

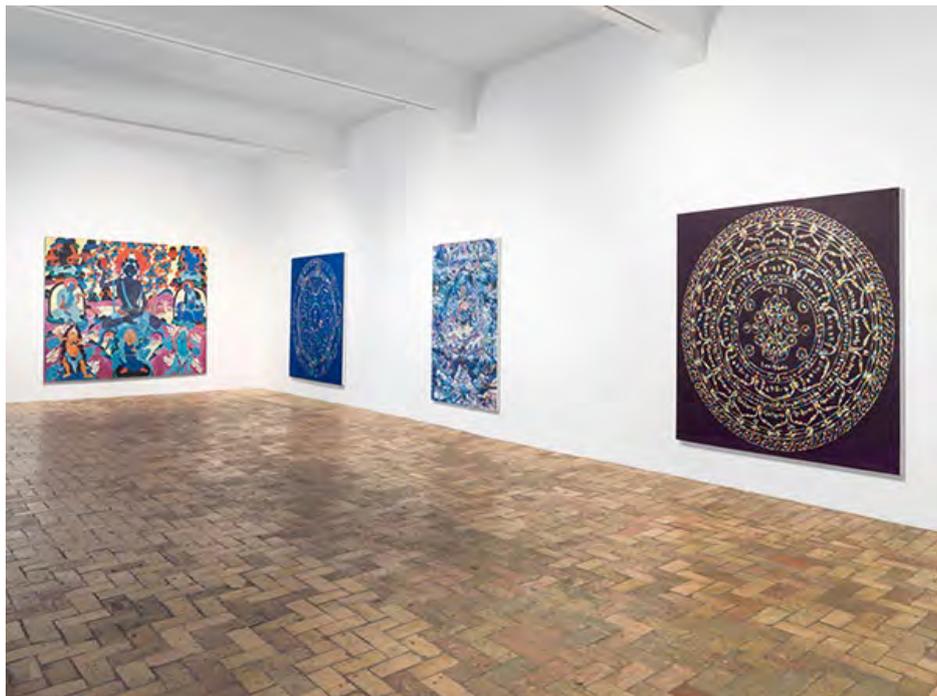
«Zheng Guogu “Visionary Transformation” at VeneKlasen/Werner, Berlin»,
Mousse Contemporary Art Magazine, April 20, 2015.



Zheng Guogu “Visionary Transformation” at VeneKlasen/Werner, Berlin

by [mousse](#)

April 20~2015



This exhibition features works from different series which are bound together by a narrative trait. “Computer Controlled by Pig’s Brain” alludes to the impact of commercial mass media and the fictive

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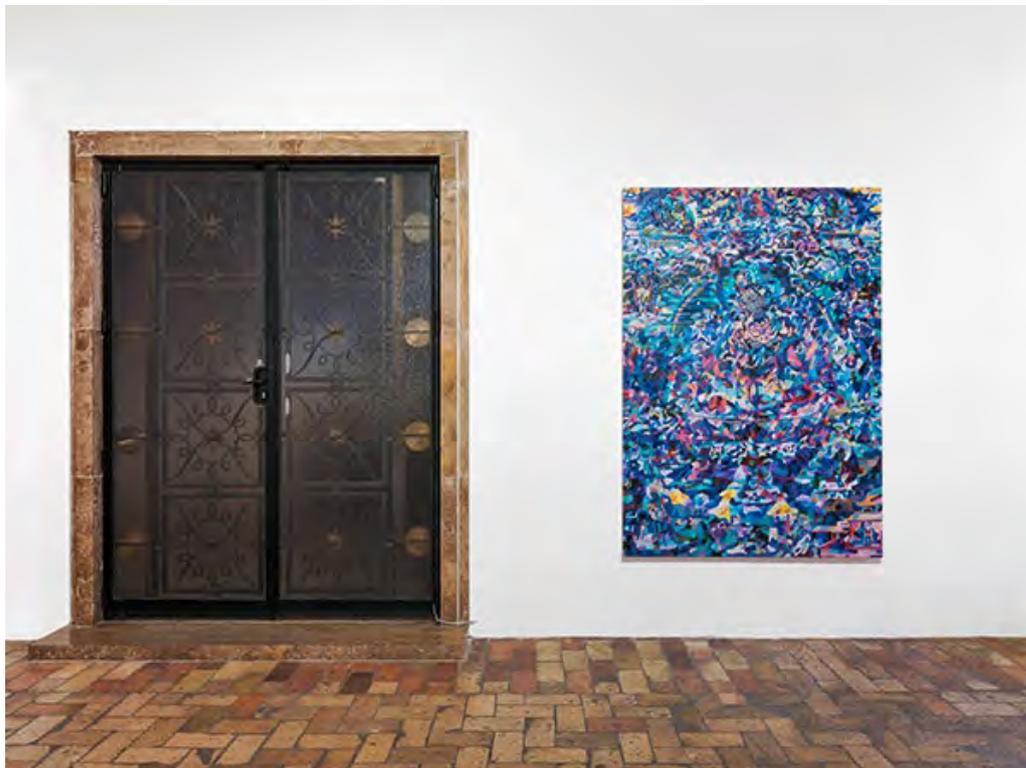


nature of images. The history of Chinese painting is dissected and its methodology reflects Guogu's questioning approach to established associations and symbols. "The Brain Nerves" are not only abstract portraits of the mental space of artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys, but also measure the sensibility of the brains of the portrayed subjects. The works of the "Visionary Transformation" series are reminiscent of Buddhist Thangka paintings, yet Guogu aims to distill the essence of the iconographic subject and to transform the material energy of the painting into a mirror that opens up a personal search for truth. "The aesthetic resonance of Chakra" series is based on the artist's exploration of the seven chakras. These series of paintings share the will to resonate the energy between the space of the painting and the energy centers within the viewer.

