

Press Release

Exhibition: The Opera

Photography and multimedia installation by Varvara Shavrova

Opening: Wednesday 15th January 2014 6-9 pm

Exhibition dates: 16th January to 22nd February 2014

To coincide with Chinese New Year 2014, Patrick Heide Contemporary Art is presenting the London premiere of *The Opera*, Varvara Shavrova's spellbinding work on traditional Peking Opera.

In the second solo show by the Russian born artist in the gallery, *The Opera* is an insight into the fragile world as well as social and human aspects of the Peking Opera, one of the most revered cultural heritages of the Chinese national scene.

The title originates from a specially commissioned multi-channel video projection in 2011 for the Espacio Cultural El Tanque, an empty oil tank in Tenerife, where 'behind the scenes' footage of two Peking opera singers was presented. The gallery exhibition is staged in collaboration with the Gallery of Photography in Ireland where *The Opera* was shown in a further developed version in 2012.

The Opera will feature two black and white time-lapse projections of male characters and a corresponding series of photographs as well as an additional colour time-lapse projection of a female character. A totally new photo series relating to the character and tragic heroine of 'Farewell My Concubine' will also be on display.

The work focuses on the transformation of the Peking Opera artists from male to female, and from female to male. Although they are admired by society as artists, their true identities and personal hardships cannot be lived out openly. Looking into the archaic and often utopian world of Chinese opera, Shavrova investigates issues of personal identity, sexuality and gender bending as they are manifested by both traditional and contemporary culture in modern day China.

Balancing moments of pure visuality with the austere formal movement codes of traditional choreography, the videos and photographs underscore the striking avant-garde qualities of this most traditional of art forms.

All video and time-lapse works in *The Opera* are accompanied by a specially commissioned score of the Beijing based composer Benoit Granier, which incorporates elements of traditional Chinese and contemporary electronic music.

Varvara Shavrova was born in Moscow and studied fine art at the Moscow Polygraphic Institute. After 15 years in London, she moved to Beijing, where she lived and worked for over five years. Now based in Dublin, Shavrova has shown in numerous public institutions and has curated significant exhibitions in Russia, China and the UK. Her work is in many important public and private collections worldwide.