vision and feelings toward the subject matter. The aesthetic and expressive quality of an image is of the utmost important to the artistic photographer. In a sense, it can be contemporary, conceptual and experimental. There is no work that has not been done before; it is related to the matter of how we re-create it in a way that we have never seen before. "Originality" in a piece of

work is always the hardest thing to obtain. The ideas, the styles, the techniques or the contents are taken from somewhere that inspires the photographer, in order to re-create his or her own creative or innovative work.



Fig. 25 - Nimbus, Photograph by Berndnaut Smilde, 2010. (Gkiouzelis 2013)

Berdnaut Smilde, the Dutch artist from Amsterdam, has installed artificial atmospheric clouds in empty gallery spaces (Fig. 25). In what seems like a magical act, Smilde perfects the atmosphere in the room by regulating the temperature and humidity of the space; then, when the moment is right, he activates the fog machine, spraying cotton-like cloud into the middle of the gallery space before it evaporates.

“I’m interested in the ephemeral aspect of the work. It’s there for a brief moment and then the cloud falls apart. It’s about the potential of the idea, but in the end it will never function. The photograph is a ‘document’, the only proof of its existence if a viewer misses it” Smilde said. (Ang 2013)

Smilde carefully observes and chooses dreamlike spaces as his setting, such as empty galleries and churches (Fig. 26 and Fig. 27). During the first forming of the injected clouds and fogs, it seems as if strange life forms will emerge out of them. Later on, the strange clouds and fogs seem to have strangely magnetic effects that absorb all life within the room and disappear gradually when one tries to approach and catch them. It reminds us of painter Rene Magritte's surreal puffy cloud paintings, except these are photographic works.



Fig. 26 - Nimbus, Photograph by Berdnault Smilde, 2012. (Gkiouzelis 2013)



Fig. 27 - Nimbus, Photograph by Berdnault Smilde, 2012. (Haag 2012)



Fig. 28 - New Landscapes, photography by Yao Lu. (Vomitto 2008)

Yao Lu skilfully addresses the issues of global sustainability and the current state of our environment. His series of work (Fig. 28) depicts piles of garbage and waste dumps covered in green and grey fishing nets, reassembled and digitised in computer manipulation that remind us of traditional Chinese landscape painting shrouded in fog and mist. Quite exquisitely, the images are inspired by traditional Chinese paintings and are as harmonious in beauty as they are jarring in content. This series of works reminds us of the past and future at the same time, as the colour is cleverly saturated. It looks like painting and photography at the same time. Yao Lu intends to address the excessive growth of China, where nature is quickly dominated by unwanted waste and crowded buildings, endangering the environment.

Yao Lu continues to maintain his style with a graceful feeling. The element of traditional Chinese painting like the use of composition, line, framing and density can be observed easily in his works. He believes that a good artwork should be composed of core aesthetic elements, reflecting the intellectual knowledge, justifying the critical thinking and demonstrating the skill of the photographer.



Fig. 29a - Photography by Amber Gray. (Gray n.d)



Fig. 29b - Photography by Amber Gray. (Gray n.d)



Fig. 29c - Photography by Amber Gray. (Gray n.d)

Gray uses much soft-focus, shallow depth of field, fog and mist in her photography and film works. Her artistic photography (Fig. 29a, b, c) focusses on beauty and fashion, using a dreamy and surrealistic style inspired by fantasies. The results are carefully planned lighting with the extensive use of foggy and misty effects. Most of her works are a romantic, nature-inspired collage of daydreaming and fairness in a purple-tone palette.



Fig. 30a - Situation, Photography by Maia Flore. (Flore 2013)



Fig. 30b - Situation, Photography by Maia Flore. (Flore 2013)



Fig. 30c - Situation, Photography by Maia Flore. (Flore 2013)

Unlike Amber Gray's photography style, in Maia Flore's series, *Situations* (Fig. 30 a, b, c), a lady in a red dress poses in a foggy landscape, searching for an unexplainable feeling of intimacy and freedom with nature. Her red ensemble draws the sun's attention, but she hides herself in the fog. As if she would rediscover the land, she walks on the ephemeral clouds that touch the ground and then evaporates into the landscape when the sun is back to haunt the mystery. Like a game between reality and imagination, the opposition of clear-sightedness and a moment of madness, the young girl plays with feelings of confusion. Compared with the above (Fig. 28), (Fig. 29a, b, c) and (Fig. 30a, b, c) fine art photographs, *In and Out of the Mist* will not use any prearranged models or objects. Everything that happens in the borderlands will need to remain and stay as it is. It is a painstaking one shot each for every encounter in fog and mist conditions, in this vast borderland which stretches from Western China to the Himalayan Region.

*In and Out of the Mist* will not be a series of abstract artworks, because the viewer will be able to see unfolding details and information from the photographs, but there are very few details or clues revealed. I am trying to photograph puzzles. I attempt to let the photographed subject have enough space to move around and breathe freely. Photographers usually photograph a subject or object that is within a space. The subject is always the prime target in photography. However it is the space that provides and allows all of these desirable compositions to be arrested. What falls outside of the frame is thus of infinite alterations and possibilities, an uncertain state, obscured and poetic at the same time. These unfinished narratives and ambiguities of the photographed subject create a puzzle that stretches out between the emotional state and physical territories of our environments. *In and Out of the Mist* will subtly evoke the relationship between humans and nature in a duality concept.

## **2.3 The Art of Fog and Mist**

There are plenty of astonishing artworks and media based on "The Art of Fog and Mist" that inspired me. When I first started photographing the borderlands in fog and mist conditions, I searched for inspirational artworks and media done by other artists. They provided me with better knowledge of fog and mist usage, creation, concept and ways of mastering the aesthetics of fog and mist. After all, artists inspire artists.

### **2.3.1 Painting**

People naturally see fog as it is; there is nothing extraordinary about it until poets and painters point out the mysterious beauty of fog. Fog had been around forever, but no one actually saw it. Fog did not occur until Art "invented" it (Wilde 2012). In a panel discussion Sarah Charlesworth said that art had to respond to its own time and had to respond to the art of the generation before (Klein 2007, p.139). Studying these paintings (Fig. 31 to Fig. 42) and trying to figure out how "fog" was mysteriously and conceptually painted at that time, helped me to mature and improve the *In and Out of the Mist* photographic works.



Fig. 31 - Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog, 1818. (Friedrich n.d)  
98.40cm x 74.80cm, Oil on canvas.

The aristocratic, softer, daintier style, known as Rococo, dominated French culture in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Rococo is predominantly characterised by elegance and sensuality, and was later challenged by the rise of the Enlightenment and the Neoclassical style, which placed an emphasis on logic and reason. At the same time, there was a revival in the interest in Classicism that was well-known in Europe and America. On the other hand, Romanticism too arose in conjunction with the Enlightenment school of thought, and was primarily concentrated on the sense of imagination and feeling. In mid-century, the invention of photography was a substantial milestone, changing the public's understanding of "reality".

Caspar David Friedrich painted the notable *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (Fig. 31), a renowned Gothic Romantic painting. It depicts the movement's disposition towards the Sublime: a deep passion and an emphasis on anxiety, fear, panic

and awe in the face of vicious nature and its dramatic qualities. Romanticism originated as a revolution against influential social and political norms and the perfect rationalization of nature. The artist is also noteworthy for his metaphorical landscapes (Fig. 32), which emphasise speculative figures silhouetted against morning mists, night skies, arid trees, and Gothic relics. His main curiosity as an artist was the rumination on nature. His repeatedly symbolic and anti-classical work seeks to reveal the inner experiences of life.



Fig. 32 - Fog in the Elbe Valley 2, 1821. (Friedrich n.d)  
33cm x 43cm  
Oil on canvas



Fig. 33 - Procession in the Fog, 1828. (Oehme n.d)  
Painted by Ernst Ferdinand Oehme . 82x106cm.  
Oil on Canvas.

Ernst Ferdinand Oehme painted the *Procession in the Fog* in 1828 (Fig. 33). This painting reminds us of Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Abbey in the Oakwood*, 1809-1810 (Fig. 34). The painting depicts a group of monks dressed in black, like on a Halloween day, walking toward the foggy and misty far end of the spooky forest. Oehme's painting makes us wonder what is going on at the back of the forest that is covered in dense mist.

On the other hand, does this painting seem surreal and mysterious enough, if it is the netherworld we are seeing? Indeed, it is a good horror painting when humans are dressed in black and we are unable to see their faces, leaving us to puzzle.



Fig. 34 - Abbey in the Oakwood, 1809-1810. (Perry 2013)  
Painted by Caspar David Friedrich.  
110cm x171cm  
Oil on canvas

Friedrich's painting *Abbey in the Oakwood* (Fig. 34) encompasses much more depth and meaning as compared with Oehme's painting (L' Historien Errant, 2012). Friedrich's painting is very well rooted, consisting of a deeper message, where the painting undoubtedly reveals the graveyard in the foreground, expressing the grief of loss of life. The monument in the graveyard may prove the glorious and peaceful period in the past. However, the ruin and dried trees evoke the dull and cold atmosphere. This painting urged me to produce work that can stand the test of time and look at the mysterious and boundless world afresh.



Fig. 35 - The Fog Warning, 1885. (Winslow 2009)  
Painted by Winslow Homer.  
76.83 x 123.19 cm  
Oil on Canvas

*The Fog Warning* (Fig. 35), painted by Winslow Homer in 1885 reminds me that anything can happen in a journey and one ought to be prepared for the unexpected by following one's own instinct. It shows two or more fish weighing down the stern, while the fisherman is rowing hard on the choppy sea (Winslow 2009). The grey, weary fog seems to push in, getting nearer to the larger ship as the fisherman gazes upon it.

*The Fog Warning* is a painting that encompasses the intense struggling moment at sea, where the fisherman must follow his instinct to either row back to the ship or row toward the shore due to the weary weather. The sea could be a good provider and a curse at the same time. And the fog is always a misery for the fisherman when one happens to get caught in it on the sea. Homer has successfully painted the many tempers of the sea as his epic subject.



Fig. 36 - Grainstack, Sun in the Mist, 1891. (Goodman 2007)  
Painted by Claude Monet.  
60 x 100.3cm  
Oil on Canvas

During the late 1880s, Claude Monet picked *Grainstack* (Fig. 36) as a subject to paint and to analyse visual perception repeatedly. He painted the grainstack in different days, weather and light conditions. He also studied the grainstacks in all seasons (summer, fall, winter and spring). He observed and painted the grainstack in different sunlight conditions. The above painting (Fig. 36) shows the fall season before sunset, where the grain stack is highlighted with a golden outline and while the gentle fog has started to form around it.

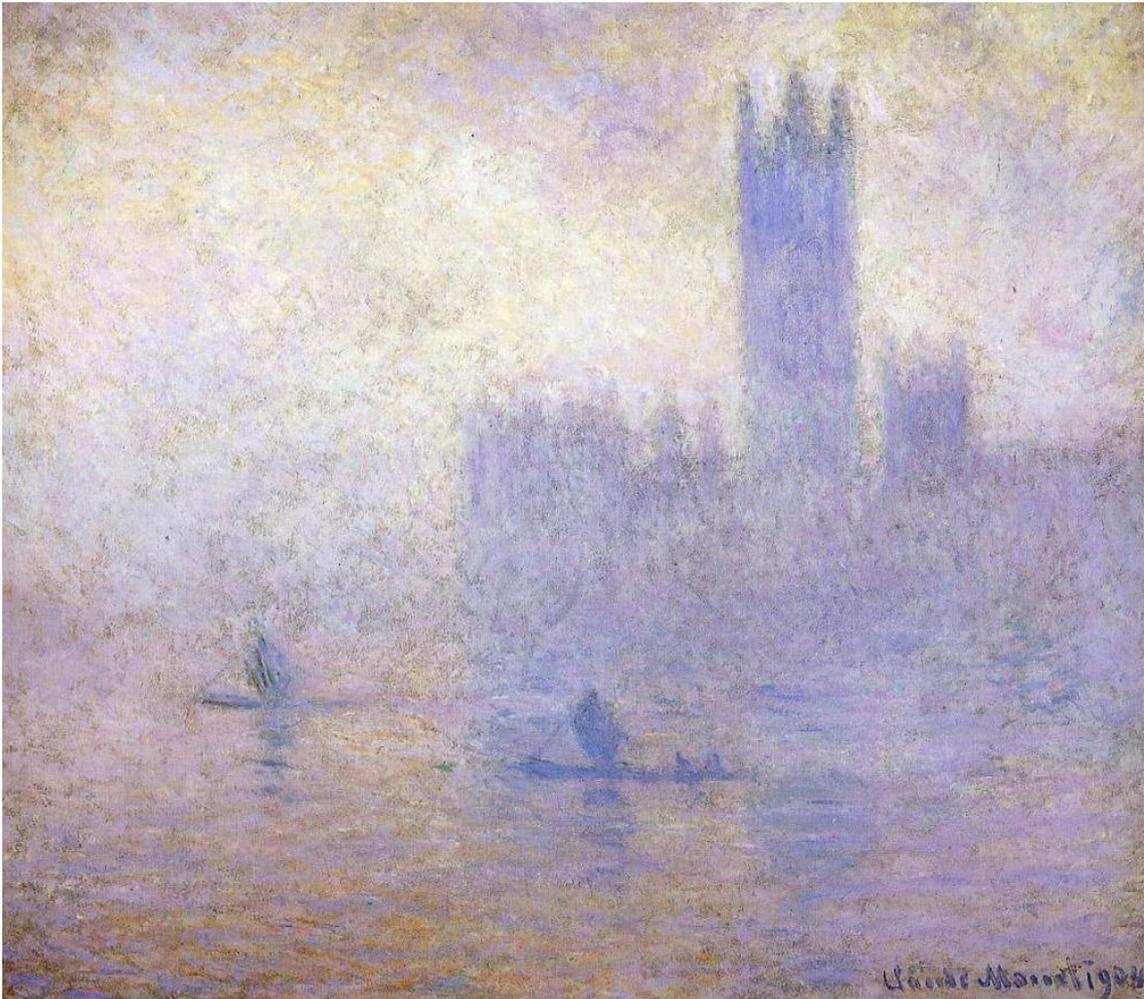


Fig. 37 - Houses of Parliament, Effect of Fog, 1904. (Monetalia 2006)

Painted by Claude Monet  
92.7cm x 82.6cm  
Oil on canvas

Claude Monet painted hundreds of canvases of the Palace of Westminster, home to the British Parliament (Fig. 37) by experimenting with them from the same viewpoint on different days, with different lighting and weather conditions. Not only that: the brush strokes he applied on each canvas seem different each time. In time, Monet successfully mastered the expression of absolute passion in art.

Claude Monet's persistence of working on the same subject over and over again reminded me to revisit the borderlands in different periods, in search of the unexpected and to refine my photographic works in time.

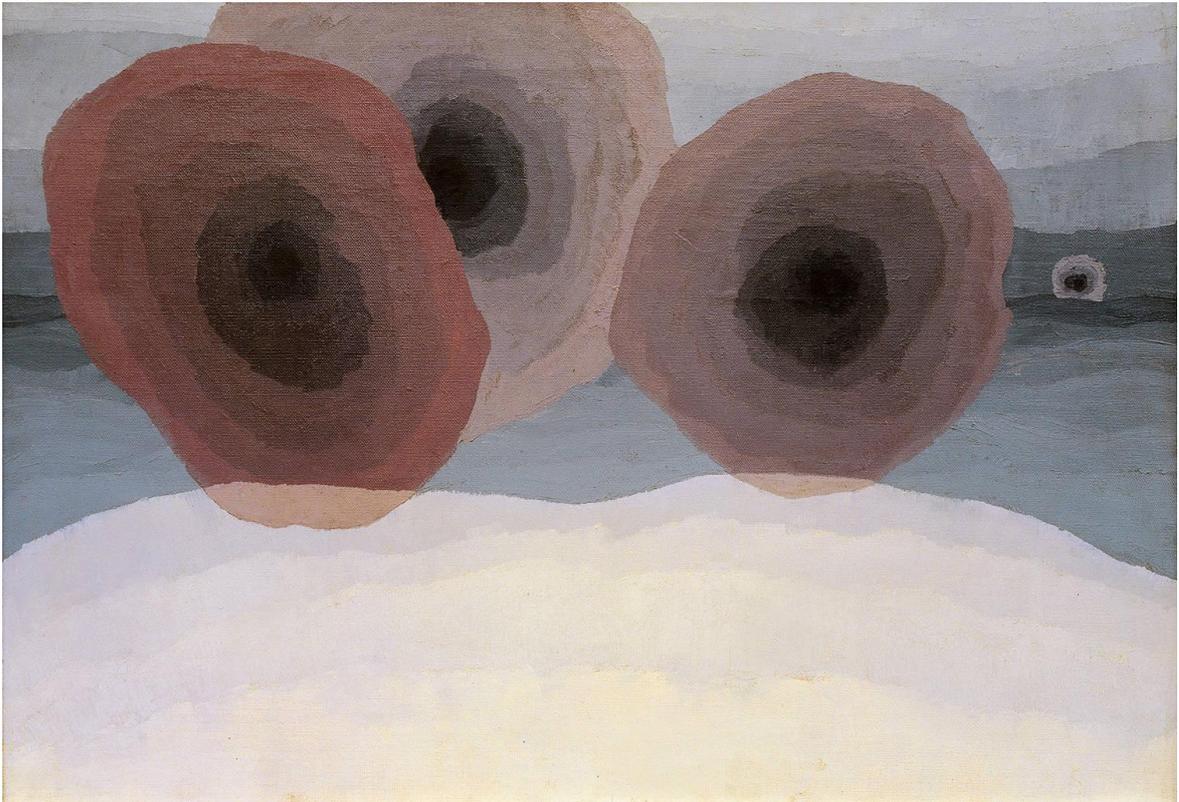


Fig. 38 - Fog Horns, 1929. (Esaak n.d)  
Painted by Arthur Dove.  
45.7 x 66 cm  
Oil on canvas

Arthur Dove was often regarded as the first American abstract painter. His works are usually painted in vague and dull colours. He sought to paint the representation of undiscovered form and environment by minimising an object to its purest nature.

When Dove spent several years living near the waters area on Long Island, he painted *Fog Horns*, 1929 (Fig. 38). It is painted in a spectrum of hues visualising the foghorns' sound echoing in the air and land. The gradation of brown colour represents the formation of sound. I am impressed by his taste of colour palette, visual representation, and style of reducing object and subject to the simplest form.



Fig. 39 - Yellow Mountain - At Dawn, 1980. (Cultural China 2007)  
Painted by Liu Haisu, 1896-1994.  
47.8cm x 90.8cm



Fig. 40 - Yellow Mountain - When the Cloud and Wind meet, 1982. (Cultural China 2007)  
Painted by Liu Haisu, 1896-1994.  
60cm x80cm  
Oil on canvas

The father of modern Chinese art, Liu Haisu (1896-1994) had encountered countless adversaries, from Conservatives to Nationalists, Socialists to Communists - the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution. He was a teacher and frontier Chinese painter who explored and combined European painting techniques with traditional Chinese painting methods, like Van Gogh and Cézanne's painting styles. For nearly seven decades, he served as the prominent role model in the era of contemporary Chinese fine art painting.

Liu Haisu visited Yellow Mountain more than ten times from 1918 to 1988. His artworks (Fig. 39 and Fig. 40) regarding the famous Yellow Mountain are a vivid record of his artistic life. The mysterious and artistic fog spread on the Yellow Mountain has become an inspiration for many profound painters and photographers, not only in China, but worldwide. Liu Haisu's painting inspired me to combine external media like fog and mist, as well as incorporating Western and Eastern styles on one single canvas.



Fig. 41 - Sea and Fog, 2000. (Asfour 2012)  
Painted by Etel Adnan.  
Oil on canvas

Etel Adnan is a Lebanese American, who writes what she sees and paints who she is. She has written poetry extensively. Her writing suggests a brutal and chaotic world, yet her painting (Fig. 41) has a bright and colourful disposition. Her poetry must have influenced her paintings rather than the other way round, although they do not necessarily have a direct connection. Her painting is the reflection of forces that mould the landscape, and her happiness in, and love for, nature.

Etel Adnan's painting provided me a good insight to explore variety of form within the simplest subject matter. *Sea and Fog* (Fig. 41) can be painted in many different colours, not only blue or green tones. Her work inspired me to discover other forms that look like fog and mist.

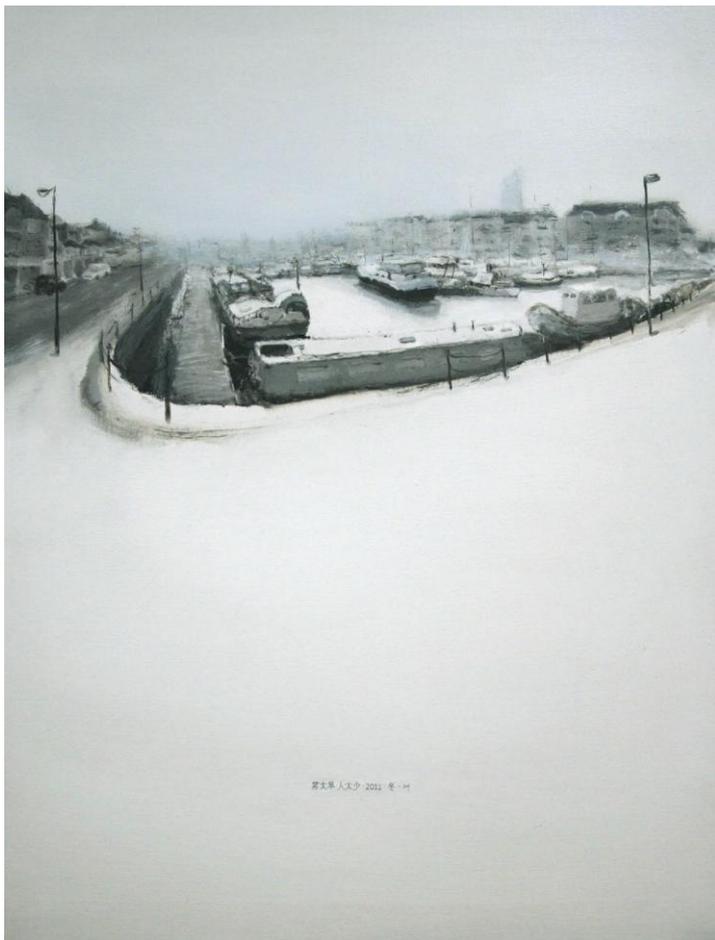


Fig. 42 - Early Fog, People Rare, 2011 (Hou 2012)  
Painted by Zichao Hou.  
Oil on linen, 90cm x 105cm.

A recent graduation show at Central Saint Martin's by painter Zichao Hou included a work entitled *Early Fog, People Rare* (Fig. 42). At the show, the young painter mentioned he has been exploring and tracing the serenity element lately. It is the exposition and representation of isolation and silent moment of people's inner existence from the outside world. It is a total silence and quiet atmosphere, only the breeze flows through the cityscape. Likewise, my view to this painting evokes a serene and calmness of white and the silence of the cityscape is what I enjoy seeing the most. The painting reminded me to observe and capture the unexpected, out-of-silence moments.

### 2.3.2 Sculpture



Fig. 43 - Fog in Strings, Installation Art by Laima Laizane. (Laizane n.d)

This art installation (Fig. 43) is composed of a thin thread in vertical display and gentle artificial fog emitted on ground level. Laima's *Fog in Strings* (Fig. 43) is inspired by the natural waterfall current where fog is formed. The display could be practically used as a partition between spaces, or situated in between windows. This almost still installation reminded me to observe the subtle and gradual unseen movement in fog and mist conditions.



Fig. 44a - Fog Sculpture at Guggenheim Bilbao, 1998. (Guggenheim 2011)  
Fog Sculpture by Fujiko Nakaya. Guggenheim Bilbao Museum.



Fig. 44b - Fog Sculpture at Guggenheim Bilbao, 1998. (Guggenheim 2011)  
Fog Sculpture by Fujiko Nakaya. Guggenheim Bilbao Museum.

Fujiko Nakaya's fog sculpture (Fig. 44a, b) displayed at Guggenheim Bilbao Museum is empirical and uncontainable in nature. The installation blends itself perfectly with water, atmosphere, air, time and space. Certainly, it is something more than a regular dimensional sculpture and it could be closely related to conceptual and land arts. The uncontainable sculpture results in a natural hot spring like quality at the fountain, causing a mysterious and obscured experience to many visitors.



Fig. 45a - Emptyful, 2012. (Carter n.d)  
Sculpture by Bill Peche and Chris Pekar.