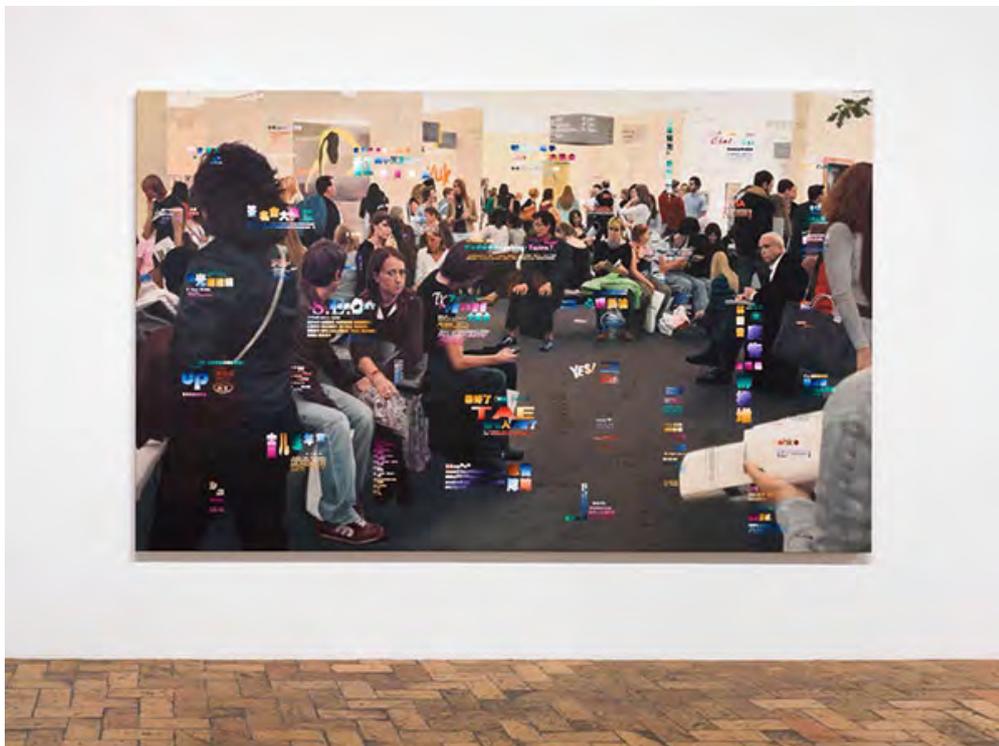
In 2000 Zheng Guogu created *The Age Of Empire*, now called *Liao Garden*, as his independent living and working space, facilitating a multi-disciplinary practice that is open to critical observations. The film *Mind Acts Without Attachments*, presented in the gallery's cinema, partly documents the life and artistic community generated by this project, allowing the audience to conceptually experience the group's artistic practice as well as witness hints of questioning the status quo of society while blurring the line between fiction and reality.

[at VeneKlasen/Werner, Berlin](#)

until 25 April 2015

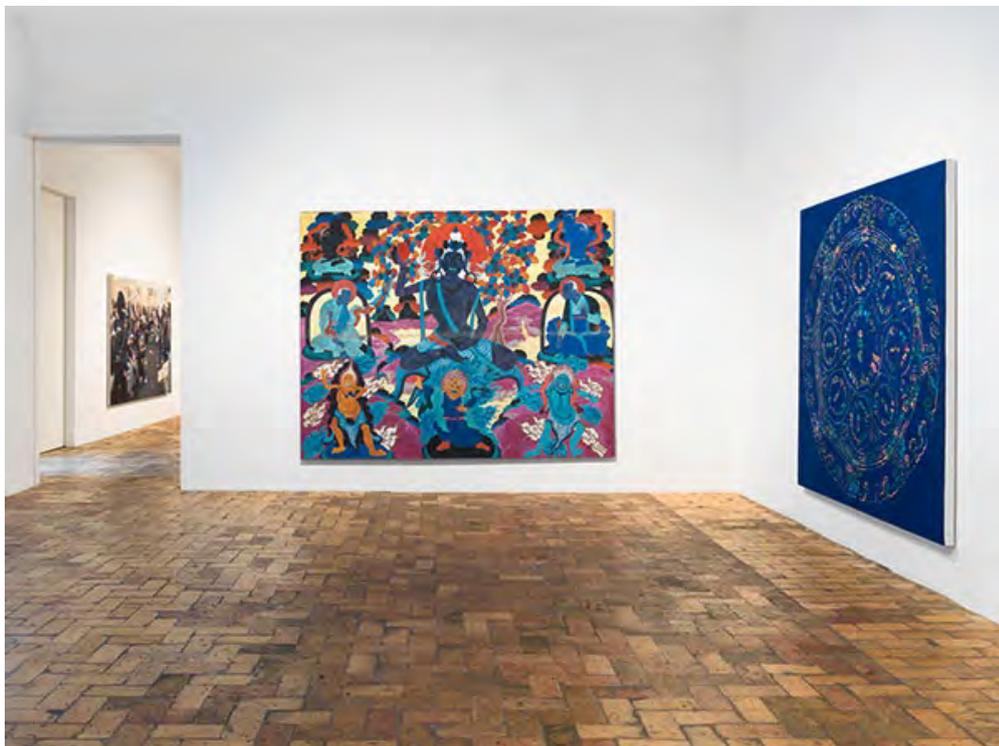


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Zheng Guogu “Visionary Transformation” installation views at VeneKlasen/Werner, Berlin, 2015

Courtesy: VeneKlasen/Werner, Berlin.

ARTAND

– *Yangjiang Group: Actions for Tomorrow* –

By ARTAND, Sydney

A Kickstarter campaign by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art has been selected for an Art Basel Crowdfunding Initiative. The campaign is one of only four non-profit arts projects selected to feature on the first wave of Art Basel's newly launched Crowdfunding Initiative, which aims to generate international support for visual arts projects and non-profit visual arts organisations worldwide.

Titled 'Actions for Tomorrow' and staged by Yangjiang Group, the contemporary art project funded by the 4A Kickstarter campaign will be presented in Sydney during the Chinese New Year Festival in January. Yangjiang Group is a contemporary Chinese collective founded in 2002 by Zheng Guogu, Chen Zaiyan and Sun Qinglin. Appropriating Chinese calligraphy and experimenting with performance, painting, sculpture, photography, video and installation, the group challenges traditional Chinese artforms and aims to rid their work of any established rules and conditions. Their practice often comprises daily actions and process in the form of non-traditional, large-scale, architectural structures.

The project at 4A will include the commissioning of a new work by Yangjiang Group, an exhibition at 4A that will take over both the public and private areas, and a one-night only participatory performance and garden party at the Chinese Gardens of Friendship in Darling Harbour. 4A's campaign, which ends 18 October, aims to raise \$20,000 to fund the project.

