

## Tuo Wang “A Study for Human Opera: Prelude”



“Reality is never more than an allurements to an unknown element in quest of which we can never progress very far.” (Proust)

*Vanitas* is based on a peculiar merge between two late-19th century literature masterpieces: Theodore Fontane’s *Effi Briest* and Émile Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin*. But literature is only one trivial layer in this convoluted world Tuo Wang builds up with his mastery of understanding different mediums, methodologies, and artistic languages, and of migrating and bridging between them. Unlike most narratives in which questions are answered in the end, in *Vanitas*, a labyrinth unfolds itself as the story climaxes, until both the spectators and the performers lose their ability to differentiate reality and fantasy. In his video rendering of this labyrinthine work, Wang interviews the literary characters as well as a university literature professor. When people from different realities and angles talk about the same classic plot (of female adultery), enchantment and disillusioning are woven together. It is worth noting that when the actor and actress of the characters narrate their roles, they are asked by the artist to fill in the stories with details of their own emotional and sensorial experience from past intimacies and traumas. The dividing line fades away between staging and automatism—two far ends among all the methods in storytelling. But aren’t all performances the sum of performance and improvisation? In *Vanitas*, while the territory of human desire is proven again to be boundless, the boundaries between theatre, documentary, biography and fiction are unprecedentedly transgressed.

—Hanlu Zhang

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