

He Chengyao

Testimony

2001–2002

triptych, colour photography / digital print

133 x 90 cm

Collection of Galeria Labirynt

The photograph presented at the exhibition is one of the three works from the “Testimony” series, presenting portraits of the artist, her mother, and son. The large-format photos in a similar style, recall classic Baroque painting – brightly lit figures shown against a uniformly dark background.

The boy is sitting frontally on a chest or a chair, his hands are on his knees and his torso is naked. The face directed towards the lens is serious, focused, it is difficult to read specific emotions from it. His silhouette seems to disappear in the darkness of the unlit background.

He Chengyao’s work was greatly influenced by her biography, in particular by her dramatic family history. Her mother suffered from a mental illness, as a result of which both struggled with social exclusion. In China, the artist’s home country, people suffering from mental illnesses do not receive adequate help from the state and most often live in difficult financial conditions. They function mainly in a limited circle – among the immediate family. Marginalisation and rejection from a larger community can simultaneously strengthen family ties and the relationships between its members. Misunderstood because of their distinctiveness, people are left to rely solely on themselves.

The artist shows her relatives, mother and son, aware of the burden they bear, but at the same time with care, tenderness and hope. The remaining works in the series are double portraits: in one of them He Chengyao is photographed with her mother, in the other she

is with her son. In the last one, the boy is on his own. Will there be someone in the future who will give him the necessary support?

Chengyao's work is about her personal experiences and is an attempt to work through the family trauma. However, this is not an individual situation, it is a testimony of the Chinese system, which is not economically and socially adapted to the needs of people suffering from intellectual disability and mental illnesses.

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translation: Krystian Kamiński

tactile diagram: Evghenia Gritscu, Agata Sztorc-Gromaszek



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