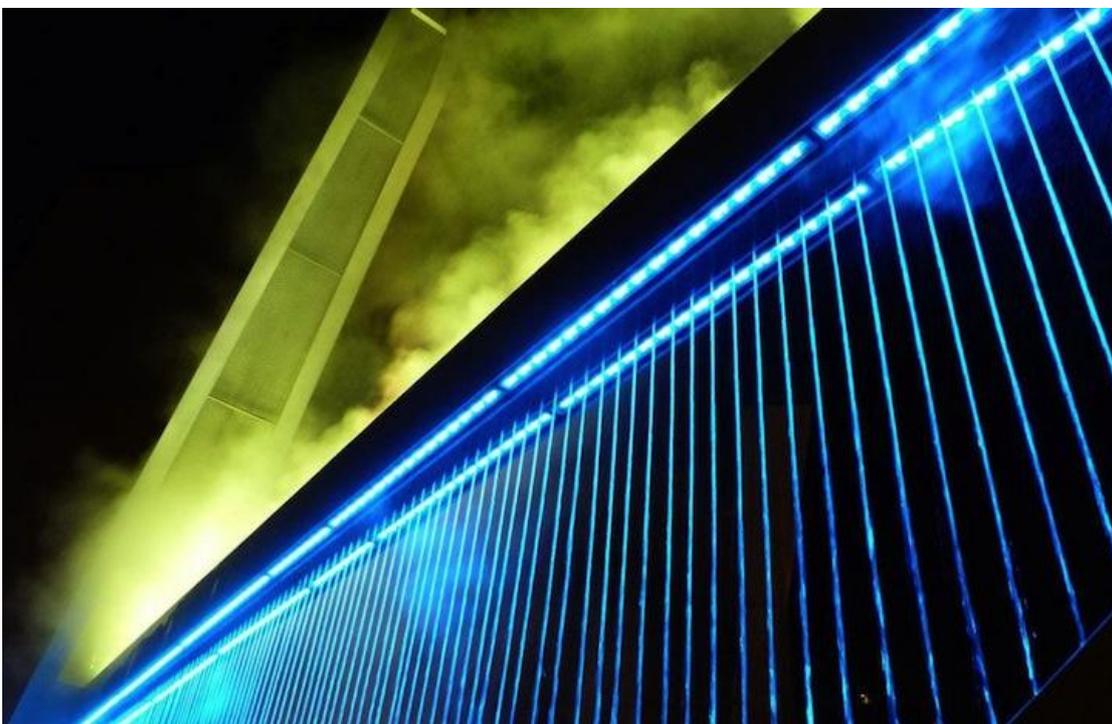


Fig. 45b - Emptyful, 2012. (Carter n.d)  
Sculpture by Bill Peche and Chris Pekar.

*Emptyful*, an art installation (Fig. 45a, b) created by Bill Peche and Chris Pekar, is a colossal sculpture with colourful LED light that spews dripping water. Certainly, it is more than a plain humongous installation. The illuminated vessel with colour-changing light, dribbling water and fog dramatically enhance the environment as a substantial glowing light show filled with imagination and life. In summer season *Emptyful* is fully operating, creating radiance against the night sky with green, blue and purple tones. However in the winter season, the fog and water will shut off to avoid freezing, but continue to impress audiences with warmer tones of light in orange, gold and red. The half full and half empty flask continues to arouse the spectators' interest and fantasy.

*Emptyful* is inspired by the idea that emptiness is an unlimited, unending space where numerous phenomena for instance light, seasons, climate and human endeavour intersperse. Winnipeg's architecture is framed and highlighted through the open container. The structure also becomes an experiment as a mode to recognise that the city itself is a continuous trial, the commodity of knowledge and imagination.

### 2.3.3 Installation Art



Fig. 46 - Tea House Urban Fog. (Tea 2011)

There are no physical emissions or the spreading of fog in this installation. *Urban Fog* is a site-specific response and examination regarding transparency and freedom in boundary. Participants are free to enter and spend time at the long stretches of structure made of chiffon fabric. *Tea House Urban Fog* (Fig. 46) aims to allow the participants to experience private space. It almost feels like travelling inside clouds, where figures tend to emerge, disappear and distort when participants walk through light and shadow. The installation provides a very similar obscured reality feeling to that which I had while entering the fog and mist environment in the unknown borderlands. Visuality and navigation can be blurred at any moment encountering the fog and mist. It could be a very good artificial and physical simulation to help us to navigate in low visibility conditions.



Fig. 47a - *Blind Light*, an Art Installation by Antony Gormley. (Kennedy 2007)



Fig. 47b - *Blind Light*, an Art Installation by Antony Gormley. (Kennedy 2007)

Antony Gormley's *Blind Light* installation work (Fig. 47a, b) strangely lures the viewer and visitor to enter into a surrounded fog space. The extreme intense fog in the glass caused zero visibility to the visitor. While visitors are exploring the fog glass, it seems like they are trapped and struggling to find their way out. He described the work as an idea of having people in fog and making visitors become part of the art, at the same time forcing the visitor to sense a disorientation experience (Kelly 2007). It especially makes the participants anxious when they

accidentally touch another person. Participants may feel claustrophobia, yet react strangely intimately at the same time.

My *In and Out of the Mist* artworks could arouse similar feelings of peculiarity to *Blind Light*. This inspired me to create a sense of excitement and ambiguity toward puzzling objects and subjects I encountered. I am always excited and surprised by the familiar and the unfamiliar visual that I have the privilege to witness.



Fig. 48a - Feelings Are Facts by Olafur Eliasson and Ma Yansong. (Behmann 2010)

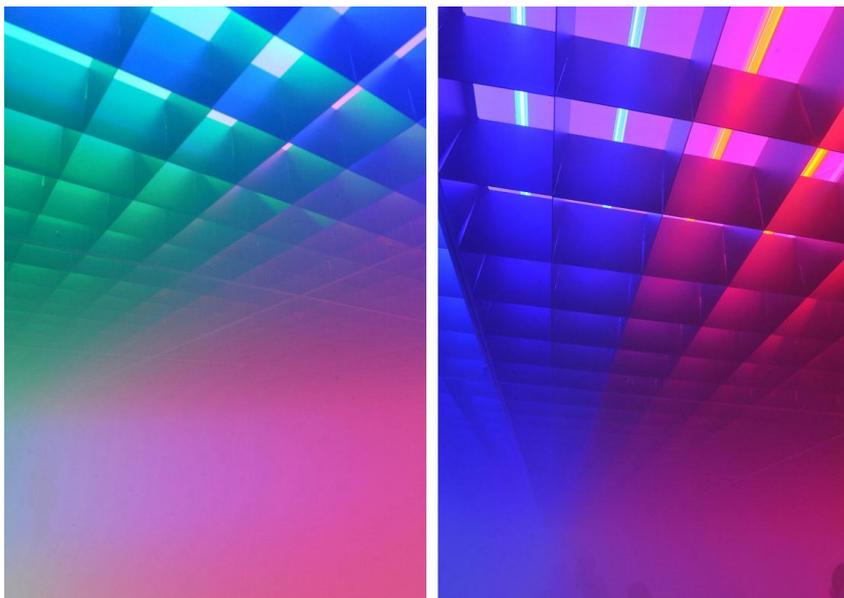


Fig. 48b - Feelings Are Facts by Olafur Eliasson and Ma Yansong. (Behmann 2010)  
Exhibited at Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing, China, 2010.

The above installation (Fig. 48a and 48b) is a cooperation between Chinese architect Ma Yongsong and Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. It is a huge space where fog and changing lighting is used to disturb the participants' daily routine orientation. Although the meaning and objective are very similar to Anthony Gormley's *Blind Light* installation, the technique used by Olafur and Ma in *Feelings Are Facts* (Fig. 48a and 48b) is different. They have installed bright, changing, colourful fluorescent lights as the fog floats around the gallery space. The visitors and participants almost feel like they have entered a disco club interacting with an unknown person. The unique colour light spectrum consisting of cyan, magenta and yellow arouses the participants to question the nature of reality. When illusion and reality are mixed up, what could be the basis of rational and factual judgment? I came to understand that by altering reality with the intervention of fog and mist, new flavour could be added once in a while to our familiar daily routine.



Fig. 49 - Fog Screen, A virtually invisible screen created of fog, 2006. (Gadget 2011)

*Fog Screen* (Fig. 49) is created by using a hanging generated fog device, emitting fog within the space without any frame around it. The audience can walk through the fog screen and suspended visual as they wish. Two projectors can project at the same time from both sides, resulting in visuals overlapping on each other. The cold air blending with warm air is forced through a filter before the tiny particles were released. Unlike real, natural "fog", *Fog Screen* uses tiny particles so that it could vaporise immediately into the thin air without wetting the space.

When we are directed to see imagery and go through it, it feels like we are able to walk through spirits and souls. A hollow feeling of time and uncertainty urged me to capture the unclear or suspicious actions obscured within the mysterious fog and mist.

#### 2.3.4 Performance



Fig. 50 - Marilyn Manson Concert in Austin, Texas. 31 August 2007. (Picnic 2007)  
Photo taken by Lithium Picnic.



Fig. 51 - Michael Jackson - Dangerous world tour, 1992. (Flamelake 2006)



Fig. 52 - Michael Jackson - Dangerous world tour, 1992. (Jackson n.d)

Fog is commonly used on stage at large concerts and performances (Fig. 50, 51, 52), as stage lights and laser beams (Fig. 53) appear better in fog conditions. For fog to appear effectively on stage, it is not only about emitting dense and thick particles. Sometimes sudden release of fog may stir the audience's attention and emotion to another height. Other times, slow release of unnoticeable steady fog into the arena or stage will allow light beams to come into sight and move across the stage. Fog not only serves as a special effect, it also arouses a psychological effect in the audience. Whenever there is fire, explosion or fog on stage, the audience tends to respond with higher excitement. Fog also enhances the concert, circus and stage performance with a more dramatic atmosphere (Fig. 54).

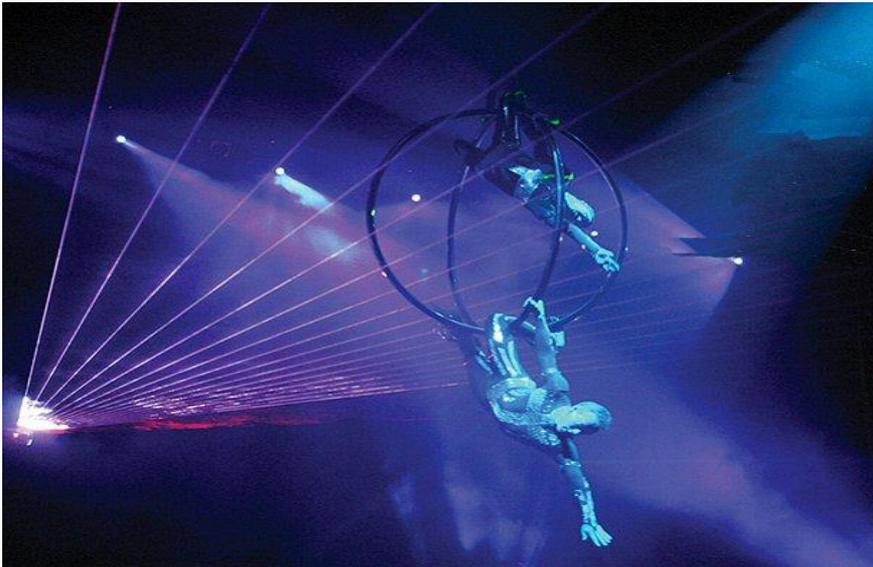


Fig. 53 - Laser Aerial Performance. (Laser n.d)



Fig. 54 - Save the Date: Le Ballet de Dracula. (Dracula 2011)

### 2.3.5 Film Making

Fog is used extensively in movie making, in all its conceptual, technical and thematic aspects. *The Fog* is a famous and well-received horror fiction film directed by John Carpenter in 1980 (Fig. 55b and 55c). The story takes place in a small town, where a malicious ghost from a shipwreck comes back to life, hunting

and killing the people who found the shipwreck. Carpenter uses shadows and soft glowing fog to invade the cinematic scene. The fog and mist effectively help to create the creepy, chilling and ghostly effect. It makes the movie characters and audiences terrified and unable to know anything from a distance. By the time we understand what is coming upon us, it is too late, and we are forced to take the consequences and risk.

*The Fog* reappeared on movie screens in 2005 (Fig. 55a): in a new film directed by Rupert Wainwright. This time round, the spooky fog moved in a threatening manner that the original film never accomplished. Again, the mysterious fog and supernatural invasion was injected into this "teen horror film".

The cinematic approach that I drew from both "Fog" horror movies provided me with a sense of seeing the epic quality in a scene with the presence of fog and mist, except I do not have any intention of photographing my subject in the horror genre.

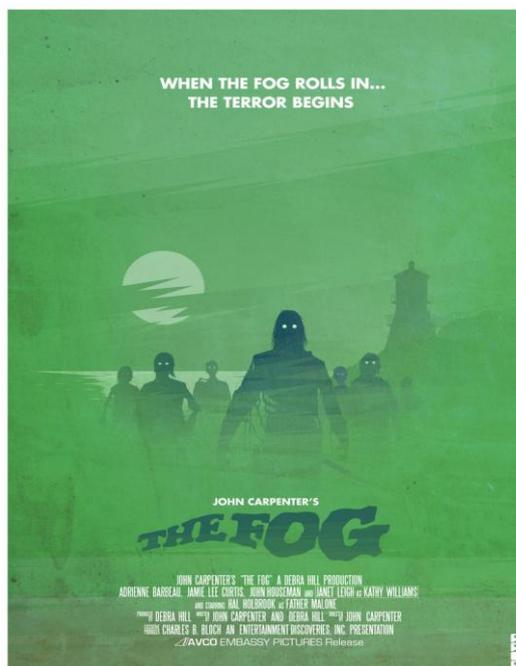


Fig. 55a - *The Fog* (2005), directed by Rupert Wainwright. (Schieman 2010)

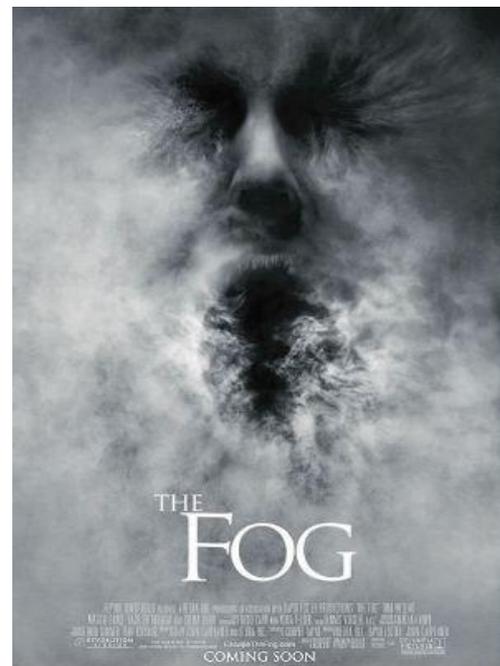


Fig. 55b - *The Fog* (1980), directed by John Carpenter. (The Fog n.d)



Fig. 55c - The Fog (1980), Screen Shot. (Bell 2013)

## Chapter 3

# Methodology

Photographers are usually attracted to and inspired by the freshness of a subject. Fredric Jameson described and suggested that there are more than enough similar images out there without needing a photographer to make new ones. When stylistic innovation is no longer possible in the world, what remains is an imitation of dead styles (Jameson n.d). Contemporary or postmodern art constantly requires the inevitable collapse of art and creativity. *The Cruel Radiance* by Susie Linfield noted the contemporary artist Richard Prince stated, "The only method to make it new, is to repeat and do it again" (Linfield 2012).

The same book by Susie Linfield mentioned that Victor Burgin stated "Our conviction that we are free to choose what we make of a photograph hides the complicity to which we are recruited in the very act of looking" (Linfield 2012). He commented that Sophie Calle's "voyeurism" and "prejudiced perception" could only lead to a miserable self-satisfaction.

High-modernist critics like American photographer John Szarkowski received substantial criticism from the postmoderns, claiming that he had confined photography from political and social purposes. Nevertheless, documentary photography and photojournalism, grounded in the political and social, are equally opposed by modernist photographers and critics. They mock socially-conscious photojournalists who embrace outdated ideas on development and their views on reality as a necessity. Sometimes, documentary photography can be similar (war documentary) to watching a horror movie, putting on a scary mask to ignite fear, converting violence into fiction.

I see that while looking at a photograph, contemporary critics suggest that it is

difficult for the viewer to find a moment of extraordinariness and originality as the photographer is unable to provide it. It is a false hallucination and a lost hope to entrust photography with a meaning.

As I researched further, I came to understand that some contemporary photography critics have refused the fundamental ideology of post-modernism. For example, Max Kozloff and Geoff Dyer, Rebecca Solnit and David Levi Strauss have replied to postmodern criticism without surrendering to it. In time, postmodern sarcasm may seem no longer in vogue.

The depiction of weak, defenceless people, as seen in many photographs, is a fake fantasy that many photographers deliberately create to gain recognition and fame. Carol Squiers depicted photojournalism as nothing more than representation of suffering and intense desperation. At the same time, Martha Rosler (Pachmanova 2006, p.109) went on to express her opinions on contemporary photojournalism as a fragmented, provoking, cunningly immoral, lip-smacking appreciation of unfamiliar vitality. Some documentary photographic works definitely match this definition. Peculiarly, Martha Rosler and her colleagues would reject provocative photography such as the works of American documentary photographer Eugene Richards and South African photographer David Goldblatt.

Martha Rosler (Ibid), however, mentioned in her writing, when she addressed the problem in the Vietnam War and Cold War during the 1950s, that war is the ultimate form of discrimination. Her artworks (Fig. 56) often depicted the reality of urban glamour and modern life contrasted to the war scene in the background where she deliberately suggests that the U.S.A.'s rhetoric of war is total paranoia, lasting even till today.



Fig. 56 - *The Gray Drape* by Martha Rosler, 2008. (Rosler 2008)

The inconvenient truth is that documentary photography was first used to document historical wars, from landscape to city life. Fortunately, the use of documentary photography continues to enlighten viewers regarding many historical events, to diversify and extend storytelling as the archive of time. Unfortunately, the use of documentary photography in wars and storytelling of violence in the city is not advanced by many current photographers, who continue to chase and capture the sensational truths only. I strongly believe that documentary photography does not attract by provocative and unnerving images only, but gutsy photographers are very much addicted to capturing such defiant and electrifying images. In order to unveil the brutal fact, some photographers think violence and war images are highly anticipated because viewers are shocked by their unbearable moment of inhuman truth, whilst photographers continue to risk their lives for such horrific moments. How can such an immoral and cruel

reality continue to happen, spreading like a virus in different corners of the world? Please make no mistake between “anticipation” and “appreciation”. Both terms can be mixed up, resulting in mixed feelings when viewers look at these provocative war images. No doubt the good intention of photographers is to capture and transmit the truth, reminding us of what violence and war can cause and how. Yet, when we look at the current media, we find ourselves surrounded by such unpleasant news.

I definitely see the need for creative and innovative representation of documentary photography beyond the mode of direct point and shoot, slapping us with repulsive images. High-calibre photographers should push and advance their intellectual knowledge, rather than chasing potentially shocking images that would provide them with assured fame. A photographer should learn to exercise beyond his or her impulsive instinct and intuition. Finding subtle elements, unconventional representations and unusual metaphors to further elaborate what is already out in reality remains challenging, but necessary. Otherwise, without self-reflection and self-realisation, photographers can be ignorant or caught in the loop of a vicious circle, continuing to capture images that have been done for over a century. This realisation is an inspiration for change, and a motivation to work relentlessly towards betterment: betterment of visual representation, metaphorical meaning and the sense of morality behind the captured images (Verve n.d). It is especially poignant when whittled down to the core: a photographer who is willing to try to push beyond the boundary of conflictual images may find a universally identifiable sentiment to visualise, and may photograph the borderlands afresh. Clarity in photography is always good, but overclarity kills art. Therefore, I always prefer to photograph my subject in a way that would create an ambiguity and freedom of expression, arousing the viewers’ attention and leading them to puzzle over it in terms of their own experiences and interpretations.

By understanding and being aware of the remarks from various photography critics and practical photographers from different backgrounds and ideologies, I begin to

find my own way and stay truthful to my own photography perception. At the early stage, I tried direct documentary works by photographing the borderland in an obvious, sincere and truthful approach. Most of these early borderlands documentary works from Western China to the Himalayan Region are based on lifestyle, portraits, cultural activities and festivals (Fig. 57).

In Chapter 3.1, I will demonstrate the development of three photographic stages and associated visual strategies leading toward the discovery of the final *In and Out of the Mist* series - A resolution of the metaphorical significance of mist as a temporal suspension in this conflicted region.

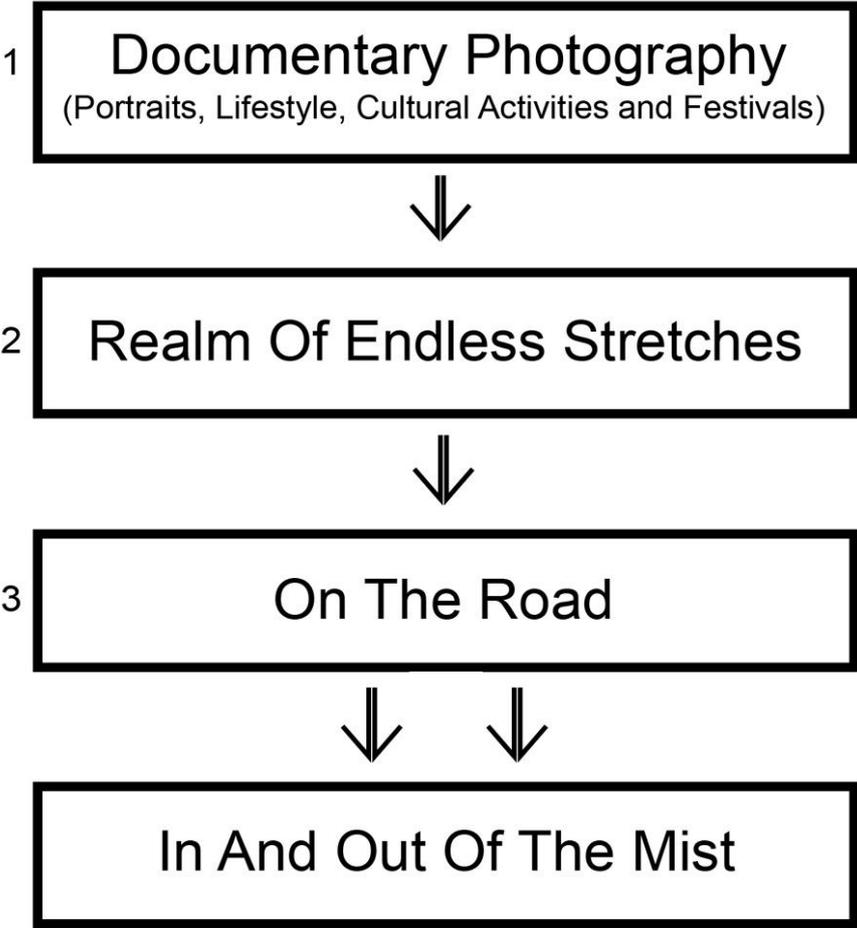


Fig. 57 - Photographic Development: Borderlands Photography

### 3.1 Photographic Development: Borderlands Photography

#### Stage 1: Documentary

The best way to witness visual differences is to see, observe and analyse them. I would like to mention a few prominent documentary photographers, like Patrick Sutherland, Ami Vitale and Carolyn Drake, who work extensively in these borderland regions (Western China to the Himalayan Region).

Patrick Sutherland is a highly esteemed Professor working in the field of documentary photography and photojournalism, ethnographic recordings of the culture and the communities of Northern India and Western Tibet. His extensive research and photographing in Spiti for about two decades are noteworthy. I find Sutherland's and Tsering's essay regarding the little known sacred ritual of Tibetan Buddhism particularly noteworthy. I am saying this because I witnessed many events organised mainly for tourism purposes regarding Tibetan cultural and heritage tradition. These are easily accessible, colourful and spectacular events. As much as I have witnessed crazy saints at play in different local rituals and festivals in Tibet, the collection of different styles of costumes of the crazy saint by Sutherland amazed me. Tibetan Buchen performances combine the spiritual, the religious, social, sexual, and comedic overlapping human experience with Tibetan Buddhism's mythical story and religious practice. Nowadays the performances are very much contradictory between the Tibetan Buchen "crazy saint" and the audiences, especially the younger generation who received modern and scientific education. The religious practitioners often felt threatened by the enlightened, educated and urbane community (Sutherland 2011, p.22). From one point of view, Tibetan Buchen performance represents the embattled lineage of tradition that is struggling to survive in the modern world; on the other hand, it is hard to gain respect from people of other communities, as the performers are treated wrongly for distorting the facts rather than profound performance and entertainment.

Oftentimes, they are mistaken for beggars on the streets rather than religious specialists.

Sutherland's photographs of Buchen performances are contemporary images portraying current living people (Fig. 58). It is hard to categorise these images as portraiture and historical documents as they have been taken in recent years and photographed in an informal way (Sutherland 2011, p.20), where Buchen are requested to pose for him instead of captured in a live performance. According to Sutherland, Tibetans and Buchen think only colour images of them, taken full-body and well-dressed, would be considered "well" photographed portraits, yet Sutherland's black and white portraits of Buchen, taken in unguarded moments, would be considered by them as "poor" images.

