

Faces We Love: Shanghai

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Compositionally diverse, Faces We Love is a perfect coffee table book to flip through and explore.

A celebration of finding joy in daily life, *Faces We Love: Shanghai* is a curated art book exploring Shanghai's crowded streets, citizens, and tourists.

In this collection, people are the subject of every photograph: walking, talking, laughing, and embroiled in tasks. The art style varies from picture to picture, and the collection is punctuated by section breaks that illuminate the uniting motif. Each page is devoted to its artist's single concept, even if the photographs themselves are distinct.

The photographs themselves range in size from a quarter of the page to a full page, and some are doubled with different filters, as in the picture entitled "hat," of a girl looking into the distance. The left photograph shows her in black and white, and to the right is the same photograph with a warmer saturation, drawing attention to both the light tan tone of the hat and the bright red of her lipstick.

Each image is captioned in both English and Chinese. These titles help to deepen the meaning behind each photograph, often introducing or interacting with the humor in the piece. In one black and white picture, old, partially gloved hands sharpen a chef's knife; its title, "iron sharpens iron," brings lightheartedness to the otherwise dark picture.

The section breaks are marked by quotes and epigrams that unite the following images, though their relationships are sometimes hazy. An image captioned "Rainbow in the rain" of a biker riding through a street at night with a rainbow umbrella belongs to a section that begins with a Mark Twain quote: "Wrinkles merely mark where smiles have been." The subject in this photograph is only visible in silhouette, though every other image in this section shows people, young and old, either smiling or with wrinkled smile marks present.

The penultimate section documents living through the Covid-19 pandemic. The tone is optimistic and lighthearted. In a photograph titled "out with the girls," two women in the background are talking, with masks on, while a dog sits in the stroller, also wearing a mask, reinforcing the playful nature of treating a dog like a human. The scene also shows that, despite a global crisis, human connection can still occur, and humor can be found.

Shanghai landmarks are explored through unique lenses within the collection, making them feel more accessible and welcoming. An image of the Bund, for example, shows smiling public service workers digging a hole on the street, showing the human side of the historical district. In the photograph "Fuxing Park Pop," a human-made park is made magical through the subject: a little girl in a pink tutu claps a large soap bubble. The soap bubble is suspended in the air and is caught mid-pop.

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GEORGE HAJJAR (May 5, 2022)

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