Yangjiang Group: Actions for Tomorrow, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney, January 2015

Image Credits

1. *Yangjiang Group, Interior courtyard: pine tree 3, 2008, subversive sea, waterfalls, plastic pine trees, CRT TV, wooden bridge; Untitled no.5, Untitled no.9, calligraphy, dimensions variable, Unlimited, Art 39 Basel, Basel; courtesy the artists.*

2. *Yangjiang Group, Garden of pine: also fierce than tiger II, 2010, Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing, courtesy the artists.*

3. *Yangjiang Group, After dinner Shu Fa at cricket pavilion, 2012, Eastside Projects and Grizedale Arts, Birmingham, courtesy the artists.*

4. *Yangjiang Group, Zizhiqu: autonomous regions, 2013, Times Museum, Guangzhou, China, courtesy the artists.*

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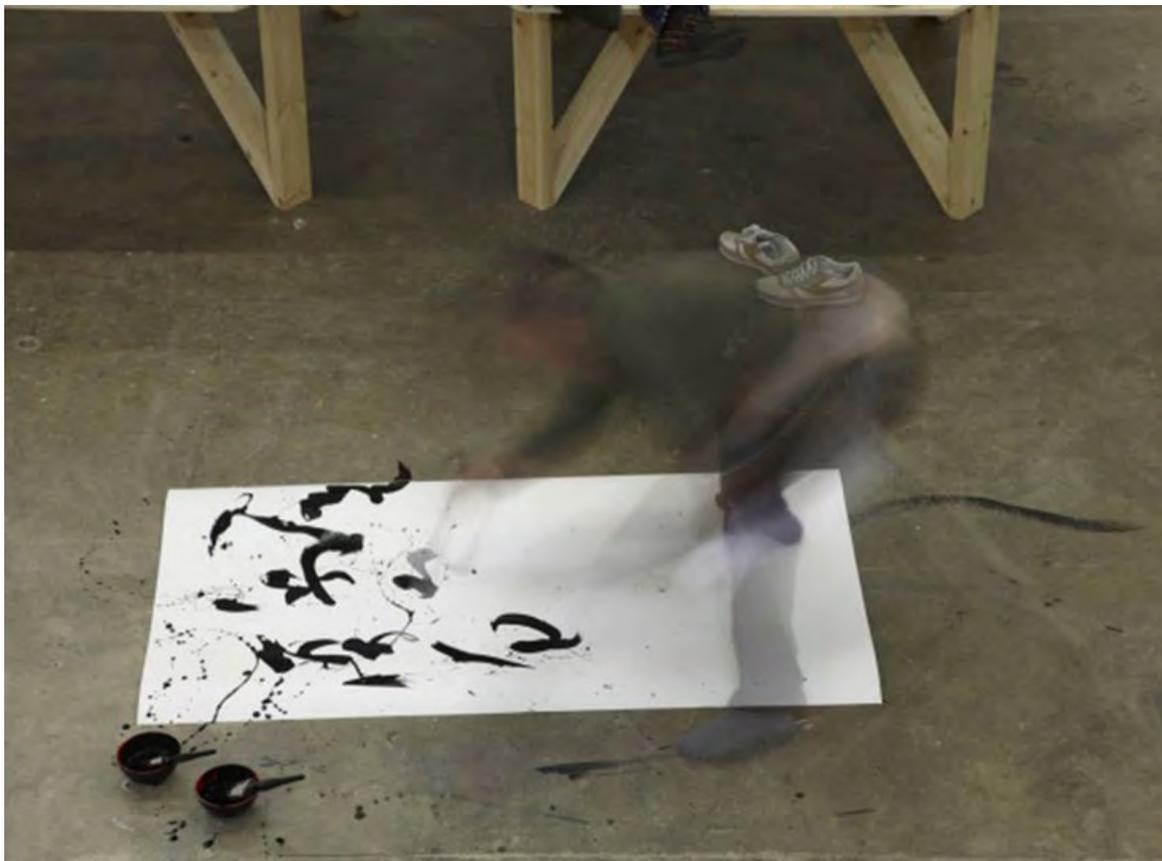
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REVIEW: Yangjiang Group's Genre-Defying Acts at 4A Sydney

BY Nicholas Forrest | January 23, 2015

Galerie
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Yangjiang Group

My introduction to the Chinese artist collective Yangjiang Group came in the form of an elaborate tea ceremony at the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in Sydney where an impressive array of tea making apparatus and tea drinking paraphernalia. The act of taking tea is a common means of “breaking the ice,” which the Yangjiang Group’s tea ceremony did remarkably well, especially because of the language barrier. But it also served as an introduction to the Group’s practice and to the exhibition I was at 4A to see, “Actions for Tomorrow.”

“Actions for Tomorrow” is the Yangjiang Group’s first solo exhibition in Australia and was partly funded by a Kickstarter campaign that was selected by Art Basel’s International Crowdfunding Jury to be part of a crowdfunding initiative that supports projects from non-profit visual arts organisations from around the world. Hailing from the coastal city of Yangjiang, a relatively small city of 2.6 million in southwestern Guangdong Province, Yangjiang Group was founded in 2002 by artist Zheng Guogu with members Chen Zaiyan and Sun Qinglin. The Group is best known for using calligraphy as the departure point for a variety of performances and installations, many ephemeral in nature, that explore issues of culture, society, economics, history, and tradition, with a particular focus on the impact of social action, as the title of the exhibition suggests.

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Critiques of contemporary society and culture as well as meditations on history and tradition are common in contemporary Chinese art, but they often lack depth and appear contrived, as though the artists are merely towing the line and continuing the trend. Yangjiang Group's work stands out because it initiates discussion and debate, incites action, and is also sympathetic to the importance of aesthetics. And as a result of these characteristics, the Group's work appears remarkably resolved, both in the context of their multilayered practice with its multiple entry points and the harmonious integration of both contemporary and traditional elements.

Another crucial aspect of the Group's practice is their focus on cultural capital, as defined academically as the ideas and knowledge that society values, as opposed to objectified cultural capital, or the value of the art object. When the market has such a strong influence on people's perception of contemporary Chinese art, the ephemerality of the Group's work has a major impact on the way it is perceived by both Chinese and Western audiences.