I find the way we perceive and comprehend images closely related to our background, knowledge, belief, intention and experience. I am saying this because I find Sutherland's spontaneous images much more interesting and rewarding because they serve visual documentation appropriately and reveal truthful moments. However, I notice there are significant differences between my documentary images and Sutherland's documentary images (Fig. 59 and 60). All of my documentary images are captured in colour mode rather than black and white tone. I have no intention to show Tibetans' culture in a nostalgic mode as they are still living and surviving in the contemporary world. I think there is no need to exaggerate the feeling and moment of lost culture in the olden days (black and white) since the purpose is not historical documentation. Sutherland's works are presented to us as an archive of collaboration between Buchen themselves, inserting their own points of views of what could be an ideal visual record of their ritual performance, their theatre and their role. Therefore I see no point in repeating and photographing similar subjects that are profoundly researched by esteemed photographers like Sutherland, but hope to learn from him and continue to push the boundary in order to discover creative visual representation that is uniquely distinguishable. As a result, I carry on looking at different documentary

photographers' works related to the Western China to Himalayan region, in order to understand their approach and research motivation better.



Fig. 58 - Disciples of a Crazy Saint (Sutherland & Tsering 2011)



Fig. 59 - Disciples of a Crazy Saint (Sutherland & Tsering 2011)



Fig. 60 - Disciples of a Crazy Saint (Sutherland & Tsering 2011)

I find Arora's article "Framing the image of Sikkim" (Arora, p.54-64) insightful because I witnessed Sikkim as being heavily promoted as a sanctuary for Tibetan Buddhism; yet, over the years, the demographics of the population and settlers seem to have changed if we look at the current residents of Sikkim. Border crossing is inevitable due to rivalry, economics and safety. Arora's article depicted Sikkim as highly framed as the Buddhist region in Northeast India, although Sikkim consists of 22 Indo-Tibetan and Indo-Aryan ethnic groups. Sikkim's indigenous Buddhist visual images, such as postcards, tourist brochures and campaigns are disseminated locally and internationally, regardless of how those visual representations might have projected a biased image, without justification in terms of the contemporary ethnographic and socio-demographic group. In the past Sikkim was a Buddhist Kingdom and ruled by the Namgyal dynasty (1641-1975), however the current Nepali and Hindu residents and immigrants to Sikkim comprise around three-quarters, leaving only 20 percent or so of the population being Buddhist and considered indigenous.

Photographs do in a sense contain and constrain - frame, exclude and include according to photographer's perception and imagination. Photographs absolutely contain the power to convey and to deceive at the same time. Sometimes, the captured image and the conveyed message don't seem to go along well due to the internal and external distinction between the imagined, original content and context, and reproduction purposes. This happens when an image is being used as an advertisement, as a promotional picture such as postcards and posters the main purpose of which is to promote and seduce tourists - cultural tourism. I would not say cultural tourism is a bad idea, but updated visual representation is needed to portray current cultural transitions in order to distribute the reality, the correct image and facts of today's borderlands. Otherwise, we would be misled into looking at stereotyped and historically old images that are discordant with today's cultures and practices on the borderlands.

Ami Vitale is a photojournalist who has travelled to more than 85 countries, having spent plenty of time in Kashmir, India, where she anticipated and witnessed much dreadful violence, poverty, catastrophe, civil conflict and tension. Vitale believes in multiple viewpoints and that no single "truth" exists. When she is covering a story and assignment, she has always injected her own perspective to interpret the unveiled meaningful fact. In her Kashmir coverage (Fig. 61), she intended to show the unseen side of the war. She witnessed the faces of war and people who often get caught in between.

My early phase of documentary and practical photographic works with documentary approaches (Plate. 1a to 1j) are rather similar to Ami Vitale's ideas of covering the borderlands. We do not seek the sensational and stereotyping war conflict visual. Both history and cultural background contributed a large context behind the content, where we spend a long period of time or frequently revisit, to understand the phenomenal and the ordinary in the same place.



Fig. 61 - Photography by Ami Vitale - Kashmir, India. (Vitale 2009)

Andy Grundberg explained that artists using other's images believe that there are still untapped images in the woods. The fact is that we go into the forest as hostages of a prejudiced image of the forest; what we grasp may have been done by other artists before (Grundberg 1990, p.172). Documentary photography has been utilised by photographers for over one hundred and fifty years for its ability to capture the exterior world and give witness to real physical events. The act of making photographs as evidence of acts, memorabilia, history and reflecting contemporary culture has been a powerful dimension of the world's culture since photography was invented. I find Ami Vitale's work remarkably classical, rooted and settled in the strictest sense of documentary command, where compelling and truthful visual is inevitable. I see many prominent documentary photographers are unable to break the documentary mould, where they continue to chase story after story without even attempting to switch direction and to see the subject afresh. Some photographers would rather resume their culmination drama over and over by bringing back similar images, but from different regions.

As I research further, I gain new perspective and interest by looking at different and unorthodox documentary works. I find emerging documentary photographers like Carolyn Drake's works very promising and innovative. She too has extensively photographed the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, China. Although she utilised a photojournalism style in documenting the borderlands, in my opinion she has made more versatile progress by turning some of her photographs into fine art pieces (Fig. 62). Drake would ask people to describe their own dreams in Islamic belief, and then ask people to leave messages in the journal and, finally, have people draw and sketch on her own printed photographic works. This would allow her to have less control over the imagery and mix it with someone else's narrative.

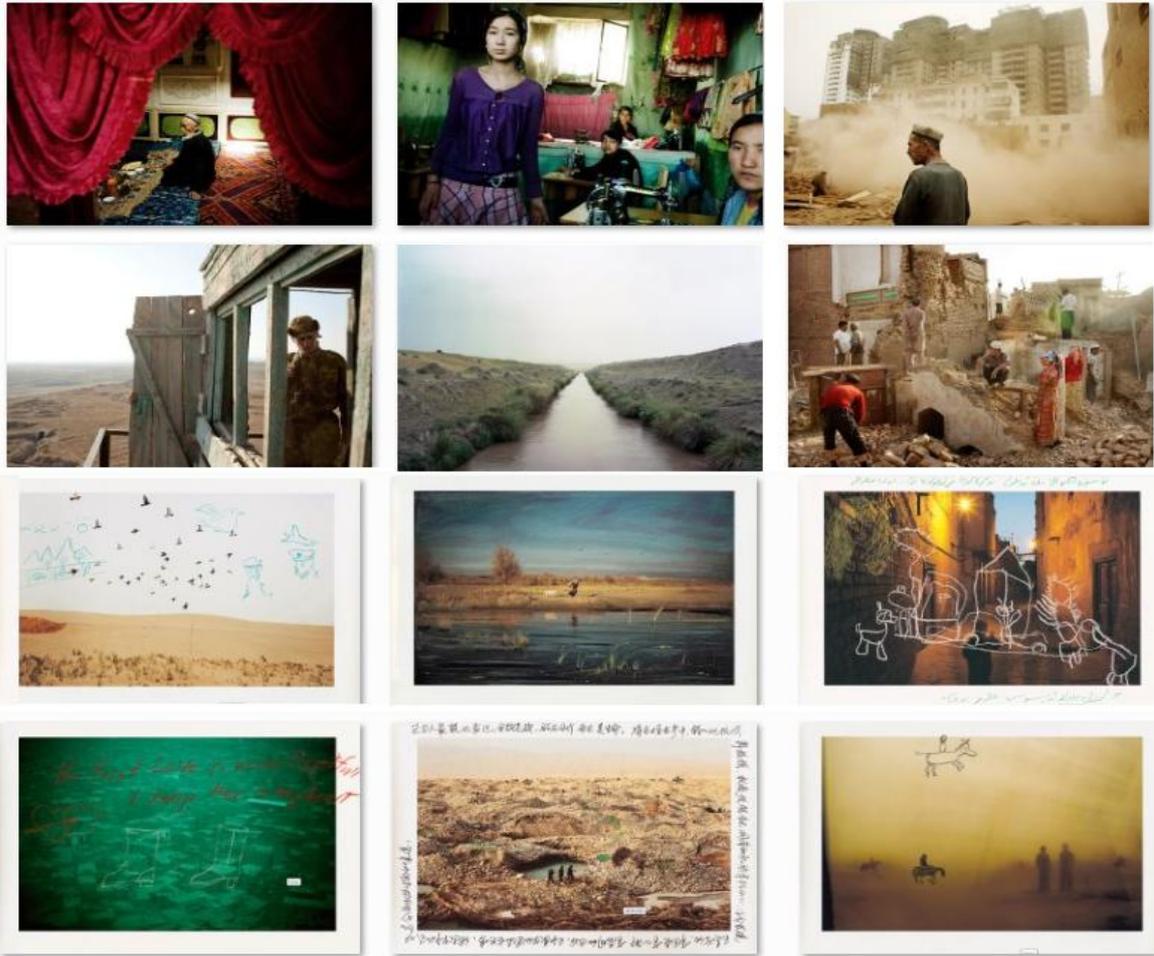


Fig. 62 - Documentary Photography by Carolyn Drake - Uyghur Autonomous Region, China. (Drake n.d)

Drake’s approach led me to experiment and look at the borderlands subject anew. However, when photographic works leap into another genre, the definition is uncertain because the purpose, content and context is different. I found that Drake’s works contained too much mixed information when she asked people to sketch on her own photographic prints. Would words and drawings provide us too much information and too many clues? Does photography need that many texts and scribbles of visuals to further describe it? In order to do so, I have departed from a documentary approach which primarily focusses on lifestyle and human conditions. I intend to seek a different and new borderlands representation in a subtle way.



Plate. 1a - After Lunch.



Plate. 1b - Bridal Room.



Plate. 1c - Condolences.



Plate. 1d - Fiance.



Plate. 1e - Future Talent.



Plate. 1f - Sunbathe.



Plate. 1g - Road Conquerer.



Plate. 1h - Camel Race.



Plate. 1i - Kazakh Performers in Red.



Plate. 1j - Massive Gathering.



## Stage 2: Realm of Endless Stretches

Before embarking on the journey to photograph the *Realm of Endless Stretches* series, and after viewing my documentary works over and over again, I find my documentary photography approach and colour photography straightforward: simply too real, too direct and too beautiful. On the other hand, I started to realise that I should further explore the borderlands passage in the restricted zones, rather than continue to photograph lifestyle, people, portraits and cultural activities (Fig. 63).

Therefore, I attempted to take a much higher ground view by plane and helicopter, photographing the *Realm of Endless Stretches* (Plate. 2a to 2j). It is because I realised that photography is oftentimes not only to attain reflective vista, instead to transcend facts of existence by composing original essence and composition of what remain before or ahead of us. It stretches the meaning of words, and extends thoughts and imagination. I find the blending landscape of borderlands fascinating. This is mainly because the aerial view of borderlands, from Western China to the Himalayan Region, is simply breathtaking and unique: the blending of massive landscape with seemingly endless stretches of grass land, dry land, crop fields and deltas looking like "earth veins", are connected to each other. It is difficult to tell the separating point of each country's borderland. The wide horizon at the borderlands can generate ambiguities of distance and position. Some of these areas are still considered undefined conflict zones. There is no clearly agreed map in these disputed areas. From far off, everything seems to blend very well together, resulting in a marvellous aesthetic of forms, colours and textures in fusion. Not only that, but also the forms of space (nature), time, and human action influence the various stages of borderland in the making. The stretches of endless landscape are going through a similar experience, either through the "Earth Changes" through a series of natural catastrophes or through human activity. Layers of memory (culture and history) are being stored and accumulated on this very ground (borderlands) that stretches beyond our prediction.

Many people see themselves as distinctive because of their capability of generating new ideas, amending and modifying old ones, and striving to fulfil their own goals. This sort of perception, motivation and aim puts humanity on the higher ground of reasoning, that a human is not merely an animal. On these borderlands, there are endless lessons and trials that teach us to generate new thoughts, analyse and realise them, and make decisive choices before acting upon them based on principles that are true to our beliefs, where we share and embrace each other (human and nature) positively. Most unfortunately, the results of unity are taken in the opposite direction by different central governments, unable to negotiate and see the benefits of a transnational perspective.

Photographing the borderlands landscape with an aerial view allowed the images to leap into another genre and convey the storytelling differently. To me, the *Realm of Endless Stretches* (Plate. 2a to 2j) would seem by far more like fine art and water colour painting than documentary photography. I thought it would serve as the philosophical representation of borderlands, because it encompassed all the elements and dilemmas that are very difficult to solve and explain at once, such as borderlanders' community interaction and communication, inseparable lands and resource-sharing, language, lifestyle and religion, borderlands security and governance, trade and businesses and many other similar and dissimilar issues. From a great distance, everything on the borderlands is amalgamated.

Having said that, I am well familiar with Andreas Gursky's large format architecture and landscape colour photographs. He often employs a high vantage point to capture his subject in a dense and well composed composition (Fig. 64a and 64b). During his study at Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, Germany, Gursky received effective training and influence from Hilla and Bernd Becher. He displayed a similar approach in his own large format documentation. There is a strong research pattern and systematic visual language in Gursky's photographic series. In his early photographic encounters he was inspired by John Davies, who photographed a lot of black and white street images and open spaces of urban

landscape. Although I admired and appreciated the consistency of the powerful, condensed and detailed images of Gursky, I never had a second doubt that my images would be similar to his works until I displayed them individually on the gallery wall.

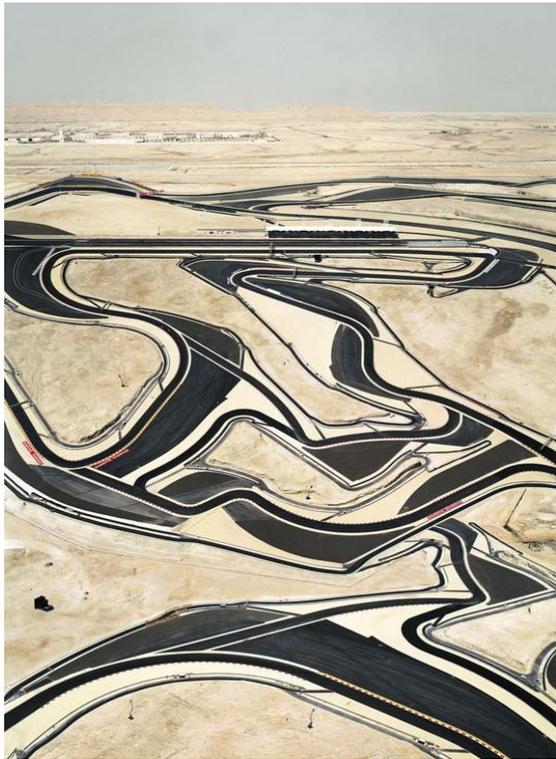


Fig. 64a - Bahrain I, 2005. (Gursky)

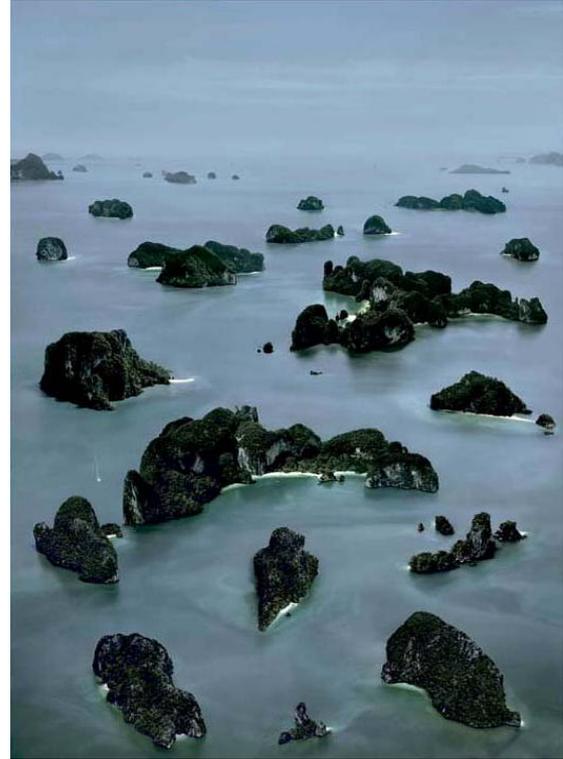


Fig. 64b - James Bond Island II, 2007. (Gursky)

I realised the *Realm of Endless Stretches* series could be the underdog in the long run, if I were to compare them with Gursky's aerial works, since his images have been displayed in major museums and galleries around the globe. Obviously I need to further experiment and capture distinctive images that are uniquely mine.

Furthermore, it would be complicated and time consuming if I were to explain each issue in detail from different sides of the borderlands. After several reasonable analyses and judgements, I decided that the *Realm of Endless Stretches* series was very broad and abstract in content, especially when I displayed them together

(Fig. 65). These images almost seem like they are taken from Google maps and satellite. In a sense, I thought the repetition of the blended borderlands landscape texture may serve better as an abstract art installation than as a photography series. This is because when the *Realm of Endless Stretches* is presented, these images do not reveal any appreciable information and recognisable locations without provided content and details.



Fig. 65 - Realm of Endless Stretches. (DVD)

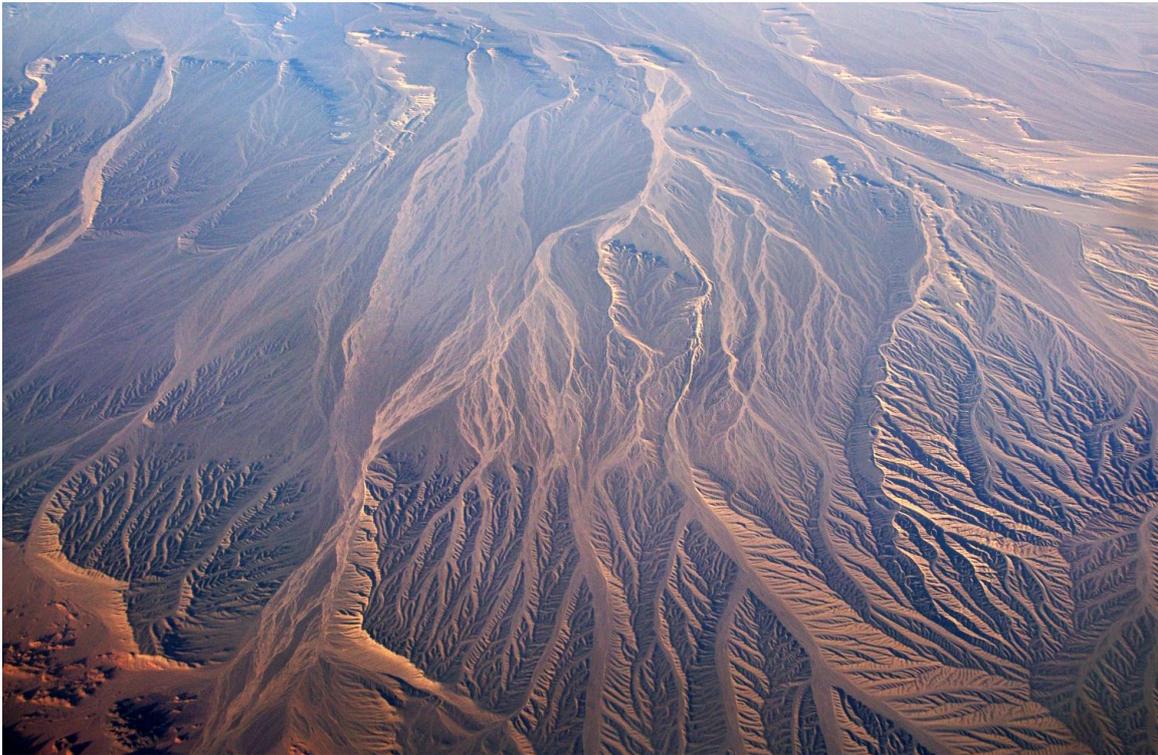


Plate. 2a - Realm of Endless Stretches (China).



Plate. 2b - Realm of Endless Stretches (Tibet, China).



Plate. 2c - Realm of Endless Stretches (Nepal).



Plate. 2d - Realm of Endless Stretches (Nepal and China).



Plate. 2e - Realm of Endless Stretches (China).



Plate. 2f - Realm of Endless Stretches (India and Bhutan).



Plate. 2g - Realm of Endless Stretches (China).



Plate. 2h - Realm of Endless Stretches (China).



Plate. 2i - Realm of Endless Stretches (Nepal and China).



Plate. 2j - Realm of Endless Stretches (China).

### Stage 3: On the Road

After confronting gravity, I am back to the ground of reality. I have decided to continue my discovery on the road of the borderlands passage. To me, life is like a road trip. Besides living with my own stories, it is interesting to listen and try to understand the stories of other individuals who have chosen to live their lives based on what they are passionate about. Hopefully, from these journeys, we can find stories that inspire and enlighten us. Therefore, I started my quest "On the Road", where I encountered the beauty and mystery of fog and mist later on.

Sometimes we are on the road trip of discovery because we are travelling somewhere in the hope of achieving a specific goal. As we experience our different journeys, they take us into a new body and we shed our old skin. We obtain a new soul and a new way of looking at life. I realise that it is the journey that makes me a man, not the goal. Perhaps the goal is important, not because of what it can give us when we attain it, but because of the life it forces us to live as we approach it.

I tried to photograph the roads that led me to the discovery of borderlands from Western China to the Himalayan Region. Of course, not all remote areas contain well-constructed roads and pathways. This is what makes freshly built tar roads valuable to me. My approach to photographing the *On the Road* (Fig. 68) series is to capture the "road" in various perspectives or display the composition within a large scale of borderland environment. It is like we - humans - have put a little scar on the landscape. Vibrant colour is important to me because it signals the vivid yet harsh living conditions on the borders. I try to photograph the road without humans: prioritizing the time and space relations from one end to another must be subjected to "Before" and "After"; we may gain insights and self-awareness when we are on a journey, unfolding our perception of life in a different perspective. Martin Lister (Lister 1995, p.11) explained that instead of focussing attention upon a photograph as a final product, we need to consider its semiotics and social

hybridity. Its meanings and power are not a singular, essential and inherent quality. I can see and come to understand what he means when I am "On the Road".

These roads serve the purpose by connecting borderland residents and activities. It is an unbelievably long journey! I must say that I admired and appreciated the road construction workers who strenuously built the roads at the borderlands in every weather condition I came to witness. Without these roads, journey in this vast borderland region would be harsh and unthinkable!

I think photographers should carry out some responsibility and awareness toward their captured images. *Sahel, The End of The Road*, by documentary photographer Sebastiao Salgado, evoked a very dramatic, painful and sad human experience (Fig. 66 and Fig. 67). It is a total silent drama of photography which I felt and confronted as hopeless tragedy when our earth has so much to offer, yet humanity is lost and neglected in different continents of the world. Salgado's compelling and dramatic black and white images bring us to witness the world's unimagined and astounding reality. On the contrary, my *On the Road* series (Plate. 3a to 3j) depicted a silent, calm, colourful, inviting yet puzzling direction toward the frontier, when the road leads to uncertainty at the conflicted zones. I come to realise that I need to capture the subtle and mysterious ambience of the disputed borderlands that contain realistic qualities to display the resonance and meanings that are timeless, rather than moments that provide a historical and direct cultural message.



Fig. 66 - Sebastião Salgado, Region of Lake Faguibine, 1985. (Salgado)



Fig. 67 - Sebastião Salgado, Lake Faguibine dried up with the drought and invasion of the desert, Mali. 1985. (Salgado)



Plate. 3a - On The Road (Summer)

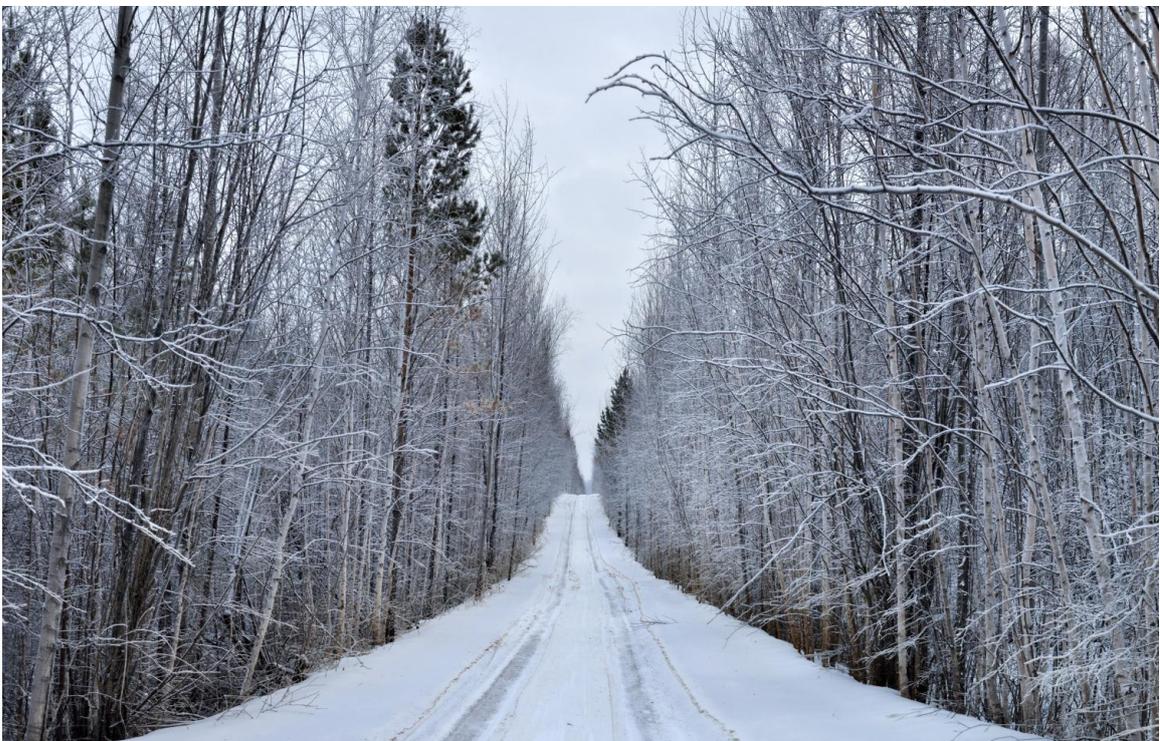


Plate. 3b - On The Road (Winter)



Plate. 3c - On The Road (Daybreak)



Plate. 3d - On The Road (New Frontier)



Plate. 3e - On The Road (Monastery)



Plate. 3f - On The Road (Disputed Zone)



Plate. 3g - On The Road (New Road)



Plate. 3h - On The Road (Flooded Road)



Plate. 3i - On The Road (Where From?)



