

# 北京銀礦

## Beijing Silvermine

北京銀礦 / 2009-2013

「北京銀礦」源起於2009年一次與一個回收廢物商人的會面，小馬在北京市北部處理部分棄置於這中國首都的垃圾，在那兒有些人特別集中於處理塑膠，有些集中處理啤酒瓶蓋，他則專注於硝酸銀，即醫院的X光底片、光碟、以及菲林底片。他沒把那些菲林底片浸沒於大量酸性液體中以收集貴重的銀，卻將它們以公斤計賣給我，「北京銀礦」這計劃由此展開。

我自那時起便每月重覆不斷地去收購那些底片，至今收藏數目已超越五十萬。每袋數以千卷計，一袋又一袋濕滋滋，味道難聞、滿佈灰塵、裂痕、皺痕的底片，使我接觸到一個非常井井有條的視覺宇宙，相中的主體通常四正地在正中央，正眼地望去外面。矛盾充斥於這些相片中，一方面它們完全不自然、另一方面相中主角與攝影師有著一份固有的複雜性；照像在中國常常是一種儀式，要被攝對象擺好姿勢和取得其首肯。得出的就是這些撲實無華、帶點趣味且討人歡喜的相片。

北京銀礦呈現這中國首都文化大革命後獨特的景貌，以及居住其中市民的生活百態。它涵蓋了1985年以後的二十年，即從菲林攝影開始在中國普及直至其被數碼攝影所取代這時期。中國這期間也正值經濟開放，人們富裕起來，開始旅遊、消費及找尋娛樂。

反覆查看這些相片的時候，我總在尋覓突出於這藝術形態的其中一種陳腔濫調，亦即是紀念攝影。腦中浮現的是一個坐在一新月型大石上俯瞰都市的男子，或是一身穿萍果綠裙女子直立在一場鯊魚與八爪魚的生死撕殺中，又或隱身於一片十五尺高的雛菊叢中。同時，一些意料之外的系列也自然地突出起來。例如在八十年代末期北京家居開始現代化，人們常常在其新購置的家居用品旁拍照……因此我擁有大量相中人在電冰箱旁擺姿勢的照片……隨著這些照片我們登入各個家庭並發現瑪麗蓮夢露、占士甸、史泰龍等的海報...在那中國開始向西方開放的當下，這些不知名、尋常百姓的紀念攝影，使我們見證後社會主義中國的誕生。

蘇文

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Beijing Silvermine started in May 2009 out of my meeting with a man called Xiaoma, who works in a recycling zone north of town, where part of the city's garbage ends up. Over there, some specialize in plastics, some in beer bottle caps, but he solely concentrates on trash containing silver nitrate, which essentially means hospital x-rays, cd-roms, but also negative film. Before drowning it all in a big pool of acid in order to collect this precious silver, he agreed to sell me negative film by the kilo, and that's how the Beijing Silvermine project was born.

Ever since, I have been repeating this collecting process every month, and the archive now counts a little more than half a million negatives. These rice bags filled with thousands of rolls of slobbery, stinky, dusty, scratched, crumpled and humid negative film, have allowed me to access a highly codified visual universe, where the subject is always standing up straight at the center of the image, looking into the objective. In these photos, there is a paradox between this total absence of spontaneity on one hand, and on the other hand the inherent complicity between the photographer and the photographed; in China taking pictures is always a ritual, it always involves posing and necessarily consent. The results are these unpretentious, often quite funny, and undoubtedly endearing images.

Beijing Silvermine is a unique photographic portrait of the capital and the life of its inhabitants following the Cultural Revolution. It covers a period of 20 years, from 1985, namely when silver film started being used massively in China, to 2005, when digital photography started taking over. These 20 years are those of China's economic opening, when people started prospering, traveling, consuming, having fun.

While reviewing this archive several times, I was constantly looking for these few cliches which stand out in this artform that is souvenir photography. I'm thinking of a man sitting on a crescent moon made of stone looking out towards the city, or a woman in an apple green dress standing in the middle of a deadly fight between a shark and an octopus, or another hidden in a field of 15-foot-tall daisies. Also, a number of unexpected series naturally started standing out. For instance, at the end of the eighties, as Beijing households started modernizing, it was quite usual to be photographed next to your latest purchases... I therefore have a tremendous amount of portraits of people posing next to their refrigerator... With these photos we enter people's homes only to discover posters of Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Sylvester Stallone... at a time when China is only starting to open up to the West. Through all these souvenir snapshots taken by the anonymous and everyday Chinese, we're in reality witnessing the birth of post-Socialist China.

Thomas Sauvin

## 蘇文簡歷

蘇文 (Thoma Sauvin) 是旅居北京的法國籍攝影收藏家和編輯。由2006年起，他為英國獨立出版社「Archive of Modern Conflict」擔任顧問一職，負責協助收藏中國的攝影作品，範圍涵蓋當代攝影、古舊刊物以至不知名人仕拍攝的照片。他負責的藏品曾出版成《Happy Tonight》一書 (2010年)。

近年他開始進行《北京銀礦》項目，從北京的廢物回收區中搜羅超過50萬張，由不知名人仕拍攝、面臨被銷毀的彩色負片。蘇文的藏品曾於中國大理攝影節，新加坡國際攝影節和在英國打庇舉行的FORMAT攝影節中展出。

