

Real art

By Ho Yi / Staff reporter

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When it comes to grappling with social and political injustice, Fan Hsiao-lan (范曉嵐) doesn't shout protest slogans in front of the Presidential Office or throw eggs at the Executive Yuan. She makes art.

In *The Revolutionary Road* (未竟之路), her latest video installation currently on display at Chi-Wen Gallery, the artist attempts to grasp what she encountered during a journey along Taiwan's troubled east coast.

In the nearly 30 minute-long film, Fan loosely connects various topics as a young heroine travels through coastal towns from Taipei. The viewer travels with her across lush landscapes, tribal land and sunbaked beaches to Taitung's Shanyuan Bay (杉原灣), where the controversial Miramar Resort Hotel is being built.

Meanwhile, an off-screen female narrator speaks of indigenous flood myths, dying corals, receding shoreline and the development frenzy that grips the region.

The work has a distinctly documentary tone and even contains an interview with Sumi Dungi, a female leader in the Return Our Land (還我土地) campaign waged by residents of the Amis village Makutaay in Fengbin (豐濱), Hualien County, to stop the government and big corporations from building parks and resorts on the tribe's ancestral land.

Makutaay, the seemingly tranquil coastal hamlet, has been a source of inspiration to Fan since she first visited the place in 2008 and was immediately drawn to its natural beauty and the Amis people's long history of struggle against the government's seizure of their tribal land. The artist had stayed there for six months with her camera, completing a series of works that reflect the local indigenous history, culture and society as well as personal experiences.

For example, *Makutaay — Not Only Her Story* (港口紀事：不只是她) is a photography installation featuring Dungi wearing nothing but a wedding veil, posing on the Shihtiping coastal terraces traditionally used by the Amis as farmland. Makutaay residents tried to register the area as Aboriginal reserve land in 1990, but the process wasn't completed because the Fengbin Township Office lost the documents.

"The traditional matriarchal society of the Amis has been fast disappearing. The role of women has changed," Fan notes. "Many women in their 40s and 50s envy young girls that have pretty wedding photographs. They, too, want to have their wedding photographs taken."

Another work, *What They Said* (聽他們說), is made up of photographs documenting the everyday life of Makutaay villagers. The project incorporates two sets of pre-recorded narrations by the artist and her Amis friend, who offer different interpretations and opinions about the images.

For Fan, the images — and the interpretations — present a portion of reality. “[There are] many clues, but no absolute answer,” she says.

The notion that reality can never be presented in full is present in many of Fan’s works. This idea takes the fore in *The Coast* (項鍊灣), a two-channel video installation about land exploitation that features subjects who can never be seen in totality.

The film begins by reminding viewers that a grand narrative is impossible. An off-screen female narrator tells the viewer in a personal tone, “My dear, I do not intend on telling you a story because nobody is genuinely capable of telling a story.”

Then we see three young women who frolic by the sea, perform manual labor in a ceremonial manner and proceed to dine with the Amis villagers by a big round table. As the trio moves from sequence to sequence, they take up fresh roles like woman, outsider, artist and subject. Sometimes, they inhabit multiple roles at once. These fragmented subjects with constantly shifting identities allude to the world they live in, but never articulate it.

For Fan, *The Coast* is an effort to present her understanding of people in an artful, oblique manner. “With *The Revolutionary Road*, I get to be more direct, straightforward and closer to the real,” she says.

But all her works are efforts to comprehend her experiences and current events. “I try to approach and understand reality in my own way, to integrate art with reality,” Fan says.

■ Chi-Wen Gallery, 3F, 19, Ln 252, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段252巷19號3樓), tel: (02) 8771-3372. Open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11am to 7pm. On the Net: www.chiwengallery.com

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