Plate. 3j - On The Road (Where To?)

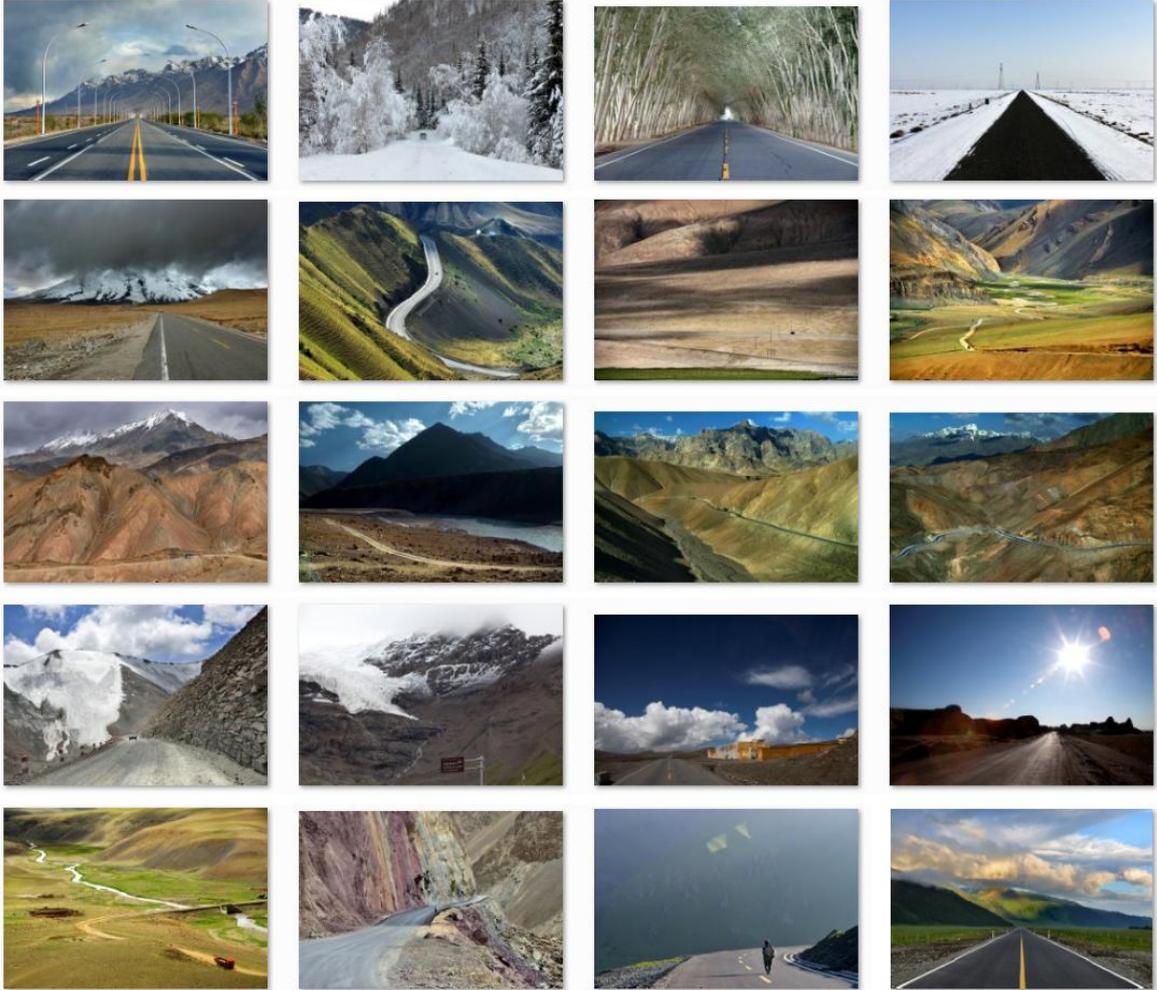


Fig. 68 - On the Road. (DVD)

#### **Stage 4: In and Out of the Mist**

By researching differently, more deeply, and revisiting the same subjects, the *On the Road* photography series led me to *In and Out of the Mist*. Like a butterfly out of a cocoon, the *In and Out of the Mist* photography series could be contemporary art that has references to twenty first century culture and visual landscape. By pushing further away from the reality of space and time, I discovered fog and mist mysteriously provided me the perfect surreal visual appearance that I had long been waiting for. Photography is more than cameras and lens; it is a magical time machine. The timing could not have been better, especially when I encountered the fog and mist conditions on the borderlands passage while I was photographing the roads that connect different borders in this region. I realised that fog and mist are the perfect synthesis of colour and black and white photography, where fog and mist transform colour photography into a neutral grey tone, but still in colour. I try to capture my photographic works differently by attempting to inject a distinctive suspension to the viewer for a mysterious yet truthful borderlands journey, through landscapes that are shrouded in mist and fog.

After my long search and research, I found many individual and singular fog and mist photographs and artworks regarding landscape, architecture and urban subjects. Nonetheless, there are no photographers who see and use fog and mist as their metaphor and fundamental concept to photograph the borderlands. I am finally convinced that the *In and Out of the Mist* series could be avant-garde and exceptional. These fog and mist images captured in the conflicted borderlands could be fresh and contemporary because they encompass an imminent dilemma happening in the current borderlands from Western China to the Himalayan Region, yet the anxious condition is soothing, peaceful and problem-free through the ephemeral fog and mist appearance.

Due to my background in animation and video, the cinematic influence can be observed in most of the *In and Out of the Mist* photographs, where they do

seem like stills from an epic journey. Some of these works look like they are from an extended narrative, as if they are single arrested moments from a larger visual experience. Each work (Plate. 4a to 4j) draws the viewer in to consider broader issues beyond the immediate connection of visual facts. When we are confronted by a lack of details, such as our experiences of a feeble dawn light or a total white-out in fog, we can have a reaction of anxiety. While looking at the works, one may imagine oneself in the foggy scene, not knowing where and what to expect next. Not only that, but some of the works from the unfamiliar borderlands may present an apocalyptic atmosphere. I strive to show the ordinary and unfamiliar in the most compelling dimension of surrealism. At the same time, all the works appeared in soft tones of grey, but actually they present soft tonal gradations of blue, green, brown and purple. By closely searching through the works in detail, the viewer would be rewarded with details of intense colour.

*In and Out of the Mist* also reveals other issues, such as global warming, isolation of peoples, humanity's relationship with architecture, and cultural connections. Of course, the most significant would be the reflection of humankind's influence on the natural landscape at the borderlands, and the drama that unfolds when fog and mist invade the borderlands.

The definite location is no longer important in the strictest sense of documenting the vast borderlands from Western China to The Himalayan Region. When one encounters fog and mist that are out of one's regular routine and rhythm, *In and Out of the Mist* can result in sudden poetic and romantic visual appearances that allude to the vast variety of landscapes around the borderlands (Plate. 4a to 4j). My main intention was not to specify or reveal the borderland location in the strictest sense, because I see that humanity, human-made and natural relationships are inseparable. The separation and discrimination of "who is who" and "who is what" may not be that important at the borderland, since borderlanders who live there all depend on the Himalayan Plateau's natural resources. After all, the temporary fog and mist effects are soothing in some

highly-armed and ongoing disputed zones.

With the intervention of fog and mist, I started to experiment with a duality concept - the unity of thinking and puzzling, exploration of the fusion of thoughts and feelings - by combining the sense of fact and personal truth that I had the privilege to come across in this vast borderland. I spent about 4 years (2009 – 2012 inclusive) painstakingly discovering the borderlands from Western China to the Himalayan Region. In time, the *In and Out of the Mist, an Artistic Investigation of Borderland and Community* photography series took shape. I began to showcase the pictures, and received valuable comments and feedback as to how to further improve them consistently, both in photographing the borderlands, and in selecting and displaying the artworks in exhibitions.



Plate. 4a - In and Out of the Mist (Zhangmu Borderland).



Plate. 4b - In and Out of the Mist (Permanent Residence).



Plate. 4c - In and Out of the Mist (Unidentify Neighbours).



Plate. 4d - In and Out of the Mist (Repetitive Routine).



Plate. 4e - In and Out of the Mist (Travel is Life).



Plate. 4f - In and Out of the Mist (Who's There?).



Plate. 4g - In and Out of the Mist (Tracks and Traces).



Plate. 4h - In and Out of the Mist (Life's Journey).



Plate. 4i - In and Out of the Mist (Perfect Stranger).



Plate. 4j - In and Out of the Mist (Border Crossing).

### 3.2 Visual Strategies: Photographing the Borderlands

Photography as a medium offers a wide variety of possibilities. Photographic subjects are always more subjective than objective, because everyone perceives and takes a photo differently based on their own experience, knowledge, motivation, perception, visual language and taste in art. It is the vision and imaginative mind within the photographer that pushes the limit of photography beyond the ordinary boundary. "Identity" remains the biggest challenge for a photographer to achieve and maintain. How one can be a better or great photographer has little to do with luck or chances. It is the way the photographer perceives himself or herself to envision worthwhile subjects and topics to pursue, rather than shrouded by uncertain visual appearance. If the subject is about photographing the puzzle, the "uncertainty of the puzzle" still needs a clearly visualised and conveyed image. The representation of the puzzling realm is cleverly demonstrated in order to obtain meaningful content and context.

At the earlier research phase, I photographed the far away amalgamated borderlands landscape, and the road journey that connects the borderlands. The vast plain with no environmental change seems endless. Yet everything may change all of a sudden when the environment encounters fog and mist. Interestingly, in contrast with the colourful series of the *Realm of Endless Stretches* and *On the Road* photography experience, the longer I stay in the fog and mist, the more I see. The illusion of fog and mist provides me with a condition from which to understand and see more with the slightest change of signs and subtle movement of human activities.

*In and Out of the Mist* intends to break the mould of borderland documentary photography. The viewer would be able to recognise a wealth of poignant images that do indeed reveal the physical world, but with a sublime difference, by looking at the *In and Out of the Mist* series. Our view of a familiar world is obscured in the photographs by the ever-present fog and mist, which covers the details we rely on

for information, to assist and guide us in our everyday existence. In a paradoxical manner, the power of photography to reveal and capture details for examination has been superseded by the dream-like quality created in the *In and Out of the Mist* photography series.

While photographing the *In and Out of the Mist* series, I am completely absorbed, and left totally shaken during the process. The created photographic series should still contain the same effects when the photographs are being displayed in the museum and gallery: as if the viewers are in the fog and mist portal themselves, viewing the *In and Out of the Mist* phenomenal happenings with their own contemplation.

The immediate quick reference for me to photograph the subject and object is that the scene should obtain the duality and illusory visual appearance I desired. This means the subject and object should obtain minimal information and be unable to signify the viewer's perception (Fig. 69a and 69b) of whether the subject is going into the fog or out of the fog. Depending on the density and amount of the fog and mist, the foggy and misty situation can be soothing or intimidating with the strangely familiar surroundings. Like much contemporary art that is neither absurdly beautiful nor immediately peculiar, one cannot help wondering what is at stake. It is an eccentric sensation that is hard to explain in words but possible to feel with the senses.

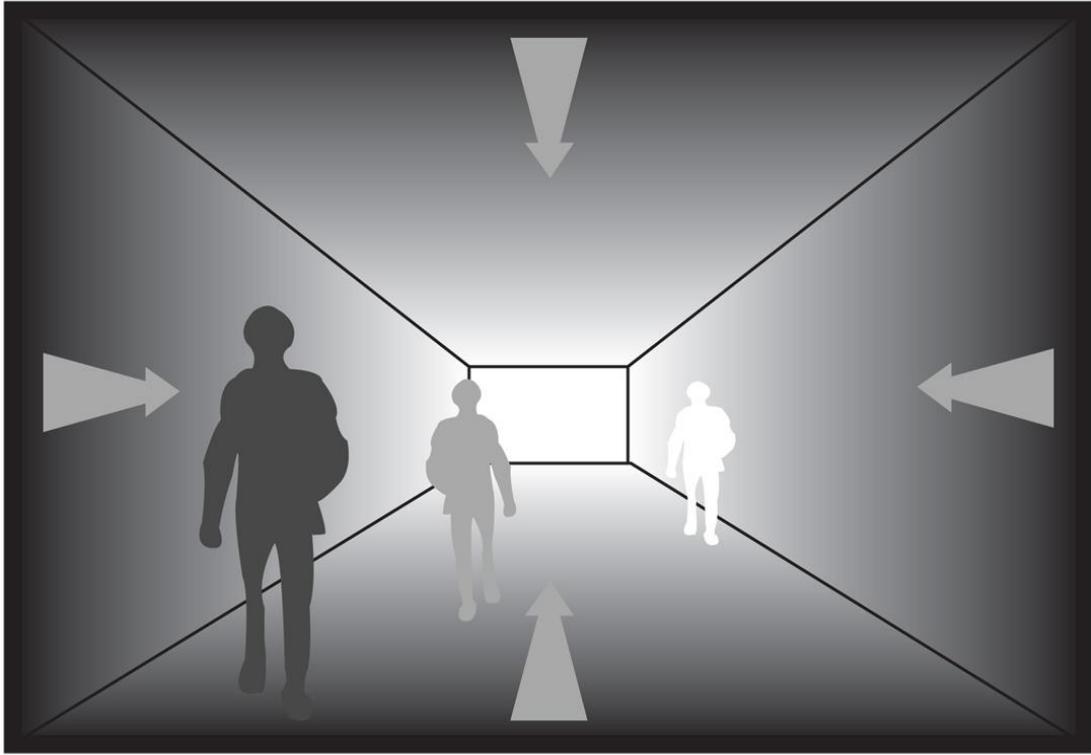


Fig. 69a - Duality and illusion Zone.

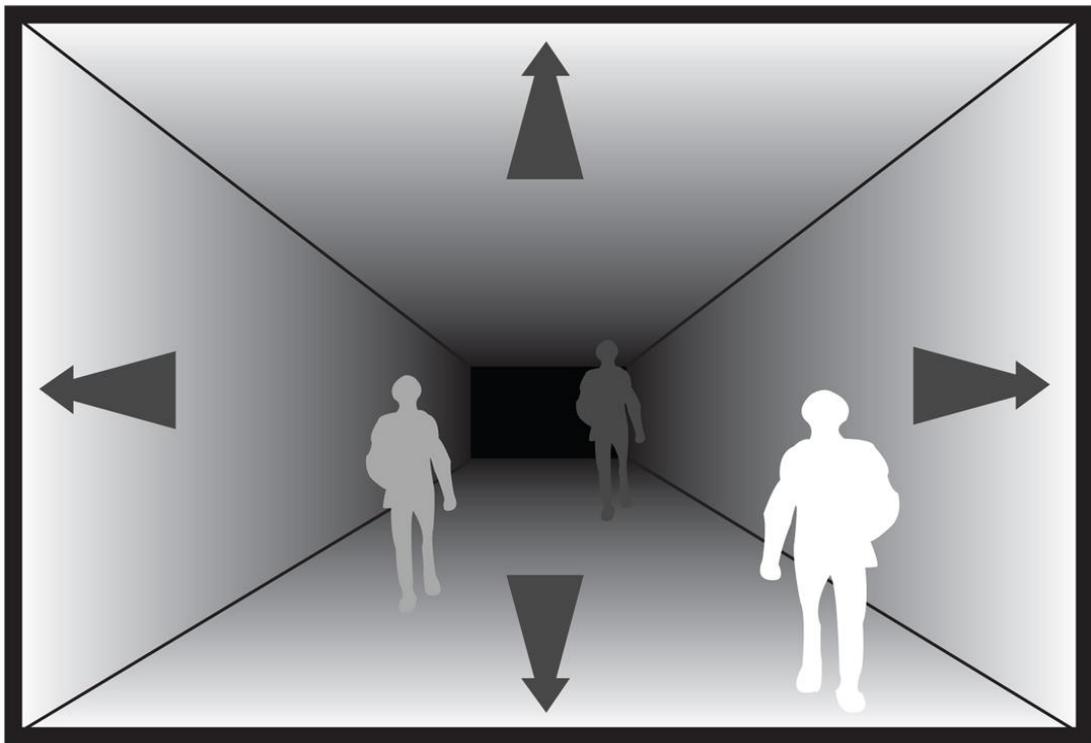


Fig. 69b - Duality and illusion Zone.

Having said that, anxiety is the emotion one might most associate with the fog and mist situation. Nonetheless, there is no time to be carried away by the immediate effects of fog and mist. Carefully, I have set a few priorities while photographing the subject and object during the fog and mist encounters on the borderlands.

Firstly, I would define the targeted subject or object in a non-overlapping position. Secondly, there should be gesture of movement where I can identify the dainty action in fog and mist, rather than photographing a totally still scene. I dislike getting motionless acts and poses in the mysterious fog and mist environment. Thirdly, I would avoid photographing moving characters on the side road, resulting in isolation and overlapping with the background. Instead, to capture the main character or subject on the road would be a better choice.

The below illustration (Fig. 70) demonstrates that the clarity of the composition detail is of the utmost importance to me as a quick guideline in order to obtain the desired result in fog and mist conditions, besides the duality zone I seek.

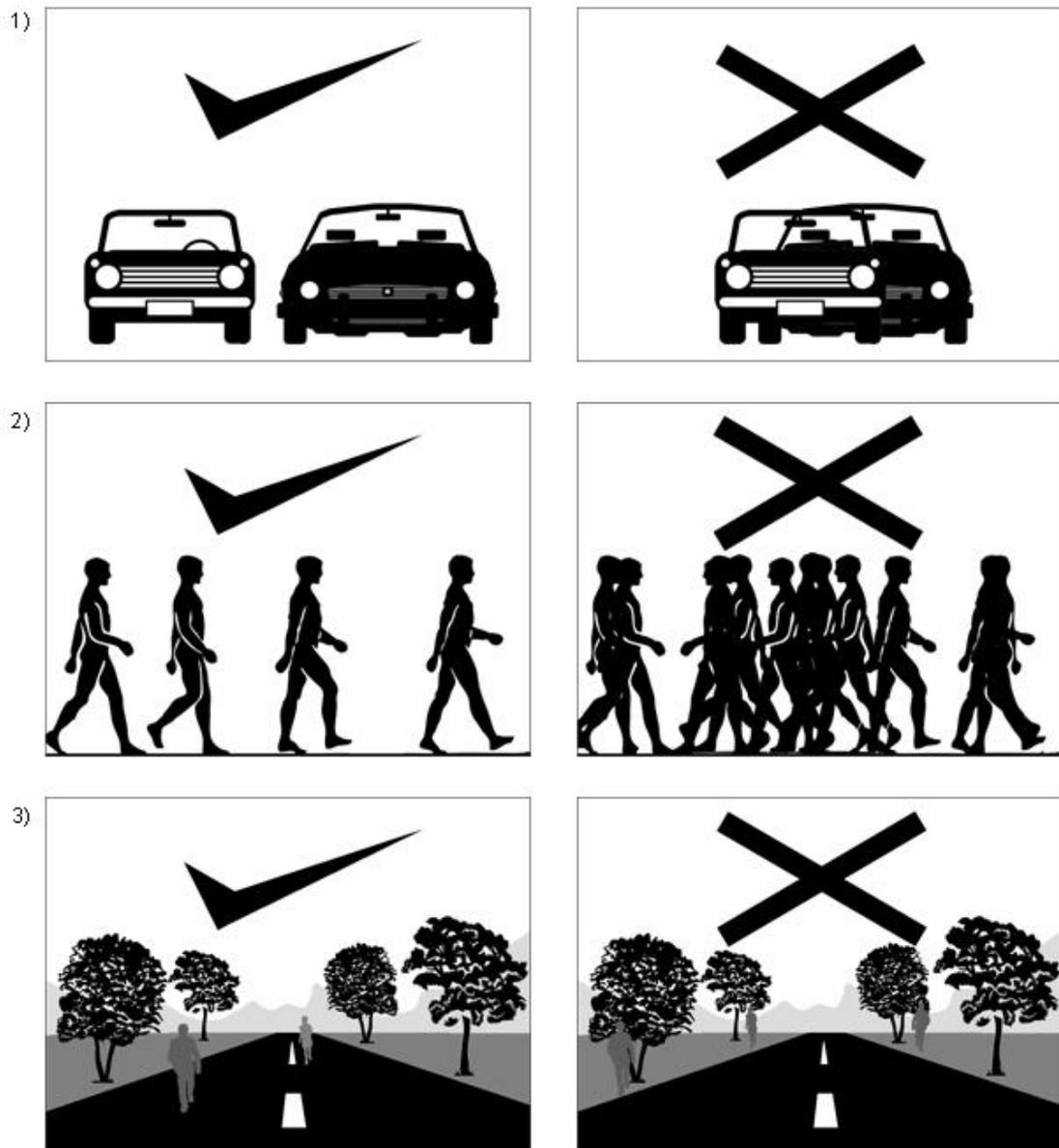


Fig. 70 - Correct and false composition.

By understanding the weather conditions, timing is another crucial factor that affects the appearance of light when it comes to taking a photo in the fog.

Depending on the type of fog conditions, some might form a thick clump over time and vary in thickness depending on the wind. Our eyes take time to adjust to the contrast of fog and mist. It is especially difficult to notice the differences of fog density if they move gradually (Fig. 71a and 71b). Here I have learnt to master the ideal photographic condition under various fog and mist encounters. The right amount of fog and mist appearance is crucial to determine the mysterious and surrealistic quality needed in my photograph. Fig. 71a, demonstrates a clearer and less condensed fog and mist condition, where humans are obviously shown on the ski ride, however Fig. 71b, demonstrates a more mysterious moment when the density of fog and mist increases a minute later before everything disappears totally in fog and mist.



Fig. 71a - First Shot  
Ski Ride, Kartepe, Bolu, Turkey.  
Photographic print, 2011.

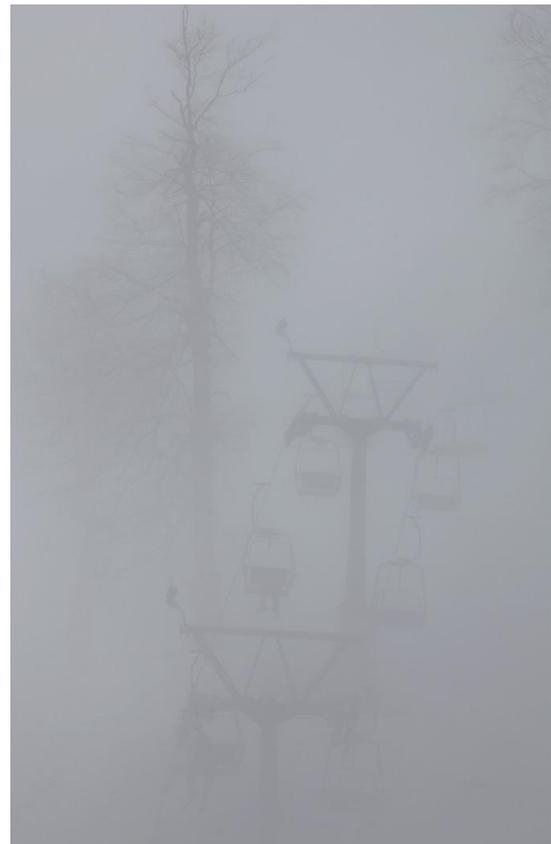


Fig. 71b - Second Shot (1 minute later)

Selecting a good photograph is as important as capturing the precise moment during the fog and mist conditions. After carefully examining and analysing the photographed work, I also pay detailed attention to analysing the impact of the content and consistency of the context between each photograph, to build up a substantial photography series. Therefore, I have eliminated many single *In and Out of the Mist* photographs that could not fit well into the series. Besides the content and context of the photographs, I have distinguished the photographs according to the combination of critical technical and artistic elements - A) Focus subject, B) Depth of field and C) Timing for maximal impact.

