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Adou: Witch and Chicken

Adou, whose photography often features the Yi people of his native Sichuan province, works in a primarily documentary vein inspired by Robert Frank, Sally Mann, and August Sander. Though Adou worked for nearly a decade in advertising and design prior to becoming a full-time artist, he is a self-taught photographer. When he was first discovered as an artist, he was selling photographic prints out of a makeshift street stall in Chengdu, the city where he now lives. His use of outdated film and processing chemicals creates a suggestive patina on his prints, as though a veil of time or memory overlies the image without affecting the exactitude of the artist's vision. The process also evokes some of the so-called ethnographic photography of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The apparent age of the image further empowers the photographs by lending them an aura of historic authenticity. These photographs never speak for or attempt to explain the situations of the people they depict. The lives we glimpse appear somewhat enigmatic not only as a result of the evocative atmosphere created by Adou's processing techniques; the sense of mystery is often deepened by the stark environment in which we encounter the subjects. In some of Adou's most striking images, the ordinary absurdity of life appears with the sort of unselfconscious candor seen in the work of Diane Arbus. Adou says of his work: "There is no difference between taking a picture of others and myself. The camera may be pointed outward, but whether you like it or not, it always reveals you."



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