

# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

All press releases and images can be found on: [www.yuyu-film.com/yuyu.zip](http://www.yuyu-film.com/yuyu.zip)

**PRESS RELEASE**

### YúYú by Marc JOHNSON



Marc Johnson, YúYú, film still, featuring Shé Zuǒ Bīn, © Marc Johnson.

**YúYú, a short film about a Chinese beekeeper by French-Beninese artist and filmmaker Marc Johnson. Film lovers, art collectors and political people will experience a thrilling short film that exposes the sensitive issue of global ecological balance in a unique artistic style.**

YúYú is based on a true story of a beekeeper who performed an incredible rite of spring in Chongqing China, an area in need to recover its environmental balance. In April 2014 Shé Zuǒ Bīn attracted millions of bees to his naked body and became a living sculpture. In a challenging production Marc Johnson transformed the real event into a work of art, showing the beekeepers journey into a thrilling trance with nature.

The intense work with sound makes this film unforgettable. Powerful images move the mind of the viewer. By staging a crucial alliance between human and nature, the film reflects fundamental issues of our planet, the survival of the bees as well as our willingness to create an ecological balance. In Chinese tradition, man is a bridge between heaven and earth.

In YúYú, the human being becomes a living interface, highlighting the elements we are composed of as «co-habitant» of planet earth.

The film was produced by **ARTPORT\_making waves**, a non profit organization and international curatorial practice dedicated to environmental issues, based in New York Valencia and Paris.

**International Sales : FREAK DISTRIBUTION**

Millán Vázquez-Ortiz, Managing Director, **email:** [millan@agenciafreak.com](mailto:millan@agenciafreak.com) / [www.yuyu-film.com](http://www.yuyu-film.com) 1

# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

### BIOGRAPHY OF THE DIRECTOR

---

Marc Johnson (Vitry-Sur-Seine, France, 1986) is a Franco-Beninese architect, visual artist and film director who works at the intersection of architecture, performance, photography and cinema. Marc Johnson has studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, from 2006 to 2011 (MFA). He studied at the Hunter College of Art, New York (2010) and continued his studies from 2011-2013 at the National School of Architecture Paris-Malaquais (HMONP). In 2012 he followed a workshop at the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou. In 2007, he was a guest artist of the A.R.T. Artists-in-Residence programme in Tokyo.

Marc Johnson has received many grants and awards for his work as an artist, including the LVMH Young Artist Award (2009), the Clermont-Tonnerre Prize from the Association des Amis des Beaux-Arts de Paris (2009), the Colin-Lefranc grants from the French Ministry of Culture (2009) and the D-SPAR art prize from the Dhillon-Marty Foundation (2012).

In 2011 Marc Johnson was commissioned by the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris a site-specific intervention (ATLAS-in-situ) in the Glass Atrium. Marc Johnson has been exhibiting worldwide including at the Fondation Ricard, Paris (2010), Nadiff Gallery, Tokyo (2007), Valerie Bach Gallery, Brussels (2011), Chandigarh Art College, Chandigarh (2012), Nairang Gallery, Lahore (2012), Organhaus Art Space, Chongqing (2014), Jeu de Paume arts center, Paris (2014), 65<sup>th</sup> International Filmfestspiele Berlin, Berlinale Shorts 2015.

# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

---

YúYú was born after a 2 years research period. Looking for a man first seen in a newspaper in China in 2012, who was performing a ceremony with bees to manifest his existence and position in the world. One day, after many months of investigation, a friend (Olivia J. Anani), once born in Benin, handed me his phone number on a plate. Through her girlfriend's uncle, Jiang Hua, I was able to talk with Shé Zuǒ Bīn to express my deep interest in his ceremony.

I wanted to focus on his body, his heartbeats, his neck, his nipple and be able to record the real.

Being able to address the "ethical" as well as the "political" as such was both a wish and a puzzle. I tried to address issues of climate change and gender not too directly, but with a subject that could embrace the idea of "mankind in nature" and its relation to other species.

The sound-mixing is playing a key role in the understanding of the short-film: moments of extreme human tension combined with silence. Anxiety is important too, given the fact that in the Western world we both fear and love bees.

Ambivalence.

# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

### LONG SYNOPSIS

text by Jeanette Zwingenberger

The film starts with a sequence of static shots of the Chinese province of Chóngqìng: huge rocks, a waterfall, the peaks of a forest. The mysterious, 50-meter high rocks called Qinglong (literally Azure-Dragon heart), are located in the department of Wulong, and are part of the «five dragons» founding myth of Chinese civilization. Today, it is one of UNESCO'S World Heritage sites.

The camera moves through the morning fog, then brushes over fertile land which is sculpted into terraces. A couple works in the fields. In this valley, the geological and the agricultural time of Chóngqìng are joined together, and the immensity of the rocks contrasts with the green landscape. Cables reveal modern civilization. In the distance, the skyscrapers of a metropolis appear while faint city noise emerges in the sound track. A traveling shot flies over a highway which appears like a division of the two worlds: the old world, the countryside with its rocks and the new world, the city with its towers. Some of the 1.4 million refugees who were relocated by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam found shelter here.

Suddenly, close-up on a neck, resonating with the rhythm of the pulse. We see a male's nude torso and his face, surrounded by some bees. It is the film's main character (Shé Zuǒ Bīn). He is assisted by four men and his wife to perform a ceremony. The queen bees are now on his body and call the worker bees who will invade the body until it's completely covered. The camera frames the beekeeper's skin, hair, and finally one nipple which the bees forage in an almost intimate way. Their loud buzzing becomes the sound of the film.

Their tingling is like a metaphor of the pulsation which the beekeeper has to master throughout his trance. The mark of a sting indicates that there is real danger. Only his absolute immobility and seeming oblivion allow him to communicate with the bees and to secure his survival. After his two-hour physical trial, he becomes a living sculpture of millions of bees from 40 beehives, an equivalent of approximately 50 kilos. The bees form the second skin of this human beehive.

Abruptly shaking off the bees, the man emerges from his static being, a critical moment that could be lethal, where he returns to life. Running away he rejoins his group. The last take is filled with a swarm of bees that hovers in front of the landscape, the bustling of the bees comparable to the interaction of small particles.

In Chinese tradition, man is a bridge between heaven and earth. Here, the human being becomes a living interface, highlighting the elements we are composed of as «co-habitant» of planet earth. These fields of tension between art and nature create a correlation between the two disciplines, where Marc Johnson puts himself onto an onto-phenomenological level in order to experience this connection of «being-in-itself» with other species. The link between nature and culture is no longer thought in the dominant verticality of mankind, but as a horizontal relationship where all beings are considered equal.

# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

### ABOUT THE PRODUCTION COMPANY

[www.artport-project.org](http://www.artport-project.org)

**ARTPORT\_making waves** is a non profit organization and international curatorial practice co-founded and co-directed by **Anne-Marie Melster** and **Corinne Erni** based in Paris and New York.

As an international curatorial practice dedicated to environmental issues with a focus on climate change, active since 2006, we have been collaborating with numerous artists worldwide in the production of specific projects, like Meschac Gaba, Subhankar Banerjee, Nnenna Okore, Betsabeé Romero, Kim Abeles, Rob Carter, reflecting on issues regarding humankind and nature.

We are particularly interested in finding new talents and in co-producing their works which contribute to a meaningful development of society. We raise awareness about environmental issues through exhibitions, film production, residency programs, workshops, and collaborations linking the arts, science, and politics with the aim to promote social change and intend to create communication with the audience, establishing discussion areas. Through these collaborations ARTPORT\_making waves is gathering international networks of artists, curators, critics, architects and institutions in order to enhance a genuine global artistic discourse, giving a voice to emerging and established artists from all over the world.

To work with a young film maker and artist like Marc Johnson in the organization and coordination of the film and its content, but also the process of finding the audience and collaborators in the post production phase, is a rewarding part of our activities where we combine our expertise as curators, managers and agents in order to promote his career. We reflect on social and environmental circumstances in many countries by giving the voice to artists, and this project lead us to China, after having co-produced art projects in Benin, Mexico, Spain, Alaska, the US, and Germany.

Art touches us, if it is done in a good way, if the quality and the message are strong and understandable. Art is a powerful cultural tool to move something in the mind of the viewer, the citizen. It is like a good book, which can open new mental and spiritual spheres and lead the recipient to a better understanding of the world and to a socially and environmentally more respectful behavior. This aesthetic experience has a socially formative potential, the recipient in constant dialogue with the artist, his work and his personal interpretations.

