

Robert Zhao Renhui: *Christmas Island, Naturally*

**Opening:** 2017/09/03, 15:00-18:00

**Duration:** 2017/09/04 –2017/11/19 (11:00-17:00, Mon. & Tues. Closed)

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ShanghART M50 is pleased to present a solo show by acclaimed Singaporean artist and photographer Robert Zhao Renhui, titled “Christmas Island, Naturally”. The exhibition will be on view from 3 September through 19 November. The series of works which were initially commissioned for 2016 Sydney Biennale will be exhibited in China for the first time.

The artist conducted a research residency on Christmas Island between 2015 and 2016. A small volcanic outcrop in the Indian Ocean, the island’s geographic isolation has resulted in its endemic biodiversity. Once part of the Crown Colony of Singapore, the island is now an External Territory of Australia. Christmas Island is best known for its annual breeding migration of red land crabs from land to the sea, during which millions of bright red crustaceans overtake the island and all vehicular activity grinds to a halt. Phosphate mining, the island’s main industry, began in the late nineteenth century, and invasive species brought over by human settlers have tipped the scales of the island’s fragile ecological balance, driving multiple native species to extinction and threatening others. Conservation efforts include an island-wide culling of non-native cats, to which the island’s native fauna had fallen easy prey.

The artist’s study focuses on documenting the island’s imperiled and extinct species, and also examines the unintended consequences of man’s presence. The artist’s photographic series of the island’s strange creatures, natural phenomena and landmarks are accompanied by signature pseudo-scientific, tongue-in-cheek exposition and field notes. The elegant wooden form of Memorial to the Last Cat on Christmas Island (2016) belies its lethal function as a feral cat trap, indicated by its pointed installation together with a resin cat skeleton.

“Christmas Island, Naturally” culminates in a speculative solution to remove all invasive species from the island once and for all, whereby humans, also proverbial “invasive species”, opt to leave the island in order to preserve its ecology. This imagined scenario unfolds via a fictive conservation conference program, “Life After Humans – Rewilding Island Ecosystems,” as well as extracts from scientific papers presented.

Under his Institute of Critical Zoologists (ICZ), devoted to a “critical approach toward the zoological gaze, or how humans view animals” and to “advance unconventional, even radical, means of understanding human and animal relations,” the artist’s multi-disciplinary approach appropriates scientific language, tools, methods and even apparatus, juxtaposed with fabulist storytelling. His works inhabit an uncanny space between reality and fantasy, often exposing overlooked contradictions,

assumptions, and tensions inherent in man's relationship with nature. Blending fact and fiction, truth and artifice, the artist invites viewers to contemplate upon the image and information being presented, a reflexive gesture that proves to be particularly pertinent in an image-saturated world of "fake news."

And sometimes, as the artist demonstrates, truth is in fact stranger than fiction.

#### About Robert Zhao Renhui

Singaporean visual artist Robert Zhao Renhui (b. 1983) works chiefly with photography but often adopts a multi-disciplinary approach, presenting images together with documents and objects. Renhui's work include textual and media analysis, video and photography projects. Recent exhibitions include the Sydney Biennale 2016, Arles Discovery Award 2015, 'A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World', Centre of Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2015); 'The Nature Collector', ShanghART, Shanghai (2015); 'Flies Prefer Yellow', Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco (2014); and 'A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World', Primo Marella Gallery, Milan (2014), Singapore Biennale 2013, Centre of Contemporary Photography (Melbourne) and Photoquai 2013. His work has also been awarded The Deutsche Bank Award in Photography (2011) by the University of the Arts London, The United Overseas Bank Painting of the Year Award (2009) Singapore. In 2010, he was awarded The Young Artist Award by the Singapore National Arts Council. His work has also been featured prominently in Artforum International, ArtAsiaPacific, European Photography, Pipeline, Archivo, Fotografia and Punctum.