#### Analysis of the non-selected works:

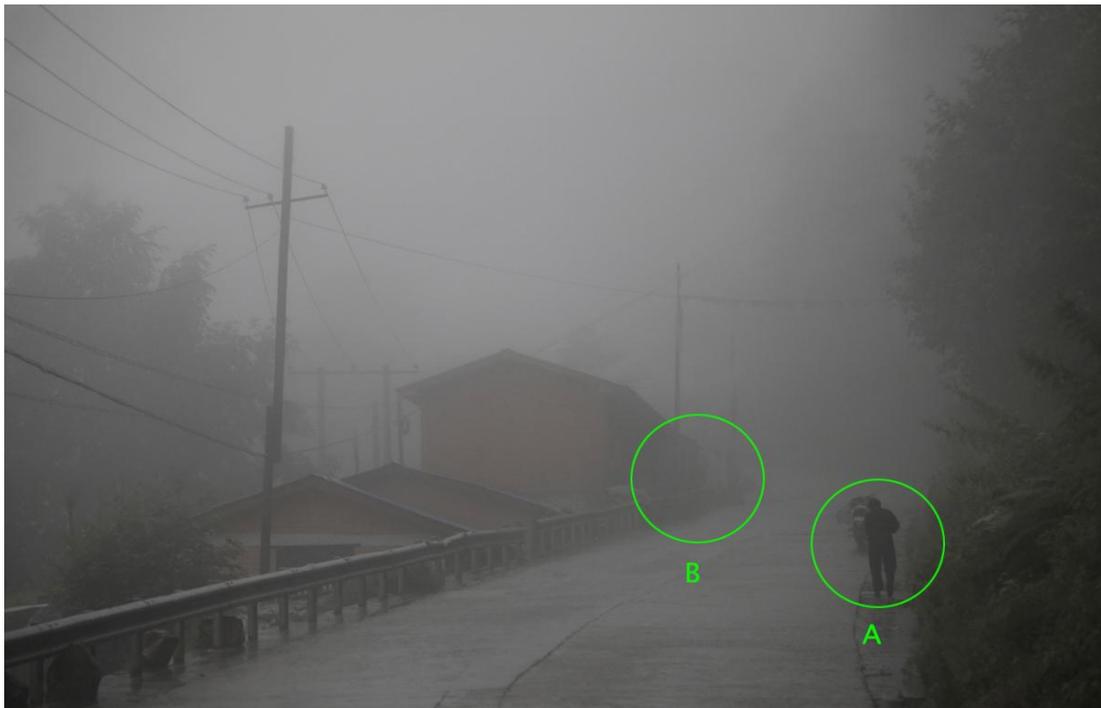


Fig. 72 - Fog and Mist.

A) Focus subject - The photograph above is not selected because the main focus subject – the human - is walking at the side of the main pathway. His or her action is overlapping with the motorcycle behind, resulting an unclear situation.

B) Depth of field - The depth of field is ideal in this photograph, but the colour is still vividly vibrant (orange colour houses). I would prefer the fog and mist to reach the correct density, resulting in a neutral grey, balanced atmosphere. In general, I would consider this a weak photo because there is no strong content and context, connecting the human action with the environment.

C) Timing for maximal impact - I waited about 2 minutes in this scene for the maximal impact, wondering why the stranger came down from his or her motorcycle and started to walk back. Nonetheless, the fog did not spread well at that moment due to the rainy weather conditions.



Fig. 73 - Fog and Mist.

A) Focus subject - The photograph above is not selected because of the imperfect composition and poor clarity in the image. The main subject - the human - should be photographed on the road in motion, separating the background and trees.

B) Depth of field - The dense fog resulted in lack of clarity in the photograph. There is a need for better focus on the subject within the composition. In general, there is no centre-of-focus subject that would convey a coherent content and context.

C) Timing for maximal impact - The fog is not dense and not spread well enough to create the puzzling and intimidating effects I desire, because I could still spot the background vehicles in the far distance.

### Analysis of the selected works:



Fig. 74 - In and Out of the Mist - Stranger.

A) Focus subject - Detecting and capturing the moving subject – the dog in the middle of the road - provided me with an interesting point of focus in the composition. The traveller on the road that we can observe from the background makes the composition more seductive, suggesting an ambiguous atmosphere that aroused me to arrest the moment instantly.

B) Depth of field - The gradual fog condition that appeared in the composition provided a good depth of field for the foreground (dog), mid-ground (traveller) and background (trees).

C) Timing for maximal impact - The perfect duality zone occurs in this photograph, because when I photograph it, I have no clue if the person is walking toward me or away from me. The density of the fog in the background is optimal enough to create the duality zone I seek.



Fig. 75 - In and Out of the Mist - Moving Assets.

A) Focus subject - The primary focus is to detain the nomad horse-rider with his whip, herding the sheep toward the poorly visible pathway that is shrouded by the fog ahead.

B) Depth of field - The gradual fog condition that appeared in the composition provided a good depth of field for the foreground (horse rider), mid-ground (livestock - sheep) and background (trees).

C) Timing for maximal impact - Physically, the perfect duality zone does not occur in this photograph, because I can clearly notice the horse-rider and sheep were moving forward into the fog then disappearing all of a sudden. However, conceptually and time-wise it is perfect, because it clearly demonstrates the effects of fog and mist that may change a circumstance in a fraction of a second. It is a perfect moment of illusion awaiting us in the next minute. At the same time, it is an ideal scene for the viewer to foresee the "before" and "after", "with" and "without" the shepherd in the next moment on the borderland.

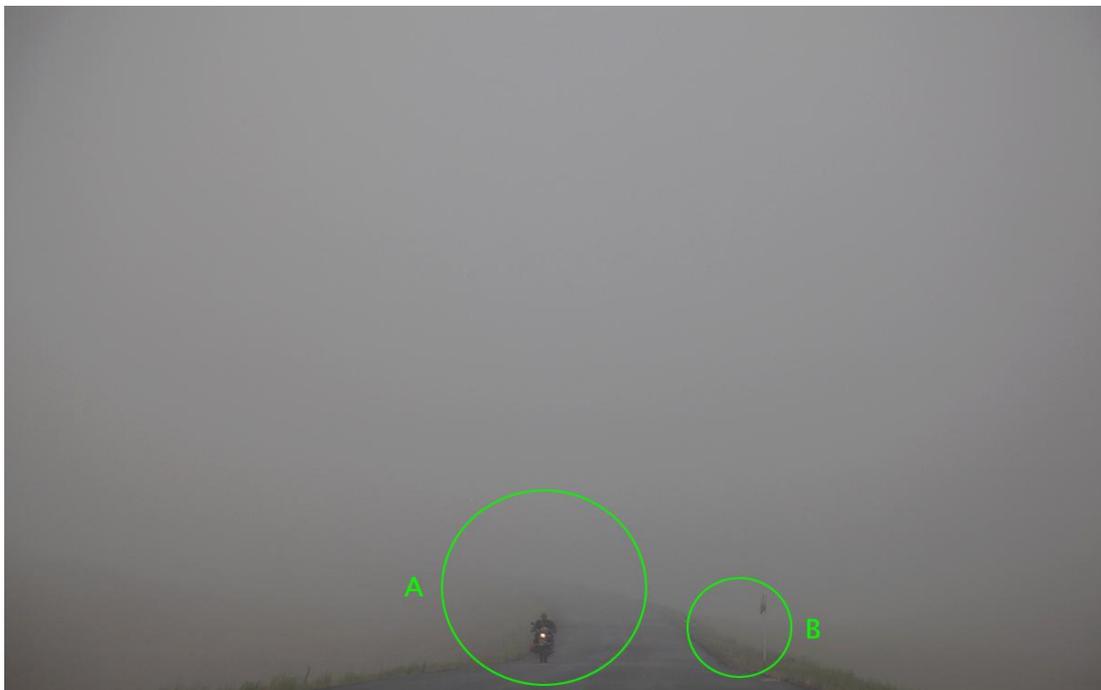


Fig. 76 - In and Out of the Mist - Make Way.

A) Focus subject - The travelling motorcycle on the road with the headlight turned on as the main focus subject. With the flag on the road side, it looks like the nomadic motorcyclist finished his own race in the middle of nowhere.

B) Depth of field - The tempestuous weather mysteriously covered the road, leading to the road fading away gradually toward the background, suggesting the essence of an epic journey of the nomadic motorcyclist.

C) Timing for maximal impact - I waited for the motorcyclist to appear noticeably in about 10 seconds to ensure I will clearly capture the motorcyclist out of the tempestuous fog, as if he is out of the perfect storm as a sole survivor on the borderland.



Fig. 77 - In and Out of the Mist - Tracks and Traces.

A) Focus subject - The workers walking together romantically on the train track toward the sunrise provided the composition with a well-focussed subject in the centre.

B) Depth of field - The train track provided a good depth of field toward the faded away background, along with the bushes and trees: the resulting atmosphere is strangely romantic and surreal.

C) Timing for maximal impact - I waited for the workers to walk to the middle of the train track, so that they would not be too near or too far away, dominating or disappearing in the fog. Everything is perfect when the sunrise gradually arises,

revealing itself as the sign of a new day. There are surprises in this particular photo, because a bird is flying out of the tree from the right-hand middle-level edge. It is a strangely intimidating and perfect moment for a new day toward the unforeseen frontier.



Fig. 78 - In and Out of the Mist - Life's Journey.

A) Focus subject - The crippled lady assisted by a loved one, walking out of the dense fog as if they are coming out from an apocalyptic disaster. Their intimate yet struggling-alike action provided the composition as the main focus subject.

B) Depth of field - I could still notice borderlanders wandering in the background in such dense fog conditions.

C) Timing for maximal impact - I did not notice the handicapped woman until she walked toward the foreground, assisted by a loved one. I waited for about a minute to arrest this strangely apocalyptic atmospheric moment.



Fig. 79 - In and Out of the Mist - Nowhere.

A) Focus subject - Among the trees, there is an obscured human in action, as if he is walking toward us or away from us. Although he is not at the centre, he became the main focus subject in this composition.

B) Depth of field - In the background, we can still see details, like the fences, trees and smaller bushes. Overall, this photograph evokes the intimate connection between a lone person carrying a few items, travelling through a vast primordial landscape that appears so ancient, as if we are witnessing the beginning of humankind.

C) Timing for maximal impact - When photographing in a plain environment at the correct time, the result can be powerfully evocative. In this contemporary period in the world's history, when there has been a spate of natural disasters worldwide, this photograph makes us consider how we could survive in a time of climate change or other force that nature could unleash.

Although I admired Sophie Calle's works, I must say that her voyeuristic style and approach to photography will not work for me. Sophie Calle's *Colour Blind* series (Calle 2010, pp.384-390) demonstrated that the personal experience of the blind person regarding "monochrome" is enough to convey and visualise an artwork. Is this enough to convey the personal experience, inner feeling and words that are absurd enough to generate any random possible images? Some contemporary photographers may say that one can photograph how one wishes and anything one likes. There are no absolute rules in photography. While the photographer is free to point at any subject they want to photograph with their own expression, the above guidelines and facts (Fig. 69a, 69b and 70) actually guided me to detect the potential imagery during the creation and selection of the *In and Out of the Mist* series (Fig. 74 to Fig. 79). With the analysis, method and approach that I have set up to photograph the borderlands, I have convincingly created fruitful results - the surrealistic style in a realistic condition - during my photographic encounters of fog and mist from Western China to the Himalayan Region. I am satisfied with the result of the *In and Out of the Mist* series because the images are visually striking yet whispering gently without disclosing, which leads to gaze without total revelation, which uncovers without controlling, allures without deceiving through the grey, obscure uncertainty of the borderlands.

## Chapter 4

# Photography as Practice-Based Artistic Approach

In all my photography expeditions (*Documentary Photography, Realm of Endless Stretches, On the Road* and *In and Out of the Mist*) I have always applied a *duality concept* - "Object to Subject" to further explore the possibility of different perspective and unexpected point of view. While navigating the borderlands from Western China to the Himalayan Region, I first started with documentary approaches by photographing the borderland communities' integration and interaction. Later on, I continued to search for better aesthetic forms of self expression, especially involving the realm of the human and nature relationship. It is because photography is more than the hothouse flowers of the pseudo-photographic art world; the issue of what is happening should be raised, discussed and photographed in different ways in order to balance the topic of discussion in a variety of angles related to borderlands issues from Western China to the Himalayan Region. As my practical research progressed further, after dwelling in the *Realm of Endless Stretches* and *On The Road* photography series, I was amazed and attracted by the strangely seductive fog and mist effects that I encountered in the borderlands. At the same time, I came to realise that the visual and conceptual representation of fog and mist would lead me to further my discovery beyond my initial expectation. Object and subject are being obscured in fog and mist, yet the subtle uncertainty and fuzziness could contain much deeper meaning than a sharp, bright, colourful photograph. The bottom line is, how my *duality concept* - "Object to subject" works.

#### 4.1 Duality concept: "Object to Subject"

I always try to enrich myself in ways of seeing and by creating my photographic works in a conceptual and puzzling mode. Although there are many unexpected encounters in the known and unknown borderlands, I have always entered this region with a "duality" concept. I prefer to enter the borderlands with a neutral mindset, and without a fixed, preconceived idea. This means I look at each object and subject from different points of view. Besides my own perspective, I try to see from another person's point of view (different viewpoint through dialogue or standing point of view), or an object point of view as if the object is alive, in order to obtain different results by comparing and contrasting them with my own position. Since one's identity is often dependent on reflexive recognition - an external opinion, coupled with the self-validation of this recognition - we are socialised to present ourselves in a way that pleases others (Wilska 2002, p.208). While our identities are not totally prescribed by others, our public personae, no matter how independent and individualistic, are still somewhat confined by social norms and expectations, since our public persona is inevitably linked to how we present ourselves, how we see the world, and how we would visualise the surrounding. Definitely, this identity recognition requires immediate reflexes, experiences and decisions made from one accumulated experience of "way of visualising" and visual perception. For example, I captured the young Uyghur tightrope walker in a famous Urumqi (Western China) cultural show to demonstrate the different perspective and point of view, depicting different representation of visual meaning and perception for a single event. I try to see the action from many different angles and positions, leading to different visual interpretation. In Fig. 80a, the height and scale between the young tightrope walker and the environment is not known. The audience's sitting location is unknown as well. In Fig. 80b, we can sense the height and scale of the space. In Fig. 80c, one can notice that my camera is very near to the young tightrope walker while he is blindfolded. The perspective and composition emphasised the young tightrope walker's delicate action, as against the audience at the bottom.

In Fig. 80d, this composition and angle allow us to witness the audience's excitement, in which we could be seen in their camera flashes while the young tightrope walker lifted his left leg attempting a critical action, resulting in an anxious moment in the atmosphere. It also provides us a glimpse of what the young tightrope walker might be seeing when he is high up. By having various points of view, I would be able to pick the photograph that best suits my storytelling.



Fig. 80a



Fig. 80b



Fig. 80c



Fig. 80d - Young tightrope walker.

These practical works are unmistakable. The photographed subject and object are not an account of random photography, but an exploration and recognition by extending the unexpected possibility - of finding "hope" to photograph in every situation, even when I encountered unexpected weather conditions (rainy, misty and foggy). Under such poor visibility conditions, hardly anything could be noticed if one did not pay sufficiently careful attention. Therefore, the concept of "unity in duality" which arises in my works is subtly discovered, not only for and by myself, but continues to be discovered and observed from and by other people's points of view. Each photography series that I have produced in this research is an outcome of my keen reasoning and contemplation, demanding time and the intricate critical thinking that marks my works. In Figs. 81a and 81b, these observations and reflections are daintily shown in my final series of work *In and Out of the Mist*. The notions on "duality" in my visual perception first led me to question the relationships of the borderland, especially that between human and nature. Barthes acknowledges that the simplest line or detail in a photograph can project a "desire beyond what (the image) permits us to see" (Barthes 1981, p.59), while each photograph possesses the incredible capacity to shrink behind that which it represents (Barthes 1981, p.82). The *In and Out of the Mist* series would allow the viewers to sense the effects of fog and mist at first sight, to feel the consequences and circumstances of such magical encounters, then arouse their curiosity to move closer to the photograph, searching for more details in each work.

## **"Object to Subject"**

Firstly, many living spaces at the borderlands are quickly changing from lower-ground houses to giant blocks of apartments. The rise of the apartments in the borderlands was not driven by programmatic needs or artistic desires, but rather economic conditions. Many of these fast-constructed apartments may not even meet the standard facility and safety regulations. Regarding Figs. 82a, 82b and 82c, I am sure many people may wonder how a rural area could be so congested in an unlimited borderland region. Is there not more than enough space allocated and provided in this region? I must say that simply putting everyone together in a given empty space is not a smart way to control borderlanders' activities. Most borderland residents may need to pay for such stereotyped housing. Due to the fact that some borderlanders are nomads and they move frequently from region to region, the concept of having a permanent apartment is unsuited to their needs and cultural patterns. From what I have observed from the big city apartments, residents are usually much more independent and isolated. The social interaction contingencies are questionable. The concept of having "apartments" in a borderland area is thus an oxymoron: a diverse neighbourhood housed in a staggeringly homogenous building type. There is nothing iconic, functional or beautiful about having such residential spaces in nature, especially in the Himalayan region. These congested buildings are the reflection and representation of chaotic crises and imbalance in nature. On the other hand, there are many forbidden individual huts and illegal houses being built in isolated areas in the borderlands. Both sardines-in-a-can-like residential spaces (Fig. 82a to Fig. 82c) and illegally scattered site housing (Fig. 81a and Fig. 81b) continue to raise many problems in borderlands, such as social issues involving infrastructure, security, pollution, education and health. The "duality" concept is like a devil's advocate, urging me to think, look and photograph my "object to subject" from different points of view - the resident, the building, the nature, and myself as the outsider.



Fig. 81a - In and Out of the Mist, borderlands residential site (An abandoned house), Kodari, Nepal.



Fig. 81b - In and Out of the Mist, borderlands residential site (Scattered site housing), Sikkim, India.

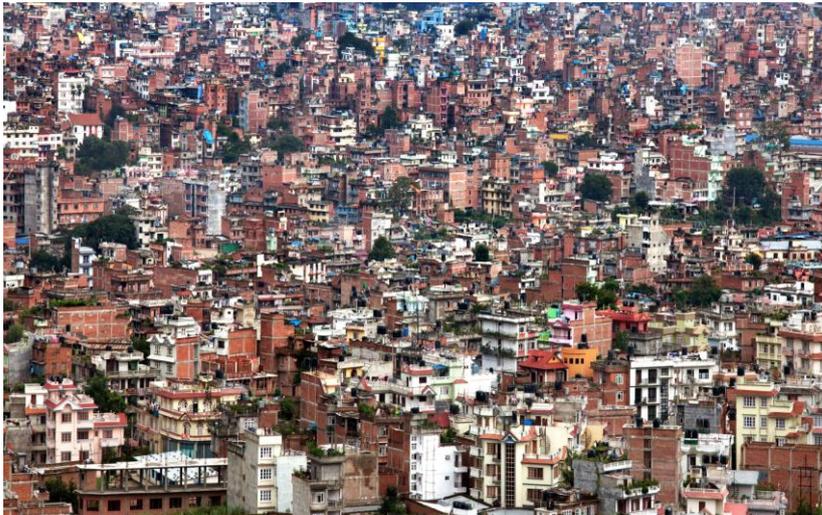


Fig. 82a - Dense housing and apartment, Katmandu, Nepal.



Fig. 82b - Dense housing and apartment, Srinagar, India.



Fig. 82c - Dense housing and apartment, Kashmir, India.

Secondly, I have explored how objects modify the borderland environment, where the symbiotic relationship between the object and the borderland environment allow entities to adapt to one another. Celia Lury (Lury 1998, p.157) explained that an individual develops the capacity to view and take pleasure in objects and experiences, usually placed outside the range of institutionally-designated aesthetic objects. When one encounters fog and mist that are out of his or her regular routine and rhythm, *In and Out of the Mist* can result in sudden poetic and romantic visual appearances that allude to the vast variety of landscapes around the borderlands. My main intention was not to specify or reveal the borderland location in the strictest sense, because I see that man, man-made and nature relationships are inseparable. These relationships lead to the construction of a visual metaphor, where a subject could be composed and analysed from various photographic angles. Alan Warde (Warde 2001, p.556) argues that the meaning of the objects themselves is shaped by the way in which we use them during this process of identity-formation. I have documented the additions and adaptations of object as traceable identity in my photographic subject. What do I mean by that? In order to understand the concept better, it is best to witness "before" and "after" a man-made object is being built or inserted into the borderland. It is part of the "duality" concept that I often question myself, as the outside observer. Do man-made objects in the borderlands serve a purpose? Man-made objects such as the utility poles installed in the borderlands (Fig. 83a to Fig. 83c) would definitely spoil the majestic scenery of this region. Certainly the scenery in the Western China to Himalayan Region is grand and breathtaking. It is even more magnificent with lots of utility poles in front of it. Most photographers would think the utility poles have spoiled the scenery. I too agreed, but I must say that there is nothing wrong if we include them as part of the photographic composition. Why try to avoid the unavoidable? It would be easier to photograph if we accepted the appearance of the utility poles as we accept who we are and why we are there. Did the utility poles intrude on the photographic composition or on nature? In contrast, did we intrude on their position (utility poles) as we tried to ostracise them from the natural marvel in the background? These unavoidable, man-made structures (public toilet,

signage, bridge, resting hut, etc), such as "utility poles", which usually supply comfort to people, at the same time dominate the borderland's natural marvels. The "duality" concept pushes me to imagine the borderlands without such man-made structures, or at least before they were being built. How would this region be? Without them, the surroundings may look untouched, pure and unsullied - a virgin land that we fight hard to protect nowadays. Then, I came to realise the idea of emptiness as part of the "duality" concept, where "form is emptiness and emptiness is form". It is a famous and wise paradox related to Buddhist philosophy. Emptiness is a state of perception, a way of looking at experience. It adds nothing to and takes away nothing from physical and mental events. I witnessed the surroundings that I encountered in the borderlands by visualising the scene without any human activity or man-made object. There is a need for a man-made object to make meaning for its body by filling the empty space around it. This means the design, location, function and purpose of any man-made structure should be served wisely and decisively. Not only that, but some of the photographs I took also contain elements of re-enactment, as if the object/man-made structure in the photograph wants to remind us of the human actions we tend to overlook in the past and the spaces between the significant moments of life in this region.



Fig. 83a - Utility poles (Heavy rainstorm), Xinjiang, China.



Fig. 83b - Utility poles, Tibet, China.



Fig. 83c - Utility poles, Xinjiang, China.

Thirdly, I must say that everyone has different capability and capacity of the senses. According to Da Vinci, “beauty cannot be properly conceived if the eye, using its visual power, does not embrace all the parts at the same time” (Mendelsohn 2001, p.299). In order to understand better and experience differently each time I enter the borderlands of this region, I try to improve my photographic works with sensory recognition methods, including seeing, touching, smelling, hearing and tasting. For example, (Fig. 84a and Fig. 84b) I smelled the new tar road built at the edge of the restricted area, I touched the man-made

structures in the middle of nowhere, wondering what they are there for, and tasted the different local borderlanders' home-cooked cuisine. Again, I would exercise my "senses" in the "duality" concept to provide me new visual perception. I must say that not all of them are good experiences; some bad experience may provide me better understanding of the consequences and teach me how to react to resolve the problems. The encounter with fog and mist does not only provide me a puzzling aesthetic visual appearance I desired. It also contains a negative aspect if one stubbornly continues to move on recklessly. I realised that many accidents (Fig. 84c) on the dangerous and sloppy paths in this region increase when fog and mist surround its nature. Fog and mist can be wicked, but can also be "deadly" wicked. Why spend time to fight against invisible particles (fog)? I would simply slow down and enjoy the free-flow portal of unexpected disclosure.



Fig. 84a - Newly completed border road connecting Kyrgyzstan and China.



Fig. 84b - Newly completed border road connecting Tajikistan and China.



Fig. 84c - A jeep flip over, caused by heavy fog and mist (zero visibility).

## **4.2 Borderland Community Integration and Interaction**

In my early photography development (p.76), one of my initial research aims was to photograph the massive gatherings of many ethnic groups in the borderlands. My documentary/photojournalism approach stands in stark contrast with photojournalists who photograph the startling conflict between different ethnic groups in this region. Rather than promoting chaos, fear and negative incidents, it is a sheer joy and rare experience for me to witness an event together, without differentiating background and race, forming a tolerant and peaceful celebration together. As an artist and photographer myself, to sense, to experience and to witness the process of an event is crucial in practical research, as I have repeatedly mentioned. Personal discovery, communication, experience with the local borderlanders, and understanding of the human and nature relationship is fundamental to my creation of practical photography works. Otherwise, the photography works would be shallow and based on surface visuality. In fact, the process is almost more important than the final artwork, because of what the research journey has offered. After all, it is the research journey that allowed me to discover and to experience.

This artistic research in the remote borderland region provided me with many unexpected and new discoveries of personal truth, sense of fact, and artistic synthesis between human, man-made structure and nature. I am especially amazed by the community integration and interaction in this region. The daily harmonious way of life is often neglected by major news agencies because such reports are not sensational or eye-catching.

