

## ARTIST

## COMPETING IDENTITIES

## Song Ta thinks you're a big deal

By Yu-Chieh Li 2015-10-16

Song Ta's work perverts administrative tactics like beauty contests, population censuses, or school tests—always twisting the official line but not overstepping it.

His artist talk, *So, you're a big deal?* will take place at 6:30 pm on November 8 in 456 Broadway, New York. This event is part of a SCREEN-curated performance program, *What Kind of Technology is Culture?*

**Yu-Chieh Li:** Originally you wanted to do a performance project for this series, called *So, you're a big deal?* But it wasn't realized. Can you talk about that project and its relation to your identity and artistic practice?

**Song Ta:** We talked about doing [my earlier performance project] *Uglier and Uglier* again in New York. The first time was Wuhan, in Central China: I invited more than forty female volunteers to walk an "ugliness" catwalk in a gallery. I ranked them from beautiful to ugly on the spot, and they had to walk out onstage in order. It's a very cruel project. If I could realize it in New York I would love to try with male volunteers, and I would title it *So, you're a big deal here?* In this case I'm going to have to force myself to be ranked, too, based on power. Of course this has to do with "identity," but it's rather than seeing other people's identities, I'd like to see what their rank is. I want to know whose identity is most analogous to my own, and what that dude looks like. Who doesn't have an identity? Talking about things with identity is fine too, but if everybody in the world took their identities and started figuring out who's higher and lower, that's way more fun.

**YCL:** Your works deal with social phenomena specific to China; how do you translate that for a New York audience? There might be gaps in cultural context or in the understanding of art.

**ST:** I don't know either, how to translate it. I bet there's other people, they'd translate it way better than me. And there's this phenomenon, too: now, the whole world is learning English, but it's reached a bottleneck. I think the total population of people who can understand English won't grow by leaps. I don't understand English myself. Maybe it's time to figure out a way to let more people sit down together and get really into chatting, but without speaking the same language. That's the future.

**YCL:** In your opinion, what forms of technology are part of Chinese culture (or all cultures)?

**ST:** WeChat is. I feel like it's a melting pot of things sort of like Beme, Snapchat, Yik Yak, and Yahoo Live. In society, now, there's lots of different cultures. They have different names, but their substance isn't really that different.



Song Ta. *Who Is The Loveliest Guy?* 2014. Three Channel Video Installation, 3'46." © 2015 The Artist.

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