On the first level of 4A, on the walls surrounding the site of the tea ceremony, is a newly commissioned 24-metre-long calligraphic mural. Punctuating the Chinese text is the title of the work, "GOD IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE RMB!" (2015), written in English. Speaking through an interpreter, Zheng Guogu explains that the title is a reference to the social situation in Sydney where Chinese development is evident and property is being sold to the highest bidder by rich Chinese buyers. Guogu says that lots of people can't afford the prices so they seek God's help but find out that only the RMB (the currency of China) can help them.

The calligraphy of the mural is scrawled across the walls with a graffiti-style energy that is highly gestural and emotive. Although the text is in Chinese, it is very painterly and can be experienced purely for its beauty and its aesthetic qualities. "They (Westerners) may not understand the calligraphy but everyone can understand aesthetics," said Guogu, who also explained that the highly abstract aesthetic of the calligraphy means that some Chinese people and even the artists themselves often cannot read what they have written. "But when you see it you can feel the energy from the calligraphy," he said, adding that it acts "like a sort of therapy" and makes you "feel relieved and devoid of panic or tension." He also stated that the calligraphy disseminates the energy of the universe which connects with the universe that he believes each person has in the body, joining the two together.

Commenting on the Group's use of calligraphy, Guogu said: "In 2000 we found that calligraphy had been replaced by social media so we wanted to find a way to use calligraphy again in the modern society. Sometimes calligraphy is more quick and convenient to express meaning. If you use the computer you need to type the words and then print them out. With calligraphy you can write immediately and express yourself immediately. To the people of the world calligraphy is like a traditional Chinese element so we want to use these traditional elements to let the world know more about China and its traditions in a new way. There is some connection between the hand writing and the body. You can express your own energy and spirit by writing calligraphy."

In the centre of the room is the slightly more complex work, "Das Kapital Football (2009-2015)," which has been reconfigured for the 4A exhibition. As the title suggest, the work combines Karl Marx's seminal critique of the capitalist system, "Das Kapital," with a game of football (soccer to us Aussies). The basis of the work is a football game staged by Yangjiang Group in 2009 with six teams who played three simultaneous games. Prior to the event, the artists commissioned their friends to translate Marx's "Das

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Kapital” into Chinese calligraphy on 7000 pieces of paper which were then used to cover the pitch. The remnants of the text from the game forms the main component of the installation at 4A where it is presented on an elevated platform as a compressed carpet of calligraphy. At each end, where the goal net would usually be on a football pitch, is a television – one shows the game in action and on the other a bored-looking girl is passed each sheet of text and holds it up to the camera before being passed the next piece, and so on. To one side of the installation is a mound of paper that oscillates hypnotically, diverting the viewer’s attention from the main work. In light of the artists’ previous references to the landscape, it is hard not to relate the mound of paper to a mountain rising out of the sea, which could be represented by the carpet of text. Perhaps this is what the Yangjiang Group think that people should be focusing their attention on: nature and its place in China’s history and culture.

“Das Kapital Football (2009-2015)” makes more sense if you know that Marxism is still an influential component of mainland Chinese society. In fact, according to a recent Time magazine article, universities in China have been directed to build their campuses “into strongholds of studying and propagating Marxism.” Although the work could be to a number of different interpretations, it is perhaps most poignant as a statement on China’s status as a country that is attempting to integrate itself into global society, but at the same retain the ideologies and social structures upon which modern China was built. The fact that a football game featuring three teams could only end in chaos is perhaps an indication of how the Yangjiang Group perceive China’s future if it continues in this direction.

Moving to the ground floor is the second of the major new works in the exhibition, an installation titled “Final Days” (2015), which consists of a mock boutique stocked with bespoke items of clothing produced in the artists’ hometown and customized with slogans used by Chinese street vendors. The clothes have been covered in wax, freezing the shop and its contents in time. Guogu explained that the inspiration for the work is the online shopping trend which he says will make people forget how to shop in a real, physical shop. By freezing the boutique in time with wax, visitors can memorize what a real shop looks like. Guogu added that in the future he thinks that shops will be like galleries for the products they sell because people will only buy their goods online. The wax itself is also more than just a metaphor for time; it is also has an aesthetic quality that once again the artists have linked back to the Chinese landscape tradition. “The wax is like a natural, frozen landscape – like a snow covered mountain,” said Guogu. “I want people to get some energy and spirit from the natural.”

The concept of time is at the very centre of the “Actions for Tomorrow” exhibition, according to Guogo, who reiterated the fact that both the downstairs installation, “Final Days,” and the upstairs mural, “GOD IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE RMB!,” both relate to time. “I want to tell people that in life there is time, but there should not be a limitation on tomorrow. If you think about time or tomorrow too much you get stuck in today and you cannot get to tomorrow easily or quickly,” he said.

Also firmly rooted in the ideologies of time is the tea ceremony through which I was introduced to the Yangjiang Group who have actually turned the ritual into a performance piece for the exhibition. Titled “Tea Office” (2015), the work was devised by the Yangjiang Group who have instructed the 4A Centre team to engage in the traditional tea drinking ritual each morning. The ceremony begins with the tea being poured from the pot into a small cup which the drinker then pours into a small drinking bowl. But before the tea is drunk the participant breathes in the aroma of the tea that remains in the empty cup. According to the Yangjiang Group, if you breathe in the scent of the tea for 30 second, you are momentarily transported to the location of the tea plant from which the tea originated. Just like the Yangjiang Group’s work, the tea ceremony is a journey into a completely different realm of time and space. It is this commitment

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to engaging their audience in an all-encompassing, multi-layered experience that makes the Yangjiang Group's practice so important and "Actions for Tomorrow" such an engaging and compelling exhibition.

Yangjiang Group: "Actions for Tomorrow" is at the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in Sydney until March 7, 2015

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Yangjiang Group: "Actions for Tomorrow" at 4A, Sydney

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Yangjiang Group, *Final Days* (2015), installation view, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, wax and modified clothing installation, dimensions variable. Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley.

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Yangjiang Group, *Das Kapital Football* (2009-15), installation view, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, ink on xuan paper calligraphy, action, documentation, installation. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley.