For ARTPORT each work has to contain the poetic aspect in order to involve the viewer, attract him to the work, invite him to watch, to feel, to listen, even to smell. The work then has to be strong enough to engage the recipient into the next phase, the aesthetic, when he combines his first attraction with his associations and begins to understand the work. If the work then also reaches the goal to activate the viewer to use his personal pleasure and interpretation to obtain new knowledge and reconsider his behavior, we will try to do everything possible to support the artist in producing a new work, usually in the context of an exhibition which we are curating, but also in the case of independent production. With Marc Johnson we found an artist who has the capability of merging all three aesthetic determinants. When he approached us with a proposal for another work, we quickly understood that his way of thinking and working was extraordinary and rare to find. Marc Johnson is able to include several social and environmental concerns into one work and create a subtle poetry which guides the viewer through the process of understanding, inspiring him to think further, to question his concepts and change his perspective.

# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

### CAST & CREW

---

#### CAST

余佐宾 SHÉ ZUǒ BĪN  
杨冬菊 YÁNG DŌNG JÚ  
杨三云 YÁNG SĀN YÚN  
王海宾 WÁNG Hǎi BĪN  
冯利 FÉNG Lì

#### CREW

MARC JOHNSON | Director, Co-Producer  
ANNE-MARIE MELSTER | Co-Producer, Production Director  
GUILLAUME BRAULT | Cinematographer  
AYMERIC DE TAPOL | Sound recordist  
江华 JIANG HUA | Production Coordinator  
OLIVIA J. ANANI | Cultural Advisor  
ZHAO FU | Cultural Advisor  
PHILIPPE VANDENDRIESSCHE | Sound Advisor  
RAPHAËL HÉNARD | Sound Editor and Sound Mixer  
MATTHIEU CHOUX | Recorder  
DANIEL BENEJAM | Sound engineer  
DAVID CHARPENTIER | Film Editor  
LAURENT NAVARRI | Colorist  
冉文 RAN WEN | Set Photographer

#### MANY THANKS TO

GISÈLE SURBLED, CATHERINE SURBLED, GABRIEL LOINGER-BECK, ALICE HALTER, DMYTRO AFANASENKO, MAXIME CHANSON, BENJAMIN GUETTA, LUC MEIER, PASCAL MARMIER, XU SILVIA, 倪昆 NI KUN, 倪島島 TAKEO, 王維 WANGWEI, SWISSNEX CHINA, PRO HELVETIA SHANGHAI, THE ORGANHAUS CHONGQING, TELLINE, OMNIA STUDIO, YELLOW CAB STUDIO

International Sales : FREAK DISTRIBUTION

Millán Vázquez-Ortiz, Managing Director, email: millan@agenciafreak.com / www.yuyu-film.com 6



# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

**VISUALS FOR THE MEDIA** download at : [www.yuyu-film.com/yuyu.zip](http://www.yuyu-film.com/yuyu.zip)



YúYú, film still, 2014, Trance of Shé Zuǒ Bīn, © Marc Johnson



YúYú, film still, 2014, Close-up © Marc Johnson



YúYú, film still, 2014, Chongqing, China, © Marc Johnson



YúYú, film still, 2014, Featuring Yang Dong Ju, © Marc Johnson



YúYú, film still, 2014, © Marc Johnson



YúYú, film still, 2014, Ecstasy of Shé Zuǒ Bīn, © Marc Johnson



Marc Johnson, director of YúYú film, photo: © Oscar Pereire



YúYú, film still, Featuring Shé Zuǒ Bīn © Marc Johnson

**International Sales : FREAK DISTRIBUTION**

Millán Vázquez-Ortiz, Managing Director, **email:** [millan@agenciafreak.com](mailto:millan@agenciafreak.com) / [www.yuyu-film.com](http://www.yuyu-film.com) 7

# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS (1)

---

#### 1) What is the meaning of YúYú?

**Marc Johnson:** “The title is a wordplay with different significations. It started with one of my Chinese friends. Her name is Yuyu Yang and she has a funny character. Her name sticks in my mind. While doing the film I understood that the abbreviation of Chongqing City was the 渝 (Yú) character. It is written on the car plate. Then there is the sound of bees as a form of onomatopoeia. I thought that the Chinese onomatopoeia for the bees could be Yú Yú! Yú Yú! I discovered as well that the “渝” character is used in Chinese words and idioms: to persevere 堅持渝 (jiān chí bù yú), unyielding integrity 堅貞渝 (jiān zhēn bù yú) and faithful 渝 (bù yú). So I started to really like this title because of its polysemy and polyphony.”