I am always amazed by the normal, beautiful, and peaceful way of life and profound morals of living together respectfully. During my time spent researching from Western China to the Himalayan Region, I became especially attracted by Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Region. Both autonomous regions remained my favorite research itinerary because of the versatile and dominant culture, warm

hospitality, and unique landscapes.



Fig. 85 - Gathering, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Xinjiang Autonomous Region is separated by Tianshan mountain region, the Tarim Basin in the south and the Dzungarian Basin in the north. Although the Tianshan mountain range served as the divider of the northern and southern regions, it did not prevent the active interaction of society and ethnic communities, ever since the Han Dynasty (206 B.C - 220 A.D). Xinjiang is a land of history, culture, natural resources and trade, and has been an economic route since the Silk Road period. In the past, the most significant ethnic groups were Sai (Sak), Rouzhi, Wusun, Qiang, Hun and Han. By the end of 19th century, Xinjiang consisted of Uyghur, Han, Kazakh, Tajik, Hui, Kyrgyz, Mongol, Manchu, Tatar, Uzbek, Daur, Russian and Xibe. Although Xinjiang is about the size of Iran, only 4.3% of the land area is suitable for human habitation, and 1/3 of the landscape is desert - The Taklamakan Desert (second largest desert in the world after the Sahara).

As I observed, each city in Xinjiang consists of different majority and minority communities. The Chinese government is keen to strengthen, promote, and support the unity of all ethnic groups, protecting the freedom of religious belief and cultural enrichment by maintaining public order, peace and the safety of all citizens. Schools, universities, cultural centres and, public infrastructure are shared equally and continue to improve. In Xinjiang, I have witnessed the rapid growth of facilities development within the few years of my research, when revisiting the same places. I have also witnessed that people from various ethnic groups gather together during religious days and festivals, celebrating and cherishing the occasion together (Fig. 85). The local residents respect and embrace each other by sharing the joint cultural festival openly and colourfully. Each time I feel grateful, when I am hosted by warm and kind Xinjiang settlers - Uyghur, Kazakhs and Han peoples - that I barely knew of before.

Xinjiang has always been a multi-religion region where diverse faiths have coexisted and flourished since ancient times. People in Xinjiang are free to practice their own religion. In the past, the religions spread to Xinjiang along the Silk Road, where primitive and animist beliefs mix with the external religions like Zoroastrianism, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Today, Shamanism is still practiced by some small ethnic groups. In Xinjiang, the majority of the ethnic minorities are Muslim disciples - Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Huis. At the same time, Mongol, Daur and Xibe ethnic groups are Buddhists. Today, much of the historical religious architecture is well-preserved and some buildings are listed as museums and UNESCO world cultural heritage sites for national and worldwide visitors. Each year, with Chinese central government and Xinjiang local administration instruction and funds, restoration projects of important mosques and temples (for example the refurbishment of the Great Mosque in Urumqi, the Jaimay Temple in Hotan and the Baytul Mosque in Yining and other historical architecture), are carried out. New cultural centres continue to get set up and built in this region.

The local community continues to flourish and it owes its gratitude and acknowledgement to the safeguarding army for development, construction and productivity in Xinjiang. In 1954, the central government decided to renounce the task of national defence and focus on building up a prosperous Xinjiang. The army and army family members became the major work force of production and labour in Xinjiang, at the same time as overseeing the stability and frontier defence of Xinjiang (Gough 2005, p.393). The army, police, militia and people of Xinjiang Autonomous Region contributed their efforts together to reject violent domestic and foreign forces, thus protecting the border territory of Xinjiang, yet maintaining open communication and active exchange activities with friendly neighboring countries.

On the other hand, Tibet Autonomous Region's population is dominated by Tibetans, 90% overall, leaving Han (7%), Monpas, Hui, Qiang and Lhobas (3%). The Tibetan plateau is well known as the "roof of the world", situated 4000 metres above the sea level. Tibet is the least densely populated autonomous region of all.

Although Tibet prefecture is situated at the world's highest roof, Tibet was never completely isolated. The Buddhist influence from India and Nepal and the Han's political influence had been dominant since the Tang Dynasty (7th and 8th century), Sung Dynasty, Yuan Dynasty and Ching Dynasty. Thus, in the midst of a changing world, the claim of the Dalai Lama that Tibet would better preserve its unique customs and culture without the influence and suppression of external forces is interesting. Tibetans who are trying to preserve their traditional societies and values are not only having difficulty adapting to the rapid economic, political and social changes, but are facing a critical threat of contemporary information and up-to-date technology. With the younger and future generation exposed, keen to learn and use modern technology like smart phones, internet, satellite broadcast television and other new social media, the sacred and rooted profound Tibetan Buddhism ideology and philosophy is in a condition of serious trauma and dilemma: from a feudal to a socialist system, from reading the sacred and holy

Buddhist doctrine, to the world wide web of globally connected news and information. Would Tibet be able to survive the cultural changes and continue to isolate herself from the rest of the world? Some said Tibet would not survive the communist-socialist system; after what I have experienced and observed in Tibet, I would say Tibet would not survive any external system (even democratic-capitalism) if Tibetans are not ready to update themselves fast enough, to go hand in hand from religion to science, political to social, culture to technology at a pace with the twenty first century world.

I must say that there remains a small portion of Tibetans (mostly those who refuse to receive education are radically religious) that are sceptical, hesitating and rejecting of the external world. On the other hand, the younger generation and those who are not only religiously educated, but who also received higher education and scientific training are very optimistic, intellectual and open to domestic and foreign conversation, as well as world topics. Certainly, I have experienced several negative acquaintances in Tibet, but the positive and heart-warming experiences remained prominent and noteworthy.

Personally, I think religious practice should always be exercised with awareness and consciousness, not with complete blindness of self-submission and acceptance. This would apply to any other religion as well. When someone is over-radical or conservative, he or she will only harm himself or herself and people around him or her. Tibetan Buddhism embraces tolerance and peace, and important celebrations are always celebrated with the local community and foreigners' participation. One of the most important events for Tibetans would be the Tibetan New Year - "Losar", where the most spectacular and long-awaited event is the display of "Holy Giant Thangka". The Giant Thangka (Fig. 86) usually takes fifty to sixty Tibetan monks to carry it out from the main temple, in order to open and expose it in the designated public space for one hour only per year. Many dances, prayers and performances will take place during "Losar".

The support of central government helped to increase the productivity of agriculture in both autonomous regions by modernising the traditional agricultural processes in production and operation. The introduction and transformation of technological industries has boosted both autonomous regions' economic growth tremendously. Science and technology help to play an essential role in developing the regional economy and social movement. The exchange of experts and expertise in science and technology also helps to boost interaction among the locals who are willing to try the new methods and equipment.



Fig. 86 - Giant Thangka, Tibet Autonomous Region.

As I observed, there have been great leaps in the education system, where the ratio of the educated and literacy among the young and middle-aged has greatly improved. I have witnessed this by talking to the younger children when the elderly are unable to communicate in Mandarin or English with me. Nonetheless, there is still plenty of room for improvement to encourage the villagers to send their

children to school, rather than constraining them to serve the family and farm land. Education for the borderlanders is proving much tougher, as some of the peoples are nomads. I have also witnessed that mobile schools and teachers are being sent by the central government to educate the nomadic children. All ethnic groups' children are freely admitted to public schools, which would help better communication and understanding in the community. I have witnessed sheer harmony between borderlanders in the disputed territories, and can acknowledge the beauty of the borderlands and its peoples' peaceful way of life. Both Xinjiang Uyghur and Tibet Autonomous region have achieved outstanding social development and economic growth each year. Together with residents from many ethnic groups, central government, and local administration, both autonomous regions have made significant historical milestones. Nevertheless, due to the location, the vastly spread landscape and harsh weather conditions of Xinjiang and Tibet, there are still many challenges, such as education, health and medical care, which can be further improved. I would emphasise that the "transnational space" should be encouraged here for better communication, by understanding the importance of cross-cultural activities at borderlands.

#### **4.2.1 Transnational Space**

While much of the media and news are based on the negative - conflict and sensational incidents - my thesis would use photography as a medium to embrace the noteworthy development and less highlighted borderland areas. My aim here is to examine if borderless borderland is at all possible, as well as one's own "local borders": ideas of inclusion and exclusion, identity within one's community and the relationship within the wider sphere of the Himalayan region.

A neutral ground in this region proves very challenging, not only because of the extreme landscape and different ethnic groups. It is mainly due to different central government conservative foreign policies and historical scars. The concept of "international space" does not exist, if we are to look at it from a physical, territorial point of view. The only physical "International spaces" that exist now are the ongoing disputed zones, disagreed between local communities and different central governments. Most spaces have been divided, endorsed and dominated by humans, from their solo ideology and selfish gene of separation instead of unity. In various areas of traditional or contemporary life, no matter if it is in the metropolis or unknown borderland, the same clan or community always stay together, distinguishing themselves from the foreigner or "outsider". It is most precious for me to see communities mingle and mix with each other harmoniously in a "transnational space". Transnationalism is a social movement to loosen the boundaries between countries, by encouraging people to collaborate, communicate and increase connectivity. Transnational ties should especially encouraged on borderlands (Western China to the Himalayan Region). Many may not know that there is a distinct difference between "Internationalism" and "Transnationalism". "Internationalism" refers to global cooperation between two or more nation states. It is an affair between the different nation-state institutions and governments. However, "Transnationalism" refers to cooperation and collaboration between people and activities that go beyond national perimeters, in which nation-

state governments do not play a significant role. The migration of overseas Chinese and Indians is the best example and role model of modern transnationalism. Many supporters of transnationalism encourage the flow of people, ideas, skills and products between regions. They believe that it does not make sense to stop or draw boundaries between nation-states. In the past, migration patterns usually concluded with a point of departure and point of arrival. Nowadays, migration patterns have shifted to a frequent movement between two or more social spaces. With the rapid growth of global communication technologies and transportation, more and more migrants call themselves "global citizens"; they travel frequently and have strong ties with more than one home country, blending into universal social and geographic space. In a sense "Transnationalism" is the direct, encouraging and effective way to interact with each other without having constraint and pressure from the government. The strategies of "Internationalism" and "Transnationalism" should go hand in hand; likewise, the rapid growth of "Globalisation" should now turn its focus to "Glocalisation" because communities are becoming more and more dynamic, in the sense that they are evaporating, decaying and reshaping in a short periods of time. Central government should play an important role by encouraging the community to instrumentally play their important role for unity, embracing harmony and peace. Using physical force to engage and absorb a border area into a territorial governance space does not yield loyalty and commitment from the local community.

I have spent several years (2009 - 2012) photographing the Western China to the Himalayan Region. I pay frequent visits to the same places and follow a similar itinerary several times in different seasons until I feel satisfied with what I need to photograph in a particular region. I still continue to visit some borderlands that I have yet to fully discover in this region.

In north-western China, the Uyghur Autonomous Region, remains as the largest autonomous region of China, with land coverage of 1,664,900 sq km (640,930

square miles). Xinjiang's population is about 22.09 million people (2013). It is the homeland to numerous indigenous peoples. Due to the harsh landscape of Xinjiang, only 5% of the land can be inhabited. Meanwhile Tibet is the second largest autonomous region in China. It is situated in the south-western part of the country, covering 1,228,400 sq km (474,300 square miles). However Tibet's population is only 3 million, mostly due to the extremely rugged topography and thin air in high mountain ranges, which are not suitable for habitation.

I prefer to consider these areas transnational space because both autonomous regions are neighbouring many countries. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region neighbours Afghanistan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia and Tajikistan. On the other hand, the Tibet Autonomous region neighbours Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal. It is because of the location of both autonomous regions that the variety of cultural and religious practices and many mixed faces and unique origins of peoples can be observed here. One would never know his or her origin unless one asked them or the borderlanders were dressed in their traditional costume. On the borderlands, diversity flourishes, from religion and culture to language, from energy and natural resources to architecture.

Travelling (trespassing) into such restricted zones almost always makes me optimistic about the future of borderlands. Suggesting the achievement of borderless borderlands may be a naive point of view, senseless and insignificant from the political context. I tend to swim against the tide and away from the preset context regarding borderlands territory. Here, fog and mist have effectively demonstrated the possibility of borderless borderlands by easing off the tight borderlands surveillance and security controls. This means the poor visibility caused by the fog and mist makes borderlands security less alert and the borderlands at large harder to inspect. My *In and Out of the Mist* series raised the ongoing borderlands issues in a non-provocative way. If the political consensus is not agreeable or negotiable, at least making a meaningful conceptual photograph

may work to evoke the dilemma on the borderlands. *In and Out of the Mist* is the best antidote to the madness of increasingly controlled territory, when transnational space should be encouraged.

In my opinion, this region is the most suitable ground where transnational space should be established, due to the fact that the Himalayan region is the home ground of more different ethnic groups, with vibrant and versatile cultures, than I have ever witnessed. Border crossing should be encouraged here because borderlanders bear unique cultural identities and customs within themselves, intermingle with "local" communities, and are indeed transformed and bring out new artistic and cultural permutations. In the book *Identity and Culture*, Chris Weedon states that the belief in our ability to shape our own identity and truly know ourselves is only partially correct, yet we live as if full control over who we are is possible (Weedon 2004, p.154). Echoing cultural theorist Stuart Hall's ideas in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Weedon finds that even though identity is not as apparent or straightforward as we think, it still has real world effects. He acknowledges the harm of subscribing to binaries and fixed identities of individuals, particularly their ability to perpetuate inequality and prejudice (Hall 1990, p.154). Beyond the inevitable social influences that borderlanders face in how they choose to live and how they see themselves in future, they are constantly defined by external assumptions and reductionist prejudices, especially from different central governments that tend to reduce them to a community of unidimensional stereotypes. I thought and considered each central government in the Himalayan region borderlands is playing an over-worried, conservative and preservative role. Gordon Allport describes bigotry as unpleasant antagonistic behavior or sensitivity toward somebody who solely belongs to a particular society, which ignores truth and is based on misinformation (Allport 1954, pp.6-20). According to Allport, humans are born free of prejudice but are taught to incorporate it into daily discourse through socialisation. Borderlanders in the Himalayan region have always chosen to live in tolerance and harmony. Yet, from Xinjiang to Tibet to Kashmir to Ladakh and to Bhutan, no community is free from

group scorn, which, by its very nature, denies the dignity of individuals and the unification of groups. The respect for co-existence in borderlands community is still a challenge beyond the challenge. The concept of “place attachment”, by Irwin Altman and Setha Low, (Altman & Low 1992, pp.4-6) defines the ways that people connect to different places, the bonds in identity, place-making and practice. It is important that the borderlanders themselves attain the feeling of being accepted by the other local communities and develop a sense of belonging in which human-environment relations are forged. In history, many royal families have pursued cross-cultural marriage in order to avoid war and embrace each other as one family. Interestingly the person-to-person attachment is somehow related to place attachment, where most married couples tend to stay in fixed place permanently. On the other hand, excessive migrations may complicate the national population, culture, history, political, economic and social balance. However, this does not mean we should apply the same settings to all regions. The Himalayan region’s borderland-neighbouring countries should work together to pour in some progressive consensus and respect this region’s physical, geographic, ethnic and unsolved/imagined possibility of borderless borderland realities. Surely each borderland country is trying to protect their right of sovereignty. Who would then protect those borderlanders’ rights? Many borderlanders suffered the division of disputed territory when their land (home and family) was once on the other side. Political intervention has forcefully separated the borderlands but, when the human and nature relationship cannot be further separated, the "Fog and Mist" intervention has been quietly merging the borderlands again.

### **4.3 Sky View: Navigating The Borderlands - Human and Nature**

Navigating the borderlands takes time, not only because of its vastness as a region. It is also because of the security situation, where some borderlands are extremely difficult to access due to ongoing conflict between local residents, communities and opposite central governments. Some territories are highly alarmed with military bases safeguarding the borders. Furthermore, there is unrest in Western China - Xinjiang, Tibet and neighbouring borderland zones, mostly caused by biased political influence and religious propaganda. As an artist and photographer, what matters to me most is to embrace peace, harmony and tolerance between different ethnic groups and appreciate the wonder and bond of the human and nature relationship at these miraculous borderlands.

The Borderlands from Western China to the Himalayan Region involve many countries, namely Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Pakistan and Tajikistan. Every country establishes a different relationship and manner with their mighty neighbour - China. Some countries may have a hostile relationship with China at the Borderlands (India and Bhutan), meanwhile some countries are warm and friendly with China at the Borderlands (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Nepal), yet some remained in paradoxical positions (Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan).

It is certainly extremely difficult to maintain relationships with so many border-neighbouring countries, especially when there are past historical scars that take time to heal. China is surely keen and positive to improve their relationship with border-neighbouring countries by opening the door for investment, trade and cultural exchange. China has positively co-founded partnerships in various pieces of research and activities with the neighbouring countries, ranging from energy and natural resources, education, technology, agriculture, communication, infrastructure and facility building, security and military exercises, etc. With aerial

photography, I have witnessed the blending of the borderlands landscape, ranging from empty, harsh, uninhabited plains (Fig. 87a and Fig. 87b) to concentrated dense settlement and industry (Fig. 87c, Fig. 87d and Fig. 88).

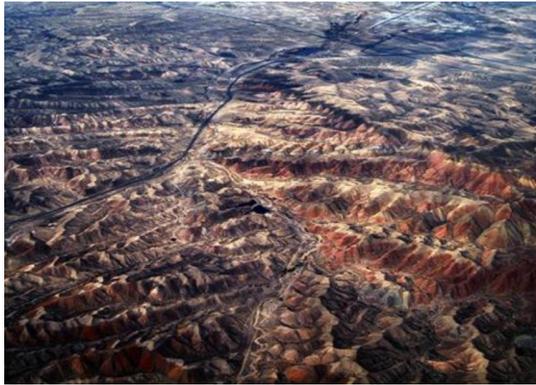


Fig. 87a - Harsh and uninhabited plains.

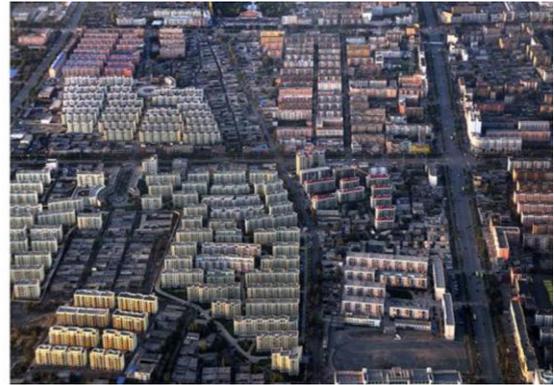


Fig. 87c - Industry area.



Fig. 87b - Harsh and uninhabited plains.



Fig. 87d - Dense settlement.



Fig. 88 - Kashgar, Southwest of Xinjiang.

At a point, the quest for photographic and practical artistic research from Western China to the Himalayan Region seems almost impossible to summarise and cover. It is simply too large, too broad and too long of a journey. Because of that, I decided to use aerial photography after trying the direct human-to-human documentary and interviews with borderlanders. I thought it would be the best way to summarise and to visualise the complex and complicated bond between human and nature by seeing the borders region from high up in the air (Fig. 89a, 89b and 89c). Rene Daumal mentioned that surely when one flies, one sees. One descends, one no longer sees, but one has seen. There is an art of memory when one reaches the lower region. When one can no longer see, one can at least still know (Daumal).

*“It’s really a wonder that I haven’t dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.”*

Anne Frank, the Diary of a Young Girl. (Neo-Neocon 2013)

I have a similar feeling to Anne Frank, by seeing the harsh and almost impossible-to-inhabit landscapes (Fig. 89a, 89b, and 89c) continue to flourish with the human will and spirit to live, and to strive for the better good of humanity. Rabindranath Tagore saw culture and nature linked closely. He considered the beauty of nature as a direct response from physical culture that is reflected by human emotion and spiritual acts. I think we humans are part of nature, yet are a force of nature. From time to time, the insolence of human beings who consider themselves exceptional to nature, often in greed and search for profit, recklessly sacrificed some people, upsetting the balance of nature toward the loading up of destruction such as landslides in the Himalayas. On the borderlands, neighbouring countries should work closely in mutual understanding by reclarifying the meaning of feasible actions for better development. It is important to respect the natural rhythms and environment that allows sustainable management of natural resources. Settlement and industry need careful planning to be conducted and implemented in order to avoid chaotic and unsafe living conditions. The uniqueness of humans is not only having the ability to change nature, but also to understand, and the capacity to evaluate and foresee the consequences of those changes that may directly or indirectly influence the future.



Fig. 89a - Realm of Endless Stretches.



Fig. 89b - Realm of Endless Stretches.



Fig. 89c - Realm of Endless Stretches.

### **4.3.1 Process of Entering the Restricted Borderlands**

The main intention of my research is not to develop a special technique, equipment or hardware to allow myself to cross the borders, but to cross borders in order to discover the undiscovered in the restricted area. Normally, entry to the restricted areas is not permitted for any foreigners. I entered these restricted areas to further investigate the border crossing possibility, with or without fog and mist conditions. I must say that I would not be able to teach or advise anyone to border cross, except speaking from my own experience of how I managed to do it over the years.

In fact, the best way to enter the borderland is appear less visible and less noticeable, in order not to attract any unnecessary attention. This does not mean foreign visitors can avoid official procedure and border crossing documentation. These conflicted zones are restricted to foreigners mainly for security and safety reasons. Of course, after several instances of rejection from the official borderlands authority to enter the restricted zone, I developed my approaches and communication skills to allow myself to wander and photograph even in the restricted "no photography" zone (Fig. 90a).

On reflection, I must admit my actions are awkward and bold. Insisting on visiting these restricted zones (Fig. 93a and Fig. 93b) seems suspicious to others. There I was, so involved and addicted to the fog and mist's subtle beauty in the borderlands, not knowing what trouble I might get myself into.

The first criterion is to behave sincerely and honestly by explaining what I will be and have been doing in the restricted zone. When the request to enter the restricted zone is rejected, I will then turn to the local borderlanders, namely the transporter or nomad. Having said this, I would prefer to go in solo or in a group. If there's a will, there's a way.

A) I would visit the borderland military commanders in charge to officially request their permission. It would help a lot if I showed the official borderland authority my publications, photograph samples, and equipment, and clearly state that I am not a spy or photojournalist, but an academic conducting artistic research. I would simply show them my working university name card, publication business card, research institute identity card, passport and letter of recommendation from a local friend and authority. After explaining that what I would do is academic artistic research, if they rejected my request, I would still invite them for a quick lunch or dinner. Due to the fact that life is harsh and simple there, not everything could be easily obtained. Of course, I would sincerely ask if there is anything I could do to help them or anything that their family would need. I would post them some small daily items when I returned home. This would make a positive impression and build trust that I am there only for academic research and nothing more. In the next visit, I would do the same, until they allowed me to follow their military convoy (Fig. 90e); this means I can take any photographs I wish in the restricted borderland surrounding (Fig. 90b and Fig. 90c), except military portraits (Fig. 90d).



Fig. 90a - No photography zone (Borderland military base camp), India.



Fig. 90b - Borderland military base, Leh, India.

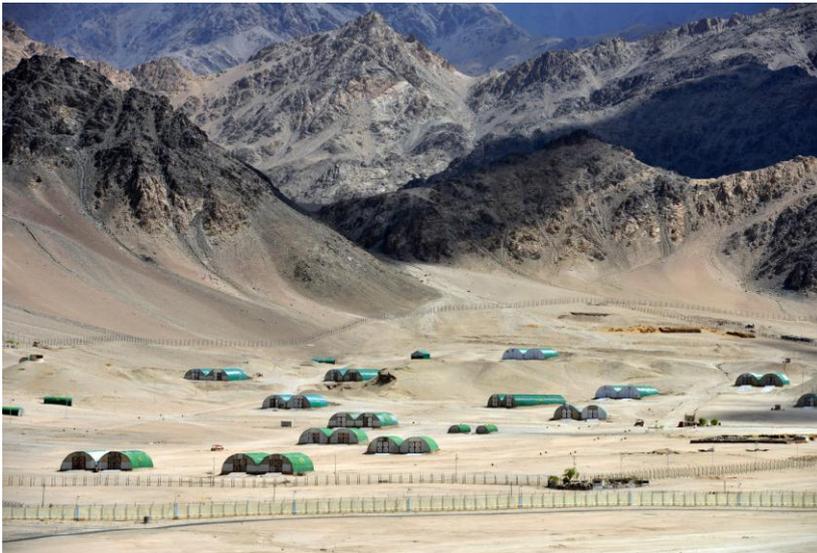


Fig. 90c - Borderland military base, Ladakh, India.



Fig. 90d - Borderland military member, Kashmir, India.



Fig. 90e - Military convoy, Leh, India.

B) Another way of getting into the restricted area is by contacting the local photographic society clearly stating that my intention is to conduct cultural and artistic research. I would sincerely inform them of my intention and background by posting them my working/academic documents and publications. The local photographic society members normally know the borderland authority well, since they live there and it is their homeland. They would very much welcome notable foreign photographers (Fig. 91a and Fig. 91b) to share their works and give talks. Having said that, I have had the pleasure of exhibiting together with the local photographic members (Fig. 91c) by exchanging points of view and experiences regarding their homeland. Additionally, there are cultural festivals organised in the borderlands from time to time by the local governments. The local cultural festival organisers will invite the photographic society members (Fig. 92) to take part in and promote such events. This is a rare opportunity that I would not miss.