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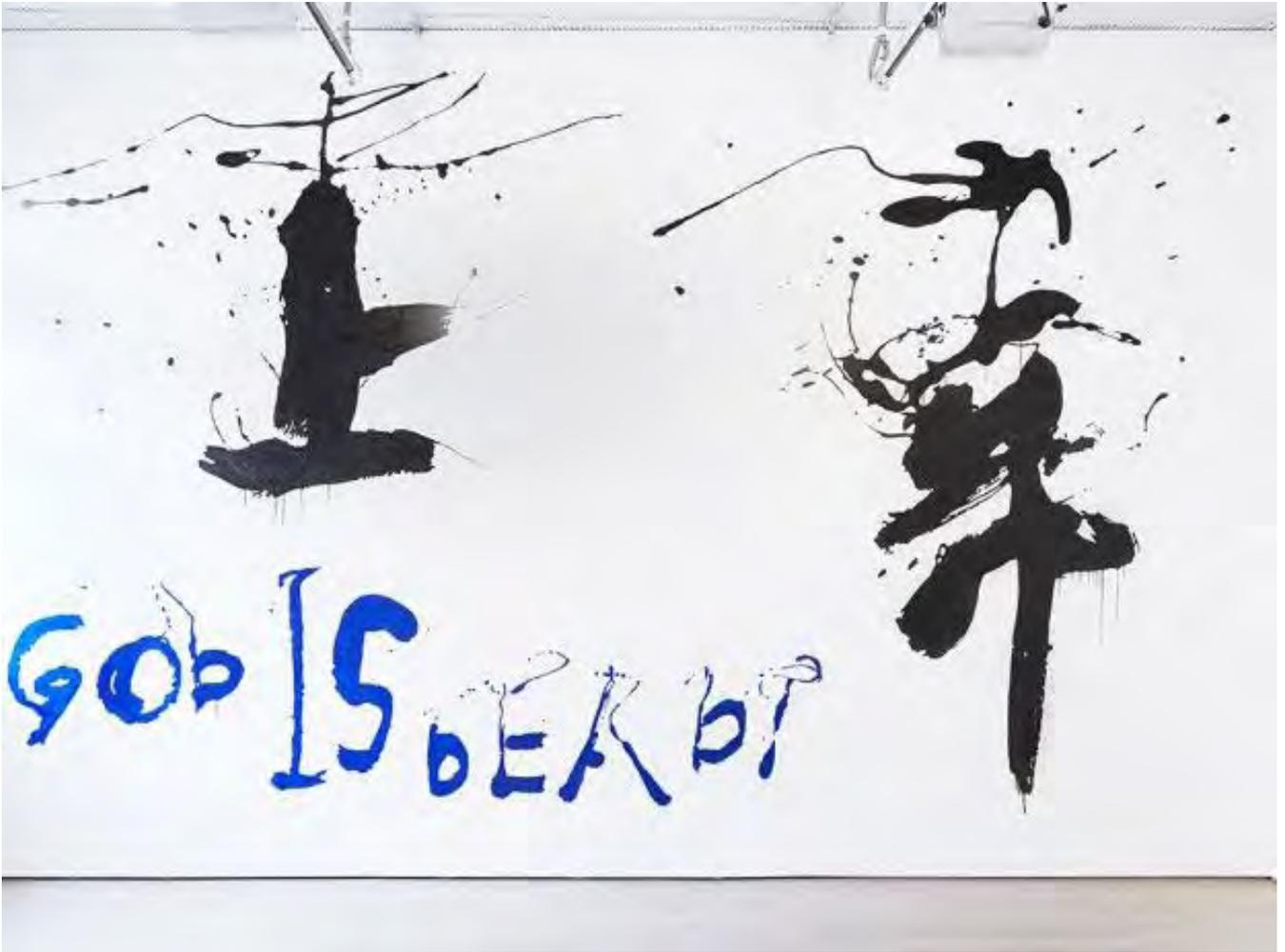
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Yangjiang Group, GOD IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE RMB! (2015), installation view, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Chinese ink and acrylic paint mural. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley.

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Yangjiang Group, *GOD IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE RMB!* (2015), installation view, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Chinese ink and acrylic paint mural. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley.



January 30, 2015 Written by Luise Guest

Anarchy, Tea, and After-Dinner Calligraphy: Interview with the Yangjiang Group

For contemporary Chinese artists Zheng Guogu, Chen Zaiyan, and Sun Qinglin—known as the Yangjiang Group—art is about social action and everyday life, including the practice of calligraphy, shopping, football, gambling, drinking, and eating. They believe art and life are entirely connected, resisting the commercialism of the art market and the over-intellectualization of art. Their latest project, [Actions for Tomorrow](#), includes a live event, Tea Office, as a feature of the exhibition, with gallery staff participating in a tea ceremony each day.

“We are not conceptual artists,” Zheng told me very firmly when we spoke (yes, over many cups of fragrant tea) at the gallery. Named after their hometown of Yangjiang, the group formed in 2002 with an anti-authoritarian and inclusive approach to art. Like Joseph Beuys, they believe that anyone is an artist, aiming to challenge the elitism and privilege that attaches to calligraphy in China—and to contemporary art. I asked the artists about their unique approach to calligraphy. Zheng Guogu responded to my questions with the help of a translator, while his two collaborators concentrated on refilling our teacups.

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Yangjiang Group. *Actions for Tomorrow*, 2015; exhibition view, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley.

Asian Art. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley.

