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China

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"Untitled," from the series
"disCONNEXION," 2003
Chromogenic color print
JGS, Inc., New York

T Traveling between China and the United States has made me increasingly aware of the conflicts between modernity and tradition, dream and reality. These have become important themes in my work. My goal is to sketch a visual representation of 21st century modernity. I carefully choose direct and intimate moments to portray the objects I find. The aesthetic quality of the imagery almost removes the photographed objects from their social context.

But I cannot forget that most of the e-trash I'm photographing is shipped from the United States and dumped in Guangdong Province, where people make a meager living recycling it. While we rely extensively on high-tech devices for our modern life, I was nevertheless shocked when I first confronted China's vast piles of dead and deconstructed machines, cords, wires, chips and parts – all with the traces of America on them.

In my country, I have experienced the changes that have taken place under the influence of Western modernity. These changes, driven in large measure by the United States, have contributed to a strong and powerful push for development in China. At the same time, however, they have led to an environmental and social nightmare in remote corners of the country.

I hope by showing these photographs in New York, I can somehow bring the trash back to the United States, and bring home the fact of its existence to American audiences.