

Galerie Daniel Templon  
Brussels

HE AN

*FLASH ART*, juillet-septembre 2014

# He An

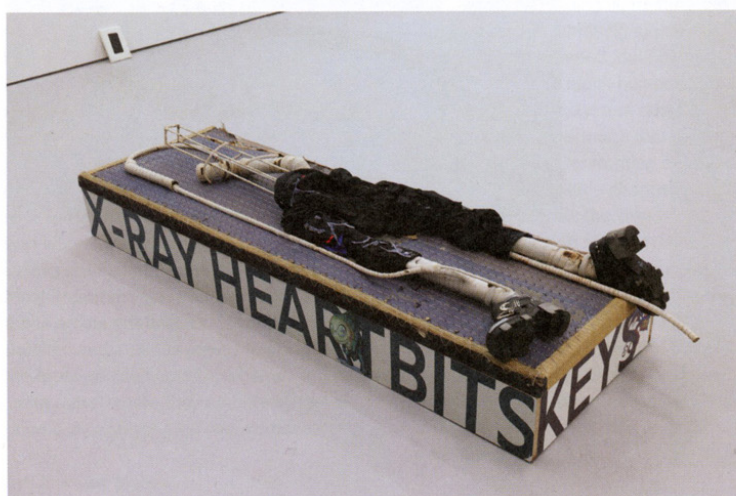
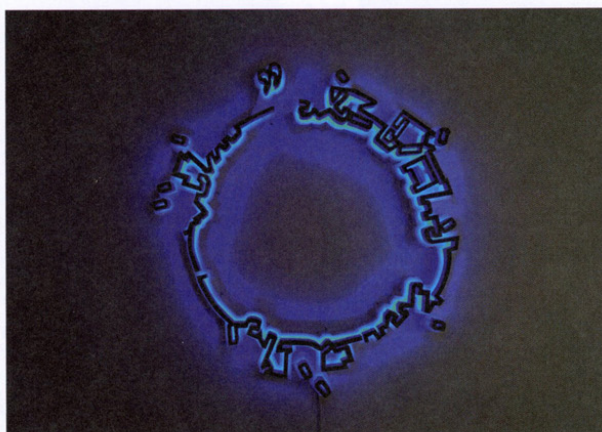
Daniel Templon / Brussels

The first impression upon entering He An's exhibition at Daniel Templon in Brussels is that of an accumulation: Chinese illuminated signs are all over the place, some of them hanging on the walls, while others are supported by large, free-standing metal plates. The artist wanted to recreate the visual chaos of a vibrant Asian city at night, with colorful ideograms lighting up gallery walls painted dark gray. Most of the signs are rusted and partially broken, revealing the electrical systems they contain. According to He An, all of them were stolen by hired thieves from various buildings in his native city of Wuhan. This illegal action forms what he refers to as the first act of a play, the second act being to write new words with these ideograms: the name of his deceased father; a Japanese actress whose banned erotic movies circulated secretly in China when He An was a teenager; the title of a song by Nick Cave (which also supplies the show's title). All of these semantic collages made with ideograms are highly autobiographical.

But it is the process of their making that gives them their true meaning. He An documents with photos the night expeditions in Wuhan, and sometimes this material is displayed alongside the neon and LED signs. When asked about Chinese authorities and the risks he faces, the artist replies with a smile: "I'm not Ai Weiwei." According to him, as long as the political questions are left aside, in China the border can be blurry between what is punishable and what is not. Many of the treasures that were plundered by the French and British armies in China during the opium wars have been sold legally in Europe and are now in prestigious collections. There is something ironic about having a contemporary Chinese artist selling works made of cheap stolen and broken materials to occidental collectors – a transaction for which they could technically be charged with concealment. It gives He An's artistic approach its postcolonial dimension.

by Pierre-Yves Desaiwe

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From top, clockwise:

## Linder

*The Working Class Goes to Paradise (2000) Installation view at Raven Row, London (2014); courtesy of the Artist; Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York; and Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London; photograph by Marcus J. Leith*

## He An

*An instant of my purity is worth a lifetime of your lies (2014) Courtesy of the Artist and Daniel Templon, Brussels; photography by Isabelle Arthuis*

## Renaud Jerez

*Untitled (2014) Installation view at Carlos/ Ishikawa, London (2014; courtesy of the Artist and Carlos/Ishikawa, London*