#### 2) What is the story behind the story?

**Marc Johnson:** “When I spent some time in China in 2012 at the Hangzhou Academy of Art for a workshop with architect and winner of the Pritzker architecture prize Wang Shu, 2012 I read in a Chinese newspaper an article about a beekeeper who was performing a ceremony with bees. He seemed to manifest his existence and position in the world in a way I had not seen before. This article stayed vivid for almost 2 years. After seeing and studying amazing exhibitions such as William Kentridge in Moma or Steve Mc Queen at Schaulager, Basel, I was more and more convinced that it was in a way “worth” the effort of making a film of my own. I was thinking that it was the right and coherent path I had to follow. I felt incredibly challenged by the retrospective at Schaulager and I thought that I had to acknowledge the feelings and thoughts I had at the time. I stayed 6 days in Basel and I was going into the museum every day for 6 days to really study the precision and commitment of this great artist. I even wrote an article published in the Afrikadaa magazine n°6 “e-motional”. Now here is my first film.”

#### 3) How did the collaboration with ARTPORT come together for this project ?

**Anne-Marie Melster:** “From the beginning on it was a very exciting collaboration. Marc Johnson first approached us with the proposal for another work at the beginning of 2014. Incidentally he told us about YúYú. We were fascinated, because it is our goal to give artists who reflect on social and environmental circumstances a voice. We quickly understood that Marc’s way of thinking and working was extraordinary and rare to find. He is able to include several social and environmental concerns into one work and create a subtle poetry that guides the viewer through the process of understanding, inspiring him to think further, to question his concepts and change his perspective. That’s why we decided to set out on this adventure together.”

**International Sales :** FREAK DISTRIBUTION

Millán Vázquez-Ortiz, Managing Director, **email:** millan@agenciafreak.com / [www.yuyu-film.com](http://www.yuyu-film.com) 8



# MARC JOHNSON

## YúYú Short film

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS (2)

---

#### 4) How long did you work on it?

**Anne-Marie Melster:** “After a seemingly endless period of research suddenly everything had to happen very quickly. We found out that the bee ceremony could only be performed in the first weeks of April due to the bee’s pollination cycle. So we only had a few weeks to identify the beekeeper, the film team, make travel arrangements, find local partners. All of this happened within a few weeks. The film team went to China at the beginning of April 2014 for ten days. After that we post-produced in Paris, in October YúYú was ready and now we are here, presenting it at the Berlinale.! Being an art curator teaming up with an artist for his debut film the speed of the production and the extreme circumstances of shooting in the middle of millions of bees was quite an experience.”

#### 5) How was your first meeting with Shé Zuǒ Bīn? What did strike you most?

**Marc Johnson:** “I first met Shé Zuǒ Bīn on April 4th 2014 around 10am. My team and I (Guillaume Brault, Cinematographer, Aymeric de Tapol, Sound recordist and Jiang Hua, Production coordinator) went to the outside of Yu, (the abbreviation for Chongqing) in Yubei District (渝北区) (the north of Yu) by car. When I first met him, he was on the road with his cousin installing beehives. I was quite excited to finally meet him after so many months of preparation. He was smiling and we shook hands. Jiang Hua was translating and discussing with him about the conditions of his ceremony. We went to see his beehives and I have to say, it was very impressive to be around so many beehives with so many bees flying around. We first recorded his beehives and surroundings. Already a week later Shé Zuǒ Bīn decided about the date for the ceremony. What surprised me most was this outstanding, meditative relationship between him and his wife, who gave him strength and faith somehow metaphysically, they were always connected throughout the performance.”

#### 6) What’s next?

**Marc Johnson:** “I am planning several new film projects now. One of them is a project about The Hyena Men, the Gadawan Kura, in Nigeria. I plan to travel there this summer with a film team in order to spend time and moving all across the country with them, telling their story through a documentary. The Hyena Men are a group of itinerant musicians, street performers who live together with the animals and use them to entertain crowds and sell traditional medicines, a tradition which is handed over from generation to generation.”