Fig. 91a - Myself giving talks at Urumqi Photographic Society, Xinjiang, China.



Fig. 91b - Myself giving talks at Karamay Photographic Society, Xinjiang, China.



Fig. 91c - Myself and Mr. Mi Ma Ci Ren, Vice President of Photographers Association Ali Tibet, and Foreign Affairs Office Ali Tibet Government.



Fig. 92 - Photographic society members and photographers rush on to get close up photos of H.E.Mrs Roza Otunbayeva, former president of Kyrgyzstan at the borderland cultural exchange festival opening ceremony. Location: Kyrgyzstan and China restricted borderland zone.



Fig. 93a - Myself at Ladakh military base camp, India.



Fig. 93b - Myself at Hemu, northern Xinjiang, China (-30 Celsius temperature).

C) There are alternative ways of getting into the restricted borderlands which I would not recommend. I have tried to access the borderland with nomads or transporters. The nomads (Fig. 94a and Fig. 94b) usually recognise many off-road pathways, because they need to herd their livestock to different areas in different seasons. Following the nomads' pathways would definitely allow me to discover more, and is something that most photographers would not attempt to do. It is a painstaking way of travelling and witnessing rare scenery, and the harsh yet simple conditions of life on the borderlands.

Another unofficial way to enter the restricted borderland is by getting a ride with a transporter that transports food and daily items in and out of the restricted borderland zone (Fig. 95a and Fig. 95b). I would certainly not recommend it to anyone; instead, follow the official way, which is always a better and safer option.



Fig. 94a - Nomad's Camel Caravan.



Fig. 94b - Nomad at breakfast.



Fig. 95a - Transporters crossing the border between Nepal and China - Kodari borderland, Nepal.



Fig. 95b - Transporters crossing the border between Nepal and China - Zhangmu borderland, China.

D) The safest way is to identify a dependable local travel agency and pay them extra service charges to have them deal with the local authority, by stating the area I wish to visit. The travel agency would advise me not to enter these restricted areas, and they usually would not be able to get a special permit to the restricted area for a first-time, foreign visitor, unless it is a well-connected agency with the local authority.

#### **4.4 The Creation and Representation of *In and Out of the Mist***

Not only does a photographer need to know the perfect moment to take a shot, but choosing the correct photograph to be included in an exhibition is equally important. Interestingly, "taking a photo" is exactly the same as "not taking a photo"; they are parallel concepts. It is because a good photographer normally takes what was pleasing and attractive to his own eyes only, in conjunction with the concept of the work he or she intended to produce. To me, taking chances is not an option, rather firmly understanding what to take and not to take is the key point to demonstrate that I am a photographer who practices research and underlines well-defined subject matter as my goal. There is no shortcut to investigating a subject. The creation and resultant photographic series *In and Out of the Mist* are my painstaking effort and time I have spent on borderlands, in order to discover an original, creative and artistic representation outside of the stereotyped documentary mould. The process is of the utmost importance, as it led me to create and continue to do my research from Western China to the Himalayan Region. This series of artworks shows a quality of consistency resulting from the fog and mist, mysterious, surreal yet real, that is very capable of enabling us to view it more than once. What is less is more. The *In and Out of the Mist* series takes a sharp turn in idea and concept, colour, composition and subject matter.

The main idea and concept is to relook at the unfamiliar borderlands that I have

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been to before, in order to rediscover the unfolding subjects and content in a fresh mind, finding different ways to visualise and represent the unknown landscape and human activity. After photographing and meeting with the borderland tribes and peoples who live here, I begin to search for something beyond the people and landscape identity. After many visits, I wanted to try to sense, see and photograph the borderlands anew by revealing my inner expression of the unfamiliar nature and borderlander. The fusion of the inexplicable reaction and relationship between human and nature is what I intend to achieve. Fog and mist may cause an appearance of fuzziness and poor visibility in the environment but, at the same time, they pause everything by giving a sense of loss at the very first sight. After staying in the world of fog and mist, everything seems slow in action, calm and peaceful to me, because the ordinary and unfamiliar suddenly may appear mysterious and surreal once more. It almost feels like I have entered a time machine portal, encountering the perfect storm! Of course the most significant would be the reflection of humankind's influence on the natural landscape on the borderlands, and the drama that unfolds when fog and mist invade the borderlands. These ongoing narratives and the uncertainty of the photographed content create an enigma that extends between the unexpected condition and actual domain of the borderlands.

The strong and vibrant colour that I saw here suddenly turns into an almost black and white drama stage, except it is grey in tone, with details of saturated colours. While fog and mist strike, this rich colour palette is hardly discovered by any photographers who are photographing the borderlands. It serves my purpose well because the main intention of this series of works is to create puzzles and ambiguity for the audience. The content of the Western China to the Himalayas is definitely a rich one, which already contained the vivid and vibrant colour of different ethnic groups and nature. Now, it is as if the colour is being hidden by the fog and mist. Many people may think it is an area of a battle or conflict-ground at the borderlands. Nevertheless, I see this vast borderlands as a neutral ground that needs further rumination (best suited to a neutral colour) because only with further

discussion, agreement and dialogue among local peoples, local authorities and central governments, will the best colour of harmony be brought out in this multilingual, multi religious, multi-ethnic region.

The composition and subject matter in the *In and Out of the Mist* series differs greatly far from my earlier practical photography research works. The *In and Out of the Mist* series is different and does not emphasise the direct human activity only (*Documentary* series), the colourful and spectacular aerial view of borderlands (*Realm of Endless Stretches* series), or the colourful dimensional conceptual photographic representation of a journey of exploration on the road in the borderlands (*On the Road* series). *In and Out of the Mist* explores the unpredictable human activity and the minute displays of individuality which travel at the borderlands. Photographs presented with direct visuality and centrality of focus would lead to a lack of study, creativity, and depth of intellectual content and context. I seek to be an image taker and image maker at the same moment while capturing *In and Out of the Mist*. In contrast to the idea of objectivity in photo taking, there are photographs in which subjectivity overrules reality. The usage of fog and mist allowed me to have direct intervention on the subject matter. The resulting composition (explained on pp.111-118) presents a sense of reality distortion. One can still recognise the reality, but with doubts and ambiguities as if they have entered a surrealistic borderland. The memory of space may only be sensed through a sheer instinct of the imagination. I am saying this because every time one moves away and goes back to the same point, the atmosphere seems different, if one could only pay careful attention to notice the unnoticed, and continue to discover the undiscovered. The uncertainty in this series of works represents well the current situation of borderlands from Western China to the Himalayan Region. The unpredictable could be predictable, only if the "fog and mist" vaporise where "doubts and conflicts" vanish, by building trust and friendship in this region.

Bruce Barnbaum mentioned that most artists are not so much searching for the

truth, but searching for a proper method of expressing the truth as they see it (Barnbaum 1994, p.15). I intend to express the complex truth about the unusual conditions on the borderland through the representation of the invasion of fog and mist. At the same time, I seek to unfold the borderlands as my imaginative visual playground. The appearance of fog and mist resulted in the perfect encounters between my imagination and collective image culture that I have previously experienced here. Such encounters allowed the landscape at the borderlands to turn into dreamscapes or mindscapes for me. What if there are no borders? Anyone who lived and visited here is free to cross the border. Of course, such "trespassing" would be chaotic and unimaginable. But, if one can imagine and dream, one has foresight and hope. *In and Out of the Mist* pushes the boundary between the real and surreal; the puzzling visual challenges the eyes of viewers and their perceptions of reality, should they look for deeper meaning beyond the visual. Besides the eye, the viewer's mind may also be challenged by the suggestive power of the image. *In and Out of the Mist* raises questions regarding the wonder of mysterious nature and human relationship. Each photograph contains hidden metaphoric content depicting the balance between human and natural significance on the borderland. Sometimes explanations are needed to get a full sense of what is expressed. For example, the first image (Fig. 96) shows a Tibetan worshipper who came out from nowhere, walking on top of a hill slope on a strangely rainy and clear day. I stood and photographed it as a witness of magical reality. The other image (Fig. 97) shows two borderlanders painstakingly carrying water supply from the remaining flowing river bank to their distant household in winter. This gives a sense of scale in the composition, where the human is solitary with nature in the unknown borderland.



Fig. 96 - In and Out of the Mist - In The Middle Of Nowhere.



Fig. 97 - In and Out of the Mist - Distant.



Fig. 98 - In and Out of the Mist - The Road To No Where.



Fig. 99 - In and Out of the Mist - Without Saying Goodbye.

*“When words become unclear, I shall focus with photographs. When images become inadequate, I shall be content with silence.”*

Ansel Adams. (Millman n.d.)

Susan Sontag (Sontag 2011, p.173) said: “Beauty is not inherent in anything; it is to be found, by another way of seeing”. The images above (Fig. 98 and Fig. 99) purposely unsettle the viewer, leaving an unfinished vision and imagination, as if there is much more photographic subject to be discovered in the borderlands beyond my stand point. Man and nature’s relationship on the borderlands continues to stimulate my "duality" concept and imagination, and open up my horizon of seeing the restricted zones anew.

#### 4.4.1 Exhibition and Display of *In and Out of the Mist*

The poetic photographs of the *In and Out of the Mist* series portray moments of human and non-human activity at the borderlands; the man-made objects rapidly and intensively dominating nature. Each photograph is like a window to search, to investigate, to question, and to reconnect the viewer with our very living spaces, by observing those who live at the borderlands (eg, photographs that convey an apocalyptic atmosphere, awe or agitated moments, tranquil and quiet surroundings, isolated houses and crowded settlements).

It is this strangely ambiguous appearance that makes the *In and Out of the Mist* series alluring, as if the artworks are gently inviting the viewer to come closer to search for more intricate details which do not obviously reveal themselves in the distance. During the exhibition, thoughts and conversations are based on the "fog and mist" subject. The "fog and mist" become the universal language among the viewers and participants. In this sense, I have successfully created an alternative communication, which provokes the imagination with strangely familiar and unfamiliar scenes. Such fog and mist memories can be universally interpreted among the viewers. It is like witnessing a still from a film fragment that neither depends on the climax nor the end result; *In and Out of the Mist* series nevertheless conveyed my unexpected yet perfect encounters at the borderlands.

*In and Out of the Mist* possesses an archival quality. The arrested photographs depict the delicate boundary between nature and community on the borderlands. These works ask one to contemplate how mankind's narrative has been documented for centuries, suggesting the obscured dilemma that needs reevaluation and revision for better transnational policy made in peace and harmony. The power of each displayed fog and mist photograph is diffused by the choice to minimise words and intensify affections. Interestingly, the relationship between art and crime is as puzzling as fog and mist's intervention in the

borderland. One can say "a perfect crime" is "a perfect work of art". It is the perfect timing and flawless act that allows such an impeccable fog and mist moment to be captured. The essay *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* by Thomas De Quincey (Quincey & Morrison 2006) oftentimes serves as the reference reflecting the connection between both "Art" and "Crime". Fortunately, there is no crime involved in my photography, except the "artless" crime of border crossing to the restricted area, purely for academic research purposes. Of course, I am not looking forward to being a "con photographer" either, but a "conceptual photographer" who is willing to push the limit and imagination to the next level by risking sensibly.

Every time I set up the *In and Out of the Mist* exhibition, I prefer to display and match the photographs anew, according to the provided display space (Fig. 100, 101, 102 and 103). Instead of constraining my works to a fixed mode of display orientation, I would prefer the photographs to take shape in a fresh display combination each time. I would again apply my photography "duality" concept in each exhibition set up, by trying to see from the captured photographs' points of view, how they would look side by side to each other, and how they would be observed within the space. I try to foresee how the displayed works will be perceived by the audiences in different directions, rather than following a guided and instructed direction to view the works.

Moments of photographing a subject always encompass the idea of inclusion and exclusion, and the form of absence and presence. In each exhibition, the metaphor of "idea and form" recurs again, when the formality of invitation takes place which requires decision-making of inclusion and exclusion of the participants. The responsive decision from invited participants to attend the exhibition resulted in the absence and presence of audiences in the exhibition space. All these events and moments are possible because of time. At first sight, the audiences/perceivers usually take time to adjust their eyes to the neutral grey balance of fog and mist photographs. Many of them would feel like they have entered into a realm of

a dream state. They are surrounded by fog and mist again, causing hesitation, curiosity and uncertainty as to which direction and photograph to begin with. Some audiences may feel what they see in the exhibition and outside the exhibition are totally different worlds, as if reality has shifted. The meditative, calm and gentle quality of the photographs leaves most audiences addicted, having lost track of time and been swept away. Whether the audiences start to view from the left or right photograph first, it does not matter anymore. I would perceive the audiences like fog and mist particles moving randomly spreading around the space to view the works without being confined by individual content and chronological orientation. Surely the audiences would recognise that I have spent my time well photographing the *In and Out of the Mist* series.



Fig. 100 - *In and Out of the Mist* exhibition at Sabancı University, FASS Art Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey.  
Date: 12 - 31 December, 2011.



Fig. 101 - *In and Out of the Mist* exhibition at Punkt Gallery - Gdansk Society of Art Gallery, Gdansk, Poland. Date: 23 August - 23 September, 2012.



Fig. 102 - *In and Out of the Mist* exhibition at The Chinese Phoenix International Photography Biennial, China. Phoenix Stadium, XiangXi district, Western Hunan, China. Date: 6 - 18 December 2012.



Fig. 103 - *In and Out of the Mist* exhibition at Pingyao International Photography Festival, Pingyao UNESCO Heritage Old Town, Shanxi, China. Date: 20 - 30 September 2012.

## Chapter 5

# Conclusion

The use of photography as a medium to document the borderland is not new. However, after an extensive period of research in this region, with my creative analysis and input, the discovery of the fog and mist intervention in photography could push documentary photography away from its original and classical context. It is no longer straightforward recording, because there is a need for creative recognition of man-made and natural elements in fusion, to generate a surrealistic scene in a realistic atmosphere. Practical research towards *In and Out of the Mist: An Artistic Investigation of Borderland and Community (From Western China to the Himalayan Region)* provided me with the opportunity to prove that photography is more than a medium of documentation. With the right moment while photographing the borderlands, under fog and mist intervention, a realistic and familiar atmosphere may suddenly turn into a surrealistic, magical and strangely familiar stage. Most of the time, the appearance and disappearance of fog and mist happens rapidly. Under such circumstances, photography is still the best medium to instantly capture these mysterious moments.

Documentary photographers' concepts and approaches which they have applied to photographing the borderland are predominantly based on the historical background and cultural context in their photographs' content. Everything that is photographed is clearly depicted in the documented photographs' content. The clear and obvious information is inevitable. All of the documentary photographers who photographed the borderland reject unclear and puzzling visuality. They seem prejudiced against the sending of an unclear message to the viewer. On the other hand, *In and Out of the Mist* broke the mould of borderland documentary photography by capturing the poignant, saturated moments and puzzling

relationships of human, man-made structures and nature in the borderland. Photographing in fog and mist conditions is not an easy task. In order to express the ambiguous aesthetic of borderlands that I desired, different representations such as *Realm of Endless Stretches* and *On the Road* series have been used to envision the borderless borderland possibility. My final photography series, *In and Out of the Mist*, demonstrated a different artistic quality compared to any documentary photography on borderlands. This unique approach serves as the best natural, local and external medium that neutralises the borderlands' complexity and tension in any conflict areas. Under such *In and Out of the Mist* circumstances, the third space forms silently - a universal border culture. Unmistakably, my research takes on the practical artistic form of expression to witness the borderland anew, rather than dwelling on the issue of territorial authority and conflict, as most media and documentary photography has done. Fog and mist represent my visual and theoretical metaphor, as well as serving as a medium to meditate on the ongoing conflicts on borderlands in a silent and mysterious mode.

The concept of "duality" in my work, how I perceive the subject/object in the surroundings, and how the subject/object perceive the surroundings is applied in my photographic works to further push the composition in reality to undiscover possibilities of perceiving the borderlands anew. I have carefully photographed in the illusion zone, how the fog and mist uncovers the subject/object mysteriously is the most important and fundamental criterion for me to determine potential fog and mist moments before I quickly pass on to various technical and artistic details in a composition, such as focus subject, depth of field and timing for maximal impact. To me, to determine a successful and meaningful photograph is not about how much information I can obtain from the work, but how the work can evoke feelings and allow the viewer to imagine, translate and interpret the information in the photograph. In a sense, the viewer should be given the chance to think, to feel and to react toward the works themselves, not according to a defined answer and result. In my view, viewers should not be spoon-fed with the direct message that is

vividly demonstrated in the photographic content. To me, the smashing and pounding works of most documentary photography stand in stark contrast to more highly intellectual works. A more intellectual photograph does not immediately review the most sensational moment, as in the traditional conception of documentary photography's purpose, but allows us to examine the work as if there is more to be explored within the photographed composition.

My photography research relates the ongoing ties and interactions between borderlanders and the nature of this region, which are much more important than the lust of power of any central government authority. The real boundary of a borderland emerges with force when each country's rules and regulations are put in front of the borderlanders. These rules and regulations are non-negotiable, but an absolute demand from different central governments. Borderlanders are required to follow these regulations, such as border crossing not being permitted without official documentation at the border check point. Yet a paradoxical situation occurs: in order to survive in the borderland region, border crossings are inevitable. For example, nomads continue to cross the border daily in discreet routines; illegal and unplanned apartments, houses and shelters are being built here and there without being bound by the facility and safety regulations of any country's law. Interestingly, borderlanders are told everything that they cannot do and everything they have to do, which they still do not do and only pretend to do. Although the delicate yet vicious law and the wild nature of the Himalayan region continue to impose on borderlanders, their attitude of ignorance helps them to continue to survive. In a sense, these rules and regulations on the borderlands seem like they are meant to be broken for the sake of surviving. Rules and regulations are limited by the way governments frame the borderlands; possibilities are ruled in and out, included and excluded by tight military law enforcement and national security default, rather than based on borderlanders' traditions and customs. Perhaps the only way to open up these possibilities in the Himalayan region is to encourage, set up, practice and pursue a transnational space. Different local administrations and borderlanders need to lean over their territories' fences,

to continue to have more cultural dialogue, put away differences, and realise the meaning of real "mutual consensus", agreed and understood between the governments and borderlanders.

The fact that there is a shared understanding of what it means to live in the borderlands indicates to us that differences remain the main concern in the twenty-first century. This research, *In and Out of the Mist: An Artistic Investigation Of Borderland and Community*, will serve as a metaphoric and artistic artwork to reject violence, racial discrimination and status differences targeted against borderlanders. The borderlands of this region are a wide open space. The borderlands should be embraced and turned into safe, accessible and familiar transnational space.

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# Appendix A

## **Technical Specification and Application of Fog and Mist**

"Fog" continues as the most ubiquitous "special effect" used today. The appearance of "fog" always seems like an illusion and magical in one form or another. Stage performance, parties, music and dance clubs, theme parks, haunted houses, horror films and circuses will seem less convincing or unexciting without the effects of "fog".

The effects of "fog" may reveal a stunning scene through the striking streaks of light. The effects can range from low-layered smoke to impermeable and furious clouds. Understanding how some of the fog forms in nature will help me and other photographers to achieve and enhance stunning artworks in a whole new level.

## Types of Fog in Nature:

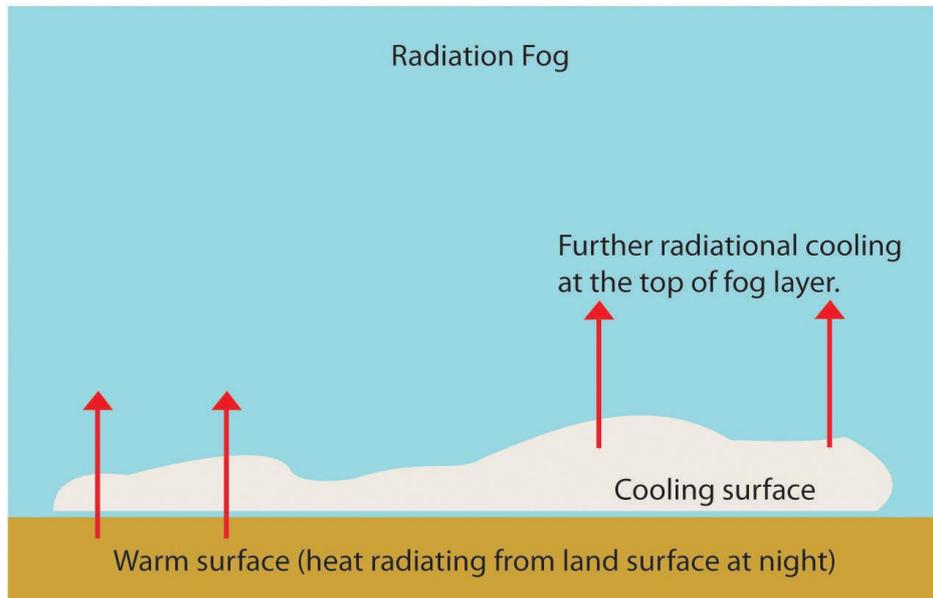
### Radiation Fog



A.Fig. 1a - Radiation Fog. (John 2012)



A.Fig. 1b - Radiation Fog. (Isles 2012)



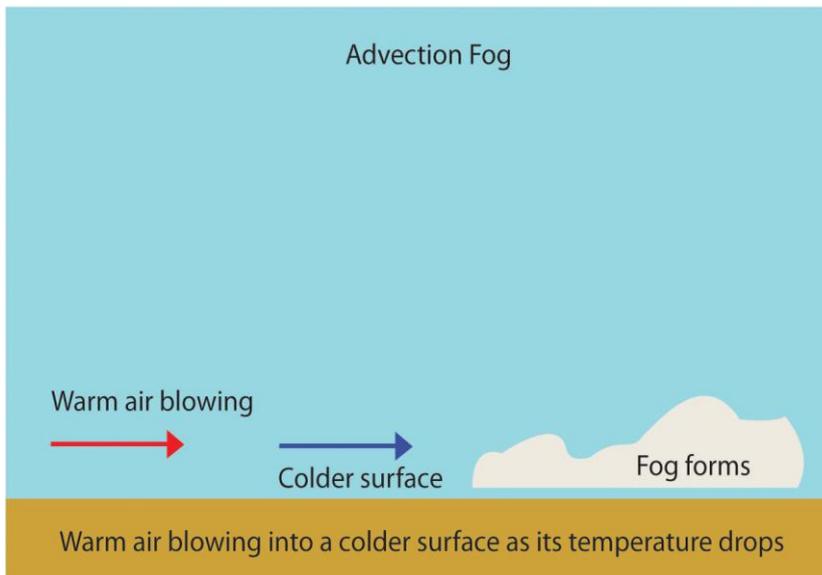
A.Fig. 1c - Radiation Fog.

Radiation fog (A.Fig. 1a, 1b and 1c) usually remains motionless at ground level. It can happen at night on a calm day under clear sky. The heat absorbed during the day is radiated into the ground surface, mixing with the cooler moist air, resulting in condensation. This type of fog can range from 1 meter to 300 meters in depth. Sometimes it can be found on the road, where radiation fog makes driving extremely hazardous by causing poor visibility conditions on the road. This sort of fog tends to disappear fast during sunrise because the sunlight and rising temperature evaporate the fog gradually.

## Advection Fog



A.Fig. 2a - Advection Fog. (Fog formation n.d)



A.Fig. 2b - Advection Fog.

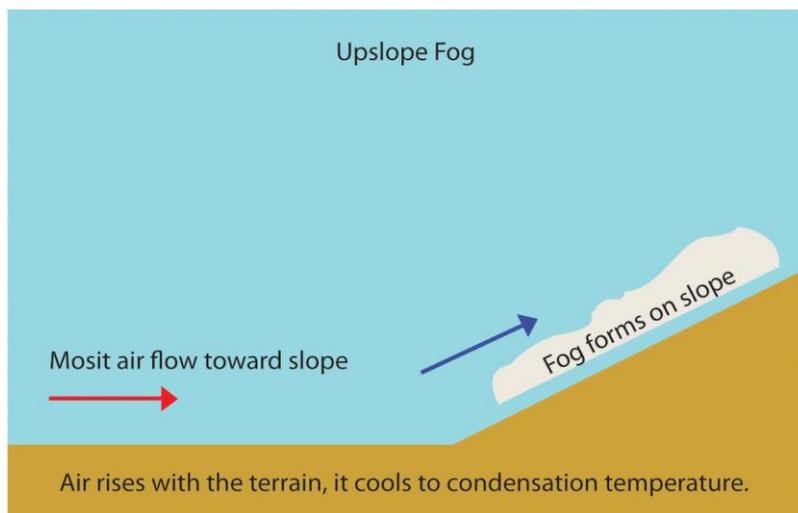
Advection fog (A.Fig. 2a and 2b) is formed when horizontal blowing warm air meets with a colder surface in a low ground area. At one point, it almost resembles radiation fog, due to the identical condensation result, but it is not. Advection fog may be differentiated from radiation fog because of its parallel movement along the field and not rising up into the air.

