

Faces of the “SmartWorld”

A Photo Documentary of the People Who Build Smartphones and Related Devices

Draft version: March 29, 2012

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PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Close to a billion iPhones, Android phones and iPads have been sold (one per every 7-8 people in the world). Everyone has heard of the companies that produce them, but what do people know about the human beings who create these revolutionary machines? This project is a photographic documentary of the people behind these ‘smart’ devices; from the high tech “wizards” of the Silicon Valley to the factory workers in Shenzhen, China. Images will include environmental portraits of the people, how and where they work, and also their industrial complexes and other surroundings.

As this could be a sensitive subject due to some recent drama (e.g.: the supposed “exposé” piece aired on the ‘This American Life’ radio show which has since been retracted due to misrepresentation and fabrications) it must be emphasized that this project is not about exploitation or sensationalism but is only intended to be a comprehensive documentary on the people behind these devices.

Extensive use of panoramic images will provide an immersive viewpoint, and be complemented by intimate portraiture.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The iPhone / Android Phones, tablets and other ‘smart’ devices have become ubiquitous in our lives. On the streets, in the coffee shops, at home; people are constantly twittering, reading news, web surfing, texting, watching sports, playing games. We are a connected society like never before.

However, behind these famous brands and technological marvels are not faceless robots and machines but vibrant human faces. Designed and programmed by the wizards of Silicon Valley and assembled by workers in Chinese factories, many hands collaborate to create these smart devices. Who are these people? Where do they work? What are the factories in Shenzhen like? Who are the Faces of the “SmartWorld”?

Silicon Valley is the birthplace of these revolutionary devices. The former orchards of the “Valley of Heart’s Delight” have been replaced by industrial campuses; a 1200 square foot starter home with 3 small bedrooms is now a million dollar house if located in the coveted town of Palo Alto. Hewlett and Packard set the seed, the Homebrew Computer Club paved the way, then came the PC revolution, the Mac, Web 1.0 / 2.0, and the post-PC smart devices. Throughout the boom and bust cycles, the vitality and innovative spirit continue. It’s a land of thinking differently; the nerds triumph and “change the world,” many times over.

On the opposite side of the world, in the Land of Dragon where the labor costs are low, these technological marvels are carefully assembled by myriad human hands. Recent reports regarding Shenzhen factories have brought some attention to the places where these devices are assembled, but unfortunately sensationalist stories and speculation still rule. Removing the drama, who are the true faces of Shenzhen?

For this project, I plan to photograph the people of the companies in Silicon Valley that design the smart devices and the people in the Shenzhen factories that build them. I will photograph the places where they work and if possible, glimpses of their recreational lives as well. A variety of cameras will be used: a panoramic camera to give the essence of space and provide an immersive experience, and a 35mm and

medium format cameras for environmental portraiture.

The progress of this project will be blogged, and the final images will be collected for publication and gallery exhibition.

BIO

I am versed in both the Eastern and Western cultures and the culture of Silicon Valley, and this project utilizes my strengths. As a Chinese-American born and raised in Hong Kong, I am fluent in English and Cantonese Chinese. I am an entrepreneur in the Silicon Valley and have friends at Silicon Valley high tech companies and friends that are factory owners in China. Through these connections, I hope to be able to access places that might not normally be otherwise available.

CORPORATE AND OTHER SPONSORSHIP

I am looking for both corporate and non-corporate sponsors, but to preserve the integrity of the project, I must retain creative control over it and decisions regarding it. Sponsorship will be tax deductible as I plan to work with a qualified non-profit organization. I am also considering a Kickstarter campaign.