

**Afterall, a journal of  
art, context & enquiry**

**57 PALESTINE AND THE WORLD**

**Furqat Palvan-Zade on the Tashkent Festival  
for Asian, African and Latin American Films  
and documenta fifteen, Xin Wang on Dance as  
Socialist World-Building, Artist Inserts by Han  
Mengyun, Haseeb Ahmed, Melissa Gronlund on  
Hazem Harb, Kegham Djeghalian Jr on Unboxing  
Gaza, Julian Ross on the Tokyo Reels, Hanan  
Toukan on Mohammed Al Hawajri, Eltiqaa  
collective and The Question of Funding,  
Janine Armin on Sung Hwan Kim**

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## NIGHT

### Han Mengyun

During the early days of my motherhood, I lost all incentive to live. The promise of unconditional love was a false marketing prize for the self-fulfilling prophecy to one's complete demise. When one becomes a mother, one dies. The mother lives on to perpetually perform as a symbol. It was in the death of my subjectivity and identity that I realised the world put a mask on me. Any sign of desire must be hidden under this mask, under the facade of love and nobility. All day long I must perform to the best of my ability. I must perform according to the rules of love without feeling any. The light of the day felt too bright. Too pure, too right. And when the night arrived, as it darkened, I put the mask aside. Following the rhythm of my daughter's breathing in sleep, I began to write on my phone in the dark. Words emerged on the screen, serving only their need for visibility. Words of complete honesty, serving no master of censorship. The nocturnal language took over the voices spoken for me during the day. No expressions attempt to tame a woman's mind and body. The night protected me. The drunkenness of the night set me free.

It was then I realised that darkness is where truth and possibility reside. The day demands the oppressive clarity of responsibility and reason, whereas the night presents the truth of ambiguity and sensation. I became infatuated with the night, impatiently waiting to plunge into its embrace by the end of the day. This infatuation with darkness gave birth to my poetry, carving a gateway into the recesses of my subconscious, to the bare skin of suffering ablaze.

When I encountered the Dong cloth made by Chinese Dong minority women, I was immediately drawn to its darkness with a sheen reminiscent of moonlight. I learned that it takes Dong women a year to make a piece of cloth, from harvesting raw cotton and weaving, to indigo dyeing and drying until pitch dark, then coating with egg white, beating with a mallet repeatedly until the cloth shines. This laborious and unique process completely transforms the nature of the cloth, the touch of which feels hard and crisp like paper, its surface shining like metal. 'Women in labour' I thought, amused by the unexpected double entendre. It's not a coincidence that the pangs of making and giving birth sound alike. To Dong people, the colour black symbolises the darkness of the womb and the egg white pounded into the fibre further insinuates fertility.

Evoking endless associations of darkness in relation to female reproductive and creative powers, the Dong cloth resonates viscerally with my nightly emancipation. It has therefore become not only a material enactment of a much anticipated night mode that instigates my poetic surge, but also a metaphorical device through which I can find connection with other women by perusing various forms of darkness: the unfathomable darkness of the womb that harbours life and wisdom; the veiled labour of women; those who are hidden, confined, abandoned, aborted, those who have never managed to weather the night and glimpse a beam of light. Yet the night is not entirely terrifying as it also gives birth to poetry, the nightly presence of the moon suggests a possibility, even if it has never been fully seen.

Previous spread: Han Mengyun  
*Night Sutra* (2024), film still

Right: Han Mengyun  
*Night Sutra* (2024), film still



## NIGHT I

*Mama,  
who is beating the bells  
nine thousand nine hundred times?  
Singing echoes in the depth of the night.*

*Blue seedlings emerge from the nail shells.  
Originally from the ocean but ended up in this strange place.  
Fresh milk flowing in the open stone has  
wet the butterfly wings hidden in the fruit.*