A good example of advection fog would be sea fogs. It is because the seas and ocean waves drift from warmer air and waves collide with cold currents. Sometimes low pressure in the inland zone attracts the advection fog to the bay area. Due to the gradual cooling on land and bay area at night, advection fog may drift over to a lower-temperature inland area.

### Upslope Fog



A.Fig. 3a - Upslope Fog. (Sissy 2013)



A.Fig. 3b - Upslope Fog.

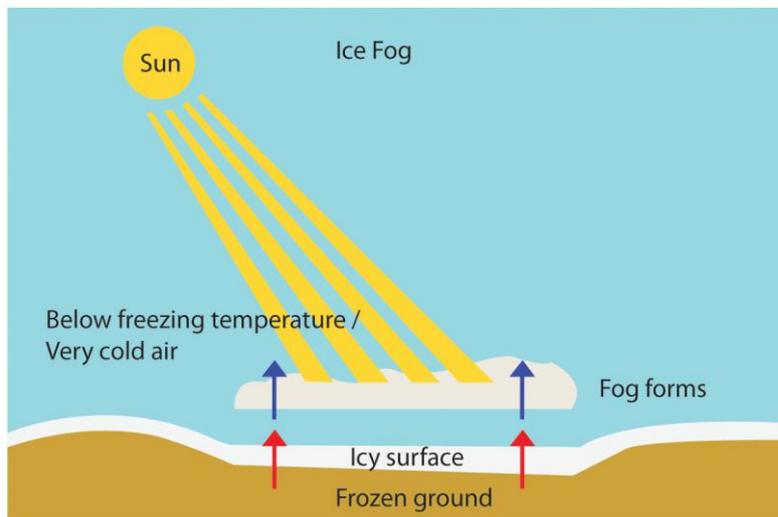
This type of fog normally forms around the mountain or hillside area. It is called upslope fog (A.Fig. 3a and 3b) because the winds elevate and push the moist air

up from the lower area, meeting with cooler air from the hillside, and condensation develops. In winter periods, fog formed with condensation arises in the lower area of the mountain.

### **Ice Fog**



A.Fig. 4a - Ice Fog. (JLS Photography Alaska 2010)



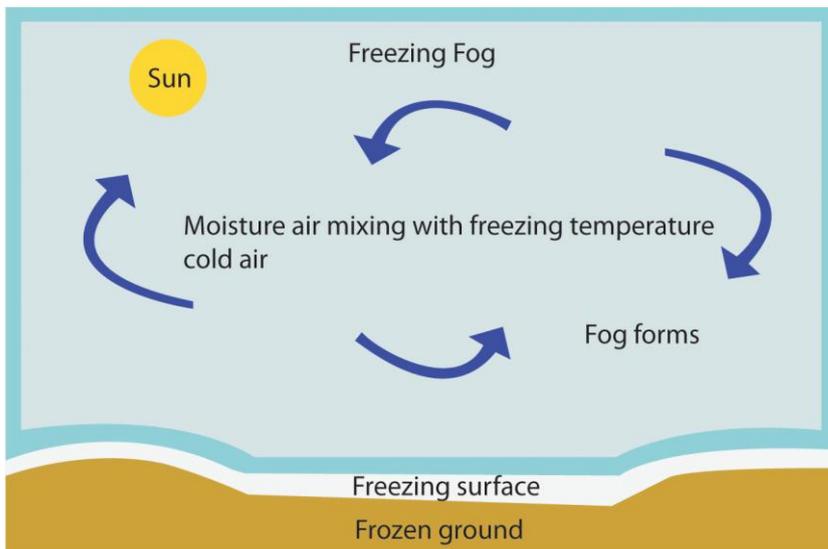
A.Fig. 4b - Ice Fog.

Ice fog (A.Fig. 4a, and 4b) usually happens in polar air, such as in the Arctic or Antarctic, with approximate temperature  $-10$  Celsius and below. With strong wind and sunshine, the thin ice crystals suspended in the air form ice fog.

## Freezing Fog



A.Fig. 5a - Freezing Fog. (O'Neil 2012)



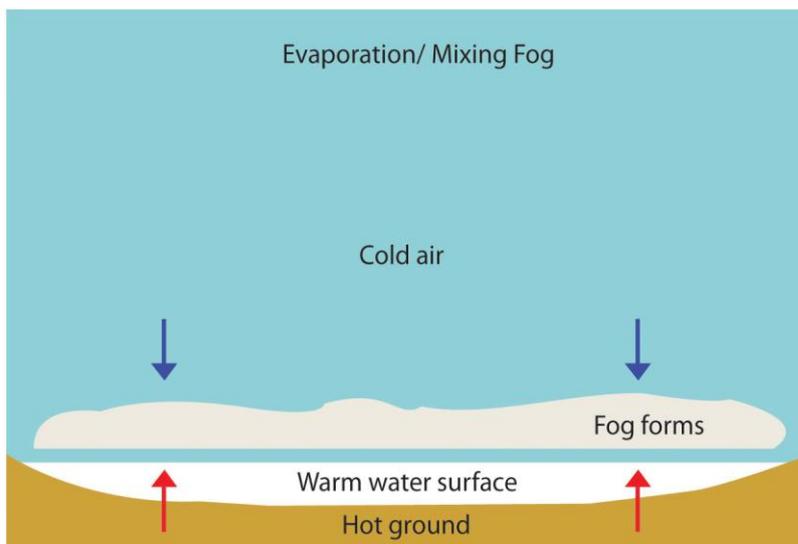
A.Fig. 5b - Freezing Fog.

Freezing fog (A.Fig. 5a and 5b) occurs when warmer air caused by the sunshine or other heated objects meet with freezing temperature cold air. When such "super cooled" water droplets come into contact with a freezing surface, fog forms. The freezing rain or drizzle tends to happen when moist rain collides into a freezing temperature. Sometimes it can instantly become coated with ice in the freezing air.

## Evaporation or Mixing Fog



A.Fig. 6a - Evaporation or Mixing Fog. (Helmenstine 2013)



A.Fig. 6b - Evaporation or Mixing Fog.

The relatively drier air mixes with cooler moist air, usually when warmer water releases surface vapour to the cold air. This type of evaporation fog (A.Fig. 6a and 6b) normally happens in most volcanic mountains, thermal lakes and spas. It is also called steam fog and frontal fog. The humidity reaches 100% and fog forms when cool air mixes with warm moist air on water surfaces. The immediate sign of such fog would be the rise of steam from the water surface.

## **Application of Fog and Mist in Nature:**

Fog, mist or haze used in photography can be wonderfully atmospheric and shed a sense of moodiness on the subjects. However, with fog and mist, there is also a high risk of obtaining washed out or flat-looking images. Photographing in unconventional (and sometimes more difficult) weather conditions requires a fundamental understanding of photography and an instantaneous response towards the rapidly changing environment. Many photographers are disappointed to see a rainy forecast on the day of their shoot; not only is bad weather commonly associated with bad photos, but they also risk ruining the precious photography gear. While wet weather is a very valid concern for photography equipment, less than brilliant weather is not impossible to shoot in. In fact, challenging weather conditions can create a whole new set of photography opportunities. All it takes is a shift in mindset for “bad” weather to become a unique shooting experience with no sun in sight.

The technical suggestion below provides examples and methods to photograph fog and mist in various phenomena.

Here, the concepts to photograph in a foggy environment will be addressed primarily. Nonetheless, few techniques, concepts and ideas of photographing in fog and mist conditions can be replicated. In nature, fog and mist usually occur in late evening, and often remain until the next early morning. They usually form near a surface of water that is a little warmer than the surrounding air. Besides the natural climate conditions of rain, hail and fog, there are also other instances that allow photographic subjects’ resemblance to the foggy or misty situation. Likewise, (A.Fig. 7) shows us that the gasses emitted from the industry that polluted the air, (A.Fig. 8) heavy forest fires and smokes, (A.Fig. 9) photographing through a veil, and (A.Fig. 10) a semi-transparent white curtain, are all very similar to fog and mist appearance.



A.Fig. 7 - Extra Chemical, Heavy smoke emitted from the factory.  
Photographic print, 2011.



A.Fig. 8 - Firefighting jet flown in from air to help putting down the massive forest fire and fury smoke at Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel. 4 December 2010. (Teibel & Estrin 2010)



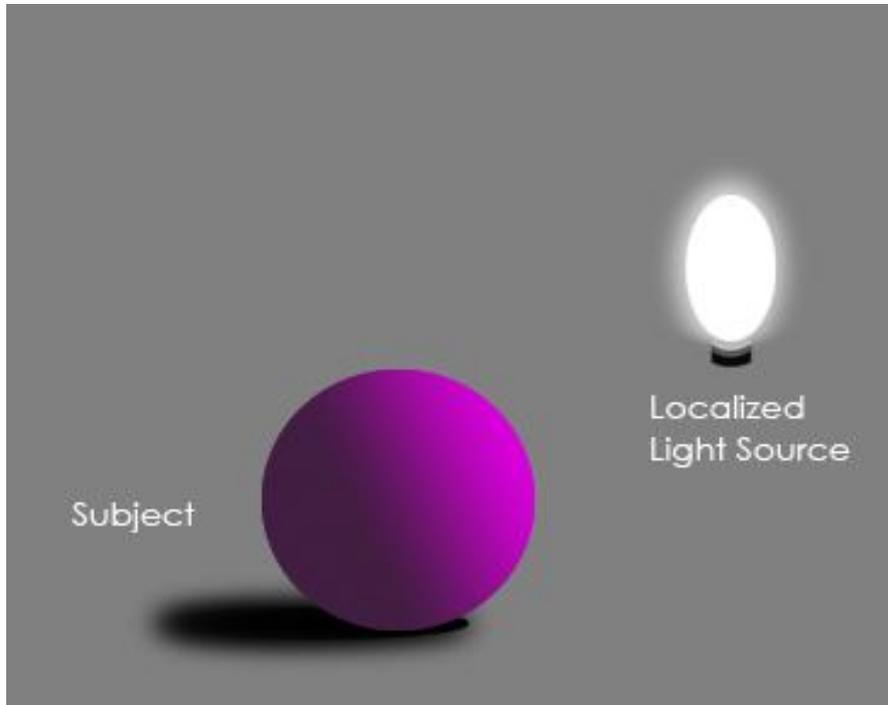
A.Fig. 9 - Through the Veil by Eleven Weddings Photography. (Eleven Weddings n.d.)  
Photographic print, 2011.



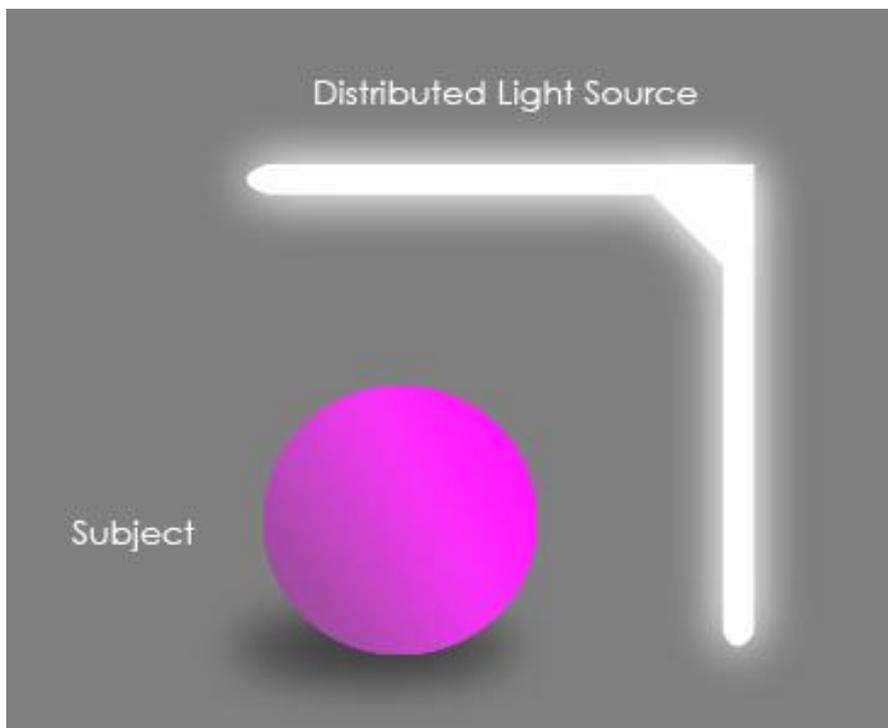
A.Fig. 10 - Mind Rest, A shot taken at the Vienna Museum of Fine Arts through the white curtain.  
Photographic print, 2011.

While photographing in foggy and misty conditions could prove very challenging than a clear day (A.Fig. 11), it is hard to focus on objects since the scenes are often deprived of colour saturation and contrast, making everything two-dimensional. In a sense, fog is a natural softbox. It scatters light sources to a much wider area. The subject is visible in a high-contrast tone under a localised lamp source or clear day. When the light source is being distributed in a wider or a more

even area, the subject loses its contrast (A.Fig. 12).



A.Fig. 11 - A Lamp or the Sun on a Clear Day. "High contrast".



A.Fig. 12 - Light in the Fog, haze and mist condition. "Low contrast".

In any fog and mist condition, scenes are usually dimly lit. A longer exposure time is required compared to a clear day. Fog makes the air much more reflective to light, which sometimes tricks your camera metering system to decrease the exposure. A similar situation occurs while photographing in snowy conditions, which requires normal or slightly positive exposure compensation.

Most photographers consider fog and mist a disadvantageous condition to doing any photography. Nonetheless, fog and mist can be a valuable tool to highlight the depth, lighting, and shape of the subjects, and create a strange mood for the scene.

The uniquely moody, often elusive and mysterious effects are much sought after by exquisite photographers who see the advantages in fog and mist application in their photographic works. The key is to understand the characteristic of the fog and mist by using them to optimise your imagery quality.

### **Emphasising Depth:**

Fog appearance in a scene can be both good and bad, because it can help to exaggerate the difference between far and near objects. When the fog is dense, it can isolate the distant objects leading to zero visibility. On the other hand, with the correct amount of fog, it can help the distant object to gain dramatic appeal.



A.Fig. 13 - Evening Mist by Yuri Ovchinnikov, Russia. (Ovchinnikov n.d)  
Photographic print, 2009.



A.Fig. 14 - Clifton Fog by Jake Johnson, United Kingdom. (Johnson 2011)  
Photographic print, 2009.



A.Fig. 15 - Fog, Lake Ginninderra by Prescott Pym, Australia. (Pym 2006)  
Photographic print, 2006.

All the examples above demonstrate that colour saturation and contrast of the subject at the furthest point – the grass (A.Fig. 13), the building (A.Fig. 14) and the bridge (A.Fig. 15) – drop dramatically. The furthest subject is reduced to nothing more than a silhouette, looking almost black and white. However, the closest camera point maintains the full colour and contrast visibility.

### **Emphasising Light:**

Water droplets in fog or mist scatter light tremendously. This softens the light significantly and the light streaks become clear from concentrated or directional light sources. In a good example below (A.Fig. 16), taken in a volcanic area in the early morning, when the photo is taken directly opposed to the sunlight we can see the light rays streaking down through the leaves, scattering off the heavy morning air. Light streaks are also clearly visible from a number of streetlights (A.Fig. 17) in the city; this depends on the photographer's standpoint and angle of view against the light source.



A.Fig. 16 - Day Break. Rotorua Volcanic Area, New Zealand.  
Photographic print, 2012.



A.Fig. 17 - Heavy fog at night, Järveotsa., Estonia. (Tarmo 2008)  
7 October 2008.

Light rays are most apparent when shot at a distance close to (but not directly at) the light source. At night when the fog is very dense, the concentrated street light will be clearly visible.

### Shapes and Silhouettes:

Fog and mist can reduce the subject to nothing more than a plain silhouette. It is because fog and mist can greatly saturate the colour of the subject to grey tones.



A.Fig. 18 - Misty Swans, Somerset, United Kingdom by Matt Clark. (CLARK 2013)

Above image (A.Fig. 18) shows how the swans' outlines have been greatly exaggerated, their details washed out by the fog; this is an effect achieved as the sun is angled directly toward the camera.

In order to obtain an imagery of great silhouettes, the level of exposure should be adjusted according to the density of fog. Negative exposure compensation could be dialled in, to ensure focus objects are not overexposed. In order to avoid overlapping of silhouetted objects while capturing the scene, careful attention should be paid to the distance and position of the objects, as well as being sure to have silhouetted objects spaced out.

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### Photographing the scale:

In order to get a sense of the scale and size of the cityscape, forest or mountain, the photographer should always stand outside and away from the subject where the photographed subject boundaries are visible without the blockage of any obstacles. Photographers can opt to maintain a distance in order to capture the scale and extent of the fog (A.Fig. 19), *City of Tide* is a striking image in which it appears that the thick and weary fogs are swallowing the entire Cape Town bay area.



A.Fig. 19 - City of Tide. Table Mountain, Cape Town, South Africa.  
Photographic print, 2012

By maintaining a distance, subjects under fog and mist can be captured without losing much light condition. When fog and are mist viewed from a distance, they are nothing more than a low-lying cloud that touches the earth's surface. Another crucial consideration is to capture the fog texture in slow motion. In fog and mist conditions, the longer the exposure time, the more milky and blurry the image will be (A.Fig. 20). However, leaving the exposure time too long may jeopardise the image, as the fog texture smoothes out everything in its way. Having the correct exposure and timing will result in a silk-like effect, and that might be surprisingly stunning.



A.Fig. 20 - Fog Movement by Dan Heller, Carlifornia, USA. (Heller 2006)

Shorter exposure time will provide a much better result of freezing the fog's motion. However, it also greatly reduces the amount of light entering the camera. This low light situation usually happens in fog and mist photography that requires the photographer to adjust the ISO to a higher degree, like 200 to 400, to accommodate the needed shutter speed. To avoid noise, and using a higher shutter speed, a monopod or tripod is a great help to obtain the highest quality of fog and mist photography.

### **Condensation:**

Condensation happens when the camera is brought from a cool to a warmer surrounding, such as out from an air-conditioned room or from a lower temperature outdoors to a warmer indoor room. The same as fog and mist usually happen when warm and cool air meet, surely there is also condensation on the camera lens and inside the camera when such warm and cool air conditions meet.

There are ways to reduce the condensation caused by coming from outdoors to indoors. By simply placing the camera in a plastic bag till the room reaches the same temperature as the surroundings, condensation will be avoided. Careful

protection of the camera from condensation is very important; otherwise, the moisture will damage the digital sensor like the Complementary Metal Oxide Semiconductor (CMOS) or Charge-Coupled Device (CCD).

## Appendix B

### Exhibition and Publishing List

*In and Out of the Mist: An Artistic Investigation of Borderland and Community. (From Western China to the Himalayan Region)* was showcased at various galleries and museums. This photography series received prestigious awards and has been included in notable publications. The aim is to share and demonstrate that this practice-led PhD research has come to fruitful results.

#### **Book and Catalogue Inclusion:**

2012: Solo: *Mindscapes - Photographic Encounters*: 2902 Gallery, Singapore. June. ISBN: 978-981-07-2299-9, 204 Pages.

(Permanent collection at Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts, Japan)

2012: Group: *In and Out of the Mist*, Kuala Lumpur International Photography Awards, KLPA, Steven, Lee (ed.), Malaysia: explorenation.net, August 2012, 93-95.

2012: Group: *In and Out of the Mist*, 155<sup>th</sup> International Print Exhibition, The Royal Photographic Society Catalogue, United Kingdom. ISBN: 978-0-904495-03-4, July 2012, 26-26.

2012: Group: *An eye for an ear*, Photography Open salon Arles 2012, Karas, Vanja (ed.), United Kingdom: Ubyu, July 2012, 81-81.

2011: Solo: *In and Out of the Mist*, University of Canterbury Publication, New Zealand. November. ISBN: 978-0-473-18998-3, 58 Pages.

**Awards:**

2013: Global Nikon Photography Award, Tokyo, Japan. 1st Prize Winner. Video Category. <http://www.nikon-photocontest.com/en/results/portfolio/detail03.html>

2013: Renaissance Photography Prize, United Kingdom, Finalist. Single Image Category.

2013: Kuala Lumpur International Photo Awards, Malaysia, Finalist, Portrait Gallery.

2012: The Chinese Phoenix International Photography Biennial by China Photographers Association. Gold Medal - Best Photographer of the Show. *In and Out of the Mist* series.

2011: PX3: France: Silver Medal, Professional category, *In and Out of the Mist* series.

2010: PX3: France: 1st Prize, People's Choice Awards. Architecture category, *Arena*.

2010: International Photography Award: Honorable Mention, Deeper Perspective, Landscape and Building category.

2009: PX3: France: 1st Prize, People's Choice Awards. Performing Arts category, *Cultural Dances*.

2009: The Worldwide Photography Gala Awards: 2nd Prize and Honorable Mention, Landscape and Citiscape category. *Architectural Maze, Conflux - A Massive Union*.

**Exhibitions:**

2015: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Ariano International Film Festival, Italy.

2014: Solo, *In and Out of the Mist* series, PH21 Gallery, Szkene Theatre - Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Hungary.

2014: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, See.Me Exhibition Space, 29-19 Jackson Ave, Long Island City, New York, United States of America.

2014: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Silver Eye Center for Photography, Pittsburgh, United States of America.

2013 - Ongoing: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Global Nikon website. <http://www.nikon-photocontest.com/en/results/portfolio/detail03.html>

2013: Exhibitor, *Survival Culture - Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region*. Renaissance Photography Award - Wapping Project Bankside, Central London, United Kingdom.

2013: Exhibitor, *On the Road* series, CODA Gallery, Taylor's University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2013: Exhibitor, *A Reverse Of Time*, Global Nikon Award Winner Showcase 2012-2013, Ginza Nikon Gallery, Tokyo, Japan.

2013: Solo, *On the Road* series, Objectifs Gallery, Centre for Photography and Filmmaking, Singapore.

2013, Exhibitor, *After Lunch*, The 5th Kuala Lumpur International Photo Awards, Galeri Petronas, KLCC Suria, Petronas Twin Tower, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2013: Exhibitor, *Creating Together - On the Road* series, Earl Lu Gallery, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore.

2013: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist*, The Royal Photographic Society 155th International Print Exhibition, Smethwick Photographic Society, The Old School House, Oldbury. United Kingdom.

2013: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Photography Open Salon South-East Asia, ChinaHouse, 153-155 Beach Street, Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia.

2013: Exhibitor, *Vanish*, Millennium Images Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

2013: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist*, RPS 155th International Print Exhibition, Bodelwyddan Castle Gallery, Rhyl, Denbighshire, United Kingdom.

2013: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist*, RPS 155th International Print Exhibition, University of Bolton, Faculty of Arts and Technology, Deane Road Bolton, United Kingdom.

2013: Exhibitor, *Rare Earth*, Darkroom Gallery, Vermont, United States of America.

2012: Solo, *In and Out of the Mist* series, The Chinese Phoenix International Photography Biennial, China. Phoenix City Stadium, XiangXi district, Western Hunan, China.

2012: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist*, RPS 155th International Print Exhibition, Rook Lane Chapel Gallery, Bath Street, Frome, Somerset, United Kingdom.

2012: Solo, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Pingyao International Photography Festival, Pingyao UNESCO Heritage Old Town, Shanxi, China.

2012: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist*, RPS 155th International Print Exhibition, Banbury Museum and Gallery, Spiceball Pard Road, Banbury, Oxon, United Kingdom.

2012: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Griffin Museum of Photography, 18th Annual Juried Exhibition, United States of America.

2012: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Punkt Gallery - Gdansk Society of Art Gallery, Poland.

2012: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Arles Photography Open Salon, Galeri Huit, Arles, France.

2012: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist*, RPS 155th International Print Exhibition, Allen and Overy LLP, One Bishops Square, London, United Kingdom.

2012: Exhibitor, *Community at Risk*, International Conservation Photography Awards, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, University of Washington, Seattle, United States of America.

2012: Exhibitor, Open Now - *In and Out of the Mist* series, Gallery of Photography, Dublin, Ireland.

2012: Exhibitor, *In and Out of the Mist*, Kuala Lumpur International Photo Awards, Warehouse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2012: Exhibitor, Open Now - *In and Out of the Mist* series, Belfast Photo Factory, Belfast, Ireland.

2012: Exhibitor, *Through Asian Eyes - Passage exhibition - Survival Culture, Story Lands, Xinjiang*. Nikon Asia, Middle East and Oceania official site.

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/nikon/through-asian-eyes-an-interview-with-yoong-wah-alex-wong/10150701184428466>

2011: Solo, *In and Out of the Mist* series, 2902 Gallery, Singapore.

2011: Exhibitor, *In And Out, Now And Then*, CODA Gallery, Taylor's University, Malaysia.

2011: Solo, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Ilam Gallery, School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

2011: Solo, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Galleria Arte Lourdes Saraiva de Queiroz, Uberlandia, Brazil.

2011: Solo, *In and Out of the Mist* series, Sabancı University, FASS Art Gallery.

2010: Exhibitor, *Now and Then, Here and There*, Earl Lu gallery, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore.

2010: Exhibitor, *Survival Culture - Story Lands, XinJiang, Uyghur autonomous region*, FASS Art Gallery. Istanbul, Turkey.