

H A L L O W E E N M A HOME TOWN



Lannoo



HOME TOWN

Xinjiang is China's northwesternmost region, bordering Central Asia and historically shaped by movement between China, Central Asia and routes further west. Ürümqi, its capital, lies at the northern foot of the Tianshan Mountains and has long functioned as a regional centre for trade, migration, industry and cultural encounter. It is here that Hailun Ma was born and raised. She left Ürümqi at eighteen. That age matters. It sits inside her photographs like a point of return, not as biography alone, but as a structure of feeling. The city she left was the place where she had learned to look before she knew that looking could become a practice: at colours, clothes, faces, family habits, street corners, gestures between friends, the way people hold themselves in public, the way they soften in private. Years later, after studying photography and fashion photography in New York, Ürümqi became visible to her again. The place that had once been simply home became an image, a memory, a question. Ma now lives and works in Shanghai, yet her work keeps moving back to Ürümqi. That return is not sentimental in any simple sense. It is more restless than that. Her photographs do not try to restore the past, nor do they treat home as something stable that can be recovered intact. They move around an unfinished moment: the departure at eighteen, the city held in memory, the adult artist returning with another eye. What appears in the images is shaped by this gap between having known a place intimately and having had to leave it in order to see it. This gives the work its particular time. The photographs often feel warm, almost ambered, as though the present has passed through memory before reaching the camera. Earth tones, saturated colours and dry light recur. They give many images a sense of suspended weather, somewhere between childhood recollection and present-day observation. Yet the work never settles into nostalgia. Mobile phones, sportswear, stylised poses, cars, sneakers and contemporary gestures keep the images alert to now. Ma's Ürümqi is remembered but not sealed off. It is still moving.





