*Can you hear the calling of the mountains?*

*O madman, follow the backlight of the clouds,  
Find the missing moon.*



## THIS NIGHT, ANOTHER NIGHT

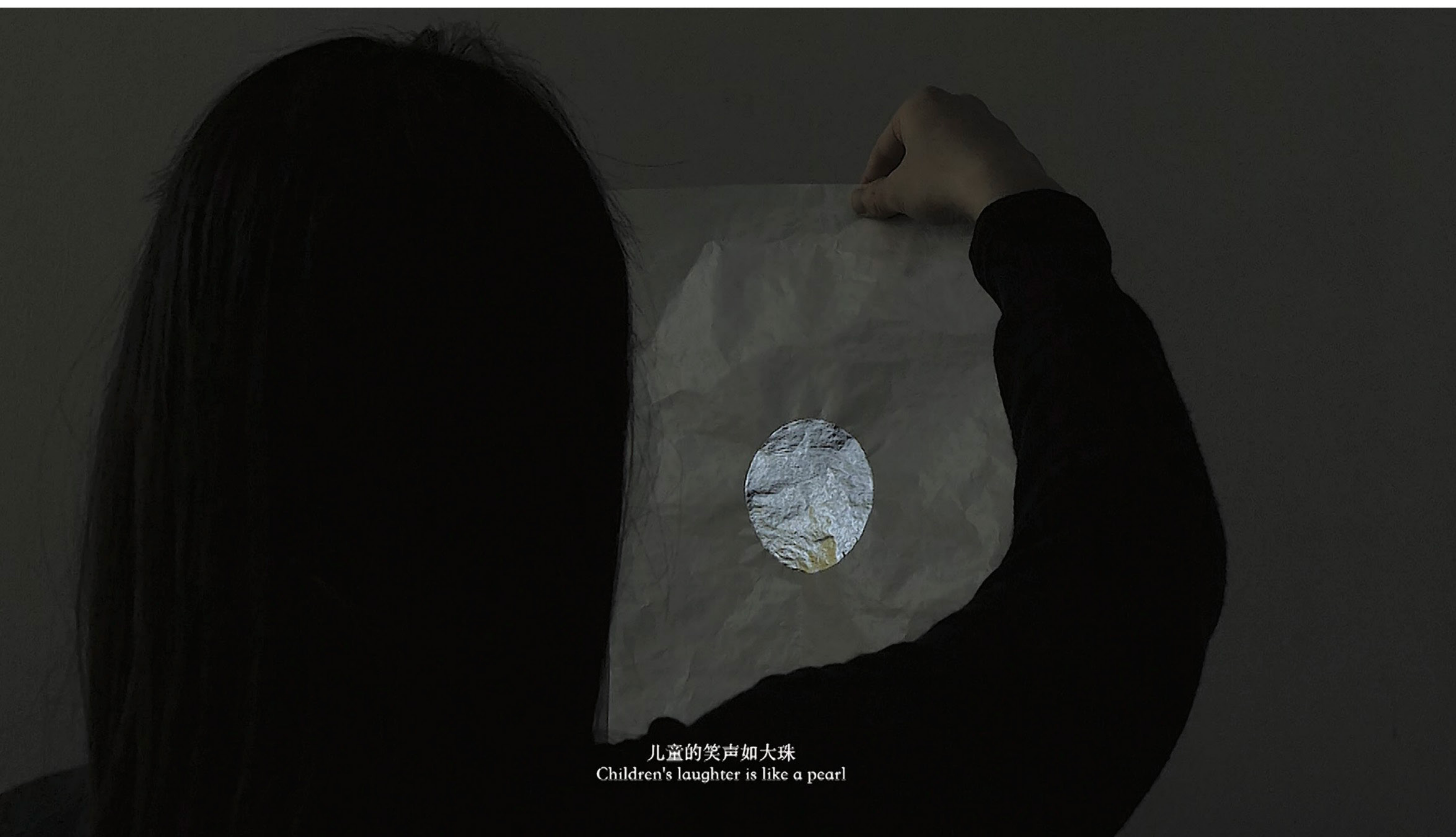
*The night is the key to the cabinet of secrets,  
of thoughts unseen during the day.  
Open it,  
one shall find a stone yet to be polished,  
a tooth with tea stain,  
a cloth embroidered with a clam frieze,  
a spider's skin,  
and dust scattered in time's traces.*

*Our sense of stillness flies too,  
along with our sense of aging.*

*If one gazes at the wrinkles of one's hand,  
one sees a canyon and a lake,  
from the eyes of some god.*

#### THE POET'S DEVOTION

*In a fanatic night,  
the poet chases after the moon,  
in search of images and words  
as witness to her existence  
and to her demise at twilight  
through fits of delirium.  
The fallen sun echoes the moon,  
shines upon the self beyond the self.*



儿童的笑声如大珠  
Children's laughter is like a pearl

Han Mengyun, *Night* (2021), film still

#### THE PENDULUM

*Every night is a journey towards tranquillity  
through an ocean of blazing rage.  
This is how a woman burns  
like a mountain  
restless, merciless.  
The burning is both a destruction and a reincarnation.  
When the day breaks, the pulse sinks into the abyss.  
The night was a refuge of hysteria.  
When the day breaks, sanity returns.  
The night was an abode of animality.  
When the day breaks, the circus closes its gate,  
The beast returns to its cage.  
Sleep,  
Until the gate opens again.  
The wakefulness awaits the night again.*

UNTITLED I  
*The grey moth in your mouth  
speaks words of ashes.  
Writing is accompanied by its own erasure  
fluttering  
as voices linger on your white lips.*

UNTITLED II  
*Nabokov's butterfly is a game of the tongue.  
The flapping of wings  
fans the flames of words.  
The moth, on the other hand,  
belongs to silence.  
From birth to destruction  
She has not said a word.*



Han Mengyun, *Night Sutra* (2024),  
film still



LOVE  
*A monster crawls out of a mother's chest  
waiting to be fed.  
Hatred fills it.  
No house can contain it.  
We must set it free  
to a chessboard without rules.*

Han Mengyun, *Night Sutra* (2024),  
film still



Han Mengyun, *Night Sutra* (2024),  
film still



Han Mengyun, *Night* (2021), film still

## HOME

*Three Birds in the village said  
'The tower across the river is filled with cries'  
It's a hotbed for newborns.  
The sound they make with all their might  
shows their hopes for the world and their lives.  
But after dawn, the tower returns to silence.  
These children returned to the place of origin,  
to darkness,  
where, perhaps,  
a better home resides.*

Baby Tower, also known as abandoned infant tower or baby girl tower, is an architectural structure in Fujian, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu and other places in ancient China. There is usually a small hole on the top, which is used to abandon dead infants, disabled infants and female infants. The pagoda architectural style is intended to suppress the spirit of the female baby with the power of Buddhas and gods, to prevent her from being reincarnated and returning back.





SHUNYATA

*Shall we set out  
to a world without edges  
nor language  
but light made of all words.  
Silence is the sound of understanding.  
The person in the mirror is no longer me.  
She dips into the pool of chaos,  
where a thousand things return to the origin,  
like an infant,  
grasping the meaning afloat in the ether.*



ANSWER

*I want to ask God  
not the question of salvation  
not the possibility of redemption  
not the meaning of existence  
but how she sculpts the tenderness of the petals,  
the proportion between shoots of a stem,  
the shyness of roots.  
I want to ask her  
how we are named,  
how mountains are placed.  
I want to ask her  
why I only see the wind in her absence,  
why the moon looks at us,  
why the sun departs?  
The earthly stone can also become the heavenly star.*