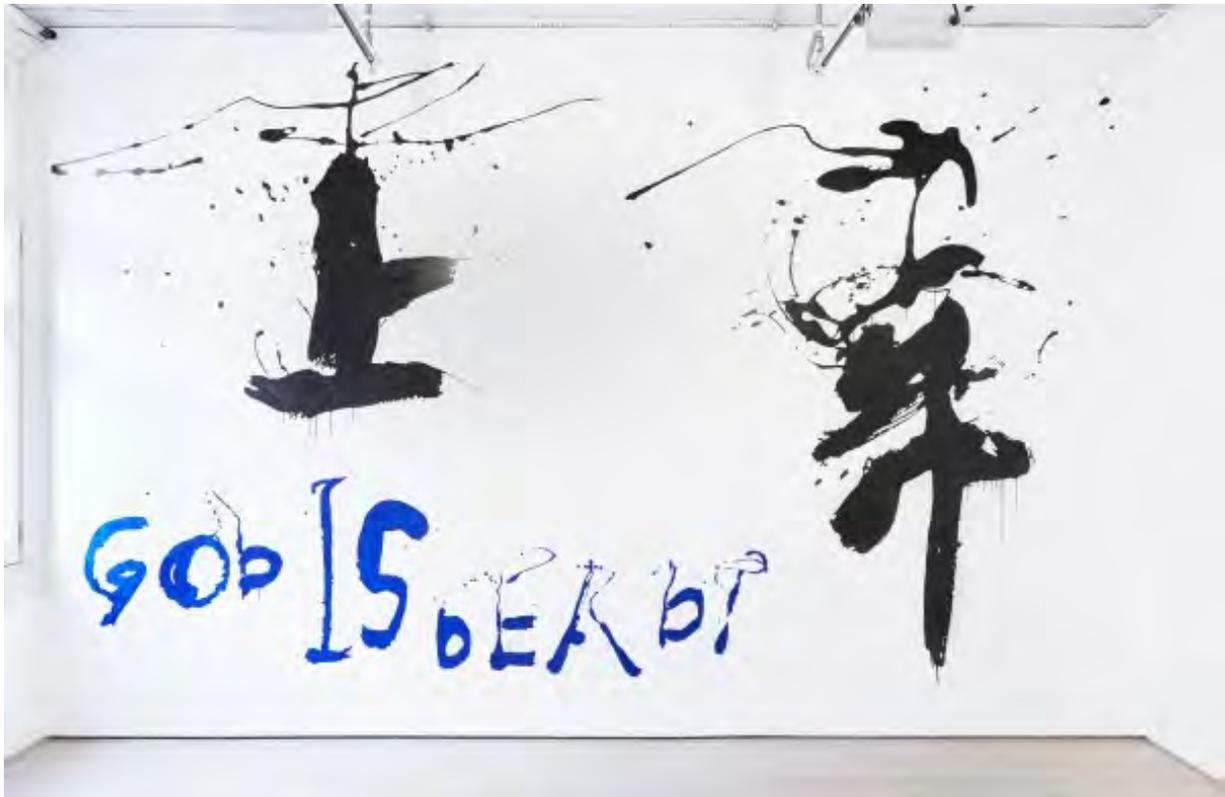
Luise Guest: Traditional Chinese scholars liked to drink and gamble, as well as paint and write poetry. Are you following in the footsteps of the literati, or are you challenging those traditions?

Zheng Guogu: At first we wanted to try to experience that life, like the ancient artists. We found that when we were drunk, the calligraphy we made was very beautiful. We thought it had a special energy, so we adopted this kind of practice. Then we found out that when we were drunk we could forget lots of the rules of calligraphy. We discovered that the ancient scholars also had many rules, and by breaking them they could make their calligraphy more expressive. You need to follow traditions first and then break from those traditions.

LG: You have been described as iconoclastic calligraphers who throw thousands of years of Chinese tradition out the window—are you deliberately challenging China's cultural heritage?

ZG: Yes, we challenge the old rules because each new generation has radicals who must break with tradition.

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Yangjiang Group. *Actions for Tomorrow*, installation view at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.

LG: Is your mural, which includes the words, "God is Dead, Long Live the RMB!" satirizing art as a commodity of international exchange or the loss of culture and tradition in China in a headlong rush toward ever greater wealth?

ZG: You are not meant to interpret any meaning. You should not use twentieth-century rules to view this exhibition; you should use a new way to see this. It's not conceptual art; it has nothing to do with the symbols. Last century when you went to a gallery and saw an artwork, you would be guessing the meaning behind it. But now, with this work, it's about how your body reacts—it's an immediate response, an instinctive and emotional response.

LG: By choosing to work with calligraphy, you are positioning yourselves in a continuing Chinese cultural tradition. By subverting it, you are critiquing Chinese culture. Are some of your works political statements? Here you have written, "God is Dead, Long Live the RMB," for example...

ZG: No. It's not art of the head—it's art of the body and the heart. When you enter into this social space you feel the energy and increase your spirit. It's not about the meaning.



Yangjiang Group. *Final Days*, 2015; installation view, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, wax and modified clothing installation, dimensions variable. Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley

LG: Okay, but in *Fuck Off the Rules* [1], you appeared to be challenging the very nature and value of art. What do you think is the importance of art in today's world?

ZG: Lots of artists today are just fake. Real artists should break the traditional rules. Forget what the form is—then you can create real art. Previous generations of artists are not on the opposite side to us, we are one line of artists. We are all like the gods.

LG: There seem to be two things that are very important to you—language and what you call “the spirit.” How is spirituality important in your work? And are these two things connected?

ZG: To write you need spirit—or *qi*. [2] You use one breath to write one character, so the spirit is important. Some of the ancient calligraphers also practiced kung fu, so they needed to have great energy. This refers to the spirit and the breath. When you are writing, your brush strokes follow your breath. When you see calligraphy, you see the writer's ‘*qi*’. This has a relationship with the universe, the earth rotating and orbiting the sun—the same as the systems in your body. Writing calligraphy follows these rules.



Yangjiang Group. *Final Days*, 2015; installation view, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, wax and modified clothing installation, dimensions variable. Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou. Photo: Zan Wimberley

LG: How did you three meet, and how did the group start?

ZG: Before 2002, I was working in photography, and then I transferred to writing texts.... In ancient times words had some spirit or energy inside, related to their nature, as well as something to do with the symbol and the sounds. So I think that words are not 2-D they are 3-D. They are alive. I changed my own name to 'Guogu' so that it would be a unique creation. Then I created my persona, my identity. When somebody calls your name there is some vibration in the air, in the universe. If you have a negative name the vibration will be negative. Although I think that words have very strong vibrations, I am not trained in calligraphy, but Chen Zaiyan is a professionally trained calligrapher, trained in Hangzhou. Sun Qinglin is from Yangjiang. I invited him because I saw his drunk calligraphy and it had a special energy. So we formed this little group.



Yangjiang Group, *Das Kapital Football* (still), 2009, ink on Xuan paper calligraphy, action,



documentation, installation (two-channel video: DV widescreen anamorphic, color, with sound, ink on Xuan paper carpet). Courtesy the artists and Vitamin Creative Space.