## 收集中國 Collecting China

這個展覽的主題雖說是「銀礦」，其實不如說是個「寶藏」。蘇文收藏被中國百姓丟棄的彩色負片，其實是一個尋寶的活動，只不過未必所有人認同這是個「寶藏」。

這個普通話比我說得要好的法國人，曾說道中國內除了藝術圈子裡，並沒有太多人去關心他所做的事情。一方面可能覺得相裡的情景對他們來說是司空見慣，也有可能覺得蘇文的照片是政治不正確的，跟當下中國的「強國」形象格格不入：濃厚的化妝，或是別扭的肢體動作，相中人了無機心的笑容，但得來的影像却惹人著迷；相中人物的身份充滿著神秘感，我們對這些「無名氏」的過去及現況完全一無所知，令到整個觀賞經驗都帶著龐大的想像空間。

蘇文的「銀礦」通常我們以「庶民攝影」(vernacular photography)一詞概括之，她推翻我們對好照片約定俗成的規條：不是構圖死板，相中人永遠是在置在中央，就是場面混亂，虛焦或是曝光失誤時有出現，卻是叫人興奮的趣味所在，更因無添加修飾而強化了影像的可信性。膠卷上隨年月得來的刮痕，又或是發霉得來的斑跡，更讓照片添上一種超現實的氛圍。

## About Thomas Sauvin

Thomas Sauvin is a French photography collector and editor who lives in Beijing. Since 2006 he exclusively works as a consultant for the UK-based Archive of Modern Conflict, an independent publisher, for whom he collects Chinese works, from contemporary photography to period publications to anonymous photography. A glimpse into this collection is presented in the photo book Happy Tonight (2010).

More recently, he started the Silvermine Project, accumulating more than half a million of anonymous color negatives destined for destruction in a Beijing recycling zone. Sauvin exhibited at the Dali Photo Festival (China), the Singapore International Photo Festival and the FORMAT Photo Festival in Derby.

The theme of this exhibition is named as Silvermine but it is in fact a treasure. Thomas Sauvin collects negative films that are dumped by Chinese, what he does is treasure hunting though not many people will agree they are treasures.

Speaking better Putonghua than me, this French once said other than people within the arts circle, not many people cared what he did. On the one hand, many people may find the scenes in these pictures are nothing unusual, on the other hand, maybe they find the pictures are politically incorrect that they are not matching the image of the contemporary China as a strong country. Heavy makeup, absurd pose with truthful smile, but then these portraits are so fascinating. People in these portraits are full of mystery; we have no idea about the past and present situation of these "anonymous" people's, that there is a lot of room for our imagination.

We usually called the photos in Sauvin's Silvermine Vernacular Photography. They are against the rulebook of good photography, the composition is dumb, the subject is always at the center of the image, the scene is often chaotic, the focus and exposure settings are often wrong. But then they are the origins of fun. The lack of décor even enhances the credibility of these pictures. Scratches and other marks left on these negatives bring about a touch of surrealistic atmosphere onto these photos.

《北京銀礦》在香港這個時空展出，多了一重特別的意義，尤其在這個中港矛盾已到達沸點、意識形態上的爭拗白熱化的時刻，衝突往往一觸即發，內地民眾形像在港人心目中史無前例的低落；蘇文特意為香港這次展覽，搜尋了一些1997年香港回歸大陸的時候，內地民眾慶賀留念的存照，對很多香港人而言，今時今日「七一」已變成了上街遊行示威的代名詞，喜慶的成份已消失得七七八八，這些還沒有被物質主義污染的民眾圖像，並沒有去叫人「和諧」的意味，但總會叫人看得百般滋味在心頭。

蘇珊·宋姐 (Susan Sontag) 曾說過收集照片就是收集世界，那麼蘇文就是收集了中國，雖然中國的老照片一直有學者去整理，但很多都是從人類學或歷史圖檔的角度去審視，蘇文卻收集了一些正規文獻檔案不會容納的吉光片羽，一個還沒被接觸過的黑洞，補充了我們對那個時代一些認知上的缺口。

在我個人而言對《北京銀礦》的最大疑惑是，主人家為什麼會拋棄這些寶貴的底片？當然可以推敲出一大堆理由去解釋：遺失、意外、關係決裂、離世……。但丟棄底片不單單是失去一堆物件，其實跟遺忘記憶是同一回事，幸好蘇文拯救了這堆回憶，但數碼年代始起，摒棄、清洗記憶變得易如反掌，已沒有挽回的可能，或許安慰自己一下是，當下發生的很多情景，到將來其實是叫人不堪回憶罷。

岑允逸  
The Salt Yard

The timing of this exhibition offers an additional meaning to Silvermine. Conflicts between Hong Kong people and Mainland Chinese have reached a boiling point that argument on ideology has intensified nowadays. The image of Mainland Chinese has hit a historical low among Hong Kong people. Especially for this exhibition, Sauvin found some photos taken by Mainland Chinese when they celebrated the Hong Kong handover in 1997. To many Hong Kong people, "July 1" has become a synonym of demonstration and protest; the element of celebration has almost been vanished. Without the contamination of materialism, these pictures do not carry the meaning of "harmonize", but they will leave many thoughts in the mind of the viewers.

Susan Sontag said, "To collect photographs is to collect the world." What Sauvin doing is collecting China. Many scholars amass old photos of China, but then they often do it from the perspective of anthropology and historical records. Sauvin however, collects precious arts pieces that are not tolerated in formal documentation. A black hole, a missing piece of that era in our cognition has been fulfilled.

Why did people throw away these valuable negatives? It is the biggest question of Beijing Silvermine to me. Of course, there are a number of answers: loss, accident, breakup of a relationship, deaths... But then throwing away negatives is not merely losing some stuff, it is the same as abandoning memories. Luckily, Sauvin saved these memories. Since the beginning of the digital era, getting rid of, erasing memory is as easy as abc that there is no way to turn back. Maybe I can comfort myself that many incidents occurring at present are not worth to be recalled in the future.

Dustin Shum  
The Salt Yard