LG: When people think of Chinese contemporary art, they think of the major art centers of Beijing and Shanghai—perhaps not of Yangjiang! What makes you stay?

ZG: Lots of people ask this! A previous generation needed to go to the art centers like Beijing, escaping from small towns, but the real inspiration for an artist is equally from small places. There is no reason to think there is less inspiration from a small town, or more inspiration from a big city... In a small town people are living their normal lives, and our work is closer to ordinary people. I find that the most essential thing is to stay in one place and to pay attention. It's like art meditation. In a big city there are too many distractions and you cannot concentrate. A real artist has to find real life.

LG: The Yangjiang Group has blurred the boundaries between art and life. In the past you have made works documenting gambling, drinking, football, gardening.... Some people might say, "Is that really art? Is that not just life?" What would you tell them?

ZG: The purpose of art is to make people live better. That explains everything we do.

The concluding event of Yangjiang's Sydney sojourn is the Twilight Garden Party in the Chinese Garden of Friendship on February 14; Actions for Tomorrow is on view at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in Sydney through March 7, 2015.

[1] Yangjiang's 2014 exhibition at Shanghai's Minsheng Museum, [Fuck Off the Rules](#), was a not-so-subtle reference to Ai Weiwei's notorious *Fuck Off* exhibition and an illustration of their anarchic anti-art approach to the veneration of calligraphy in Chinese culture.

[2] The literal translation is "air" or "breath." It is the underlying principle in traditional Chinese medicine and the practice of martial art forms. It refers to the life force and the flow of energy through the body.

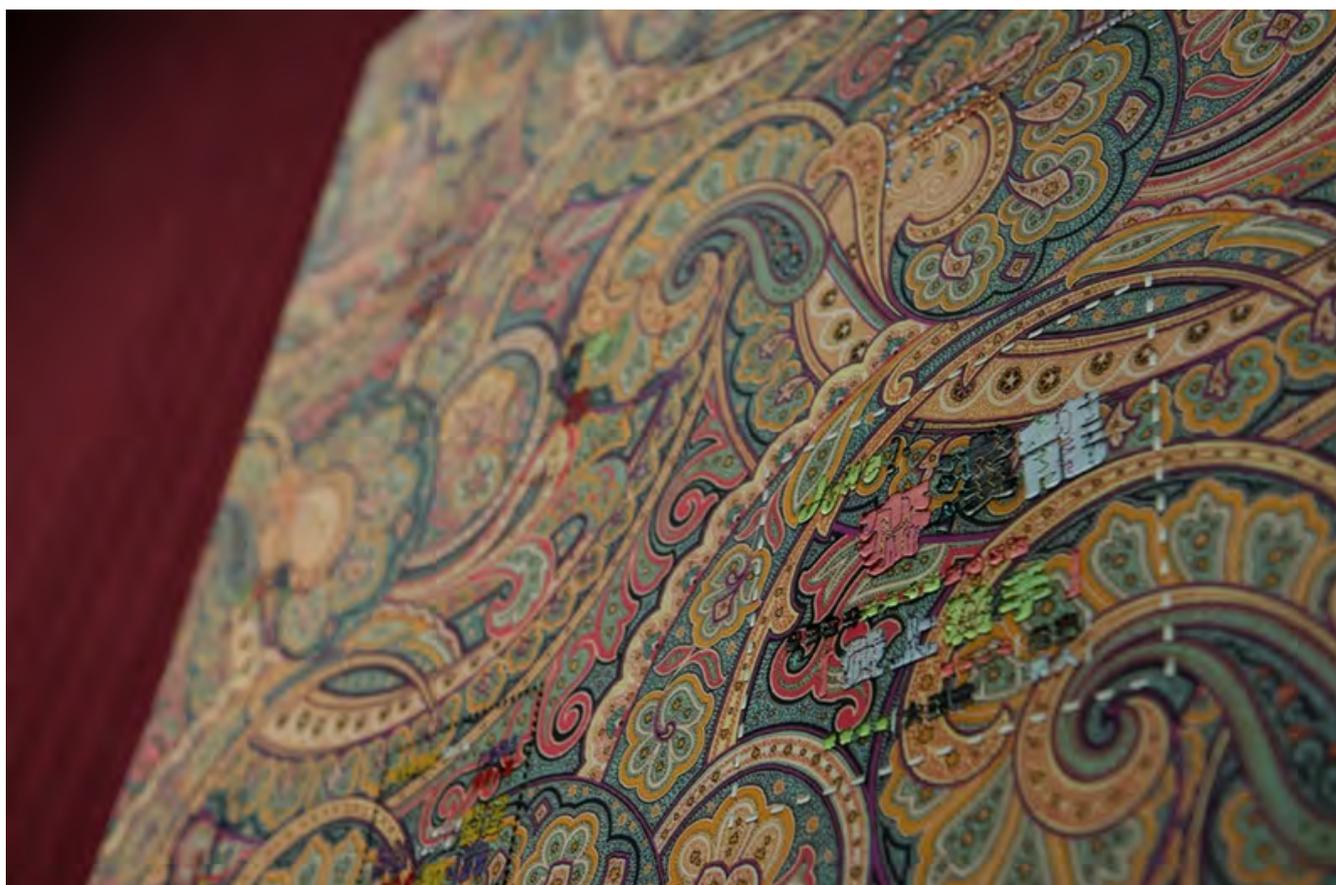
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The Quarterly Journal of Design

Vertebra Prominens by Zheng Guogu

London / 28 October 2015

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



Chinese artist Zheng Guogu takes issue with the traditional relationship between viewer and object. “There’s something that disrupts the relationship between viewer and artwork,” he says. “I’m trying to get rid of that disturbing layer. The viewer and the artwork: I want a direct relation.”

This idea is the basis of Zheng’s most recent project, a collaboration with the Italian fashion brand Etro, a studio notable for its work with paisley. Zheng has designed a capsule collection of silk scarves for Etro, as well as using a selection of the brand’s paisley silk scarves as canvases for artworks. “I thought it could be interesting to see a Chinese perspective on paisley,” says Jacopo Etro, one of the brand’s three creative directors. “We wanted a point of view that comes from somebody else as to what paisley could be”

Working from his hometown of Yangjiang, Guangdong province, Zheng’s mixed-media work draws on a blend of historical Buddhist and Daoist art, as well as an interest in contemporary neuroscience and culture. What drives Zheng, he says, is a concern for the way in which visual stimuli directly impact on the body: “I’m very interested in the research of energy flow,” he says. “Work that you can look at it and which you experience on a microscopic level. Your cells respond to the artwork.”

Pattern and colour are Zheng’s main methods for achieving this. The Etro scarves blend colours harmoniously to create a species of motley exoticism, and borrow spiralling patterns from Zheng’s

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existing artworks. Elsewhere, in the series of artworks Zheng created for the brand, these same patterns are dabbed onto paisley scarves with curlicues of oil paint. In spite of the competing intricacies of the paisley and Zheng's own patterns, the canvases avoid a sense of busyness. They are soothing rather than clashing compositions.

“In my paintings I try to eliminate everything that disturbs me when I look at them, until only the things that have a direct effect on my body are left,” says Zheng. “The objective is to reach an absolute balance. I tried to make the image whole, the background with the paisley and the painting become one.”

Yet translating this process into the practicalities of designing a commercial scarf collection was challenging. “Guogo was free to develop what he wanted with these textiles and the result is still very much an Etro pattern,” says Jacopo Etro. “He worked a lot on the colours and sent us a mood of colours that he wanted, which was a little bit difficult. There weren't specific colours, more a feeling, so to get the right balance of colours was challenging. We had to have a few tries.”

This approach, however, seems to appeal to Zheng. The scarf collection is titled *Vertebra Prominens*, the name of an acupuncture point at the back of the neck which a scarf sits over. Acupuncture, with its direct physical impact on the body and discussion of energy flow and qi, mirrors the concepts and effects that Zheng wants his artworks to embody and affect: direct stimuli for organising the body's inner workings.

“You could say the scarves are a tool of communication with the images,” he says. “In acupuncture the

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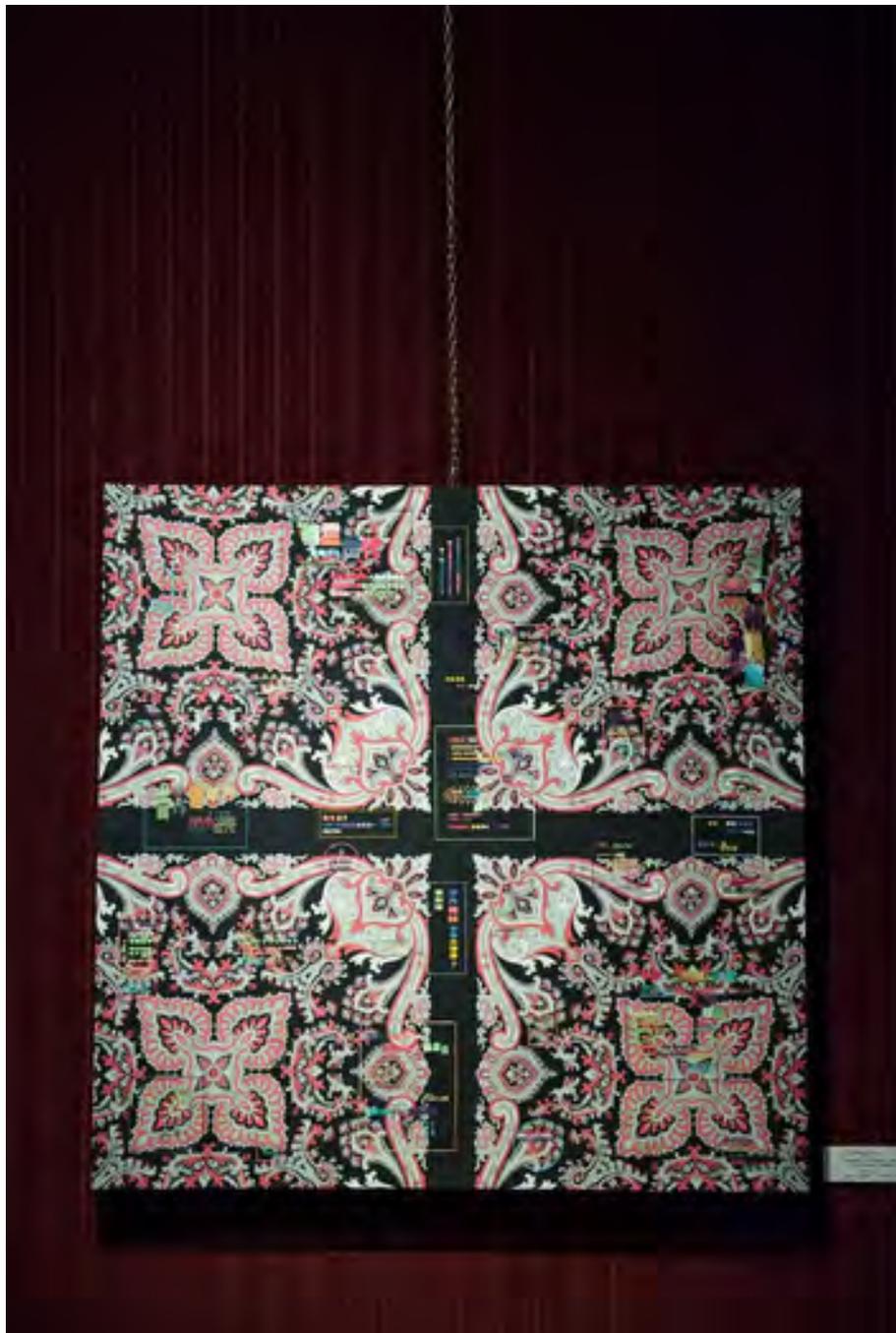
The Quarterly Journal of Design

vertebra prominens has a corresponding point at the front of the throat, which stands for communication . So you can put on the scarf, which has colours that correspond to the paintings and energy points on the body, and that will allow you to communicate with the artworks.

“Paisley is a mystical pattern and the symbol for a seed of creation. If you think about a seed, it’s something that expands and is dispersed. It grows and touches you through its branches. My artwork it’s similar. There are energy points that touch you on a microscopic level, that reach out and develop into something else. There is a direct relation between the viewer and the artwork.”

WORDS Oli Stratford, Disegno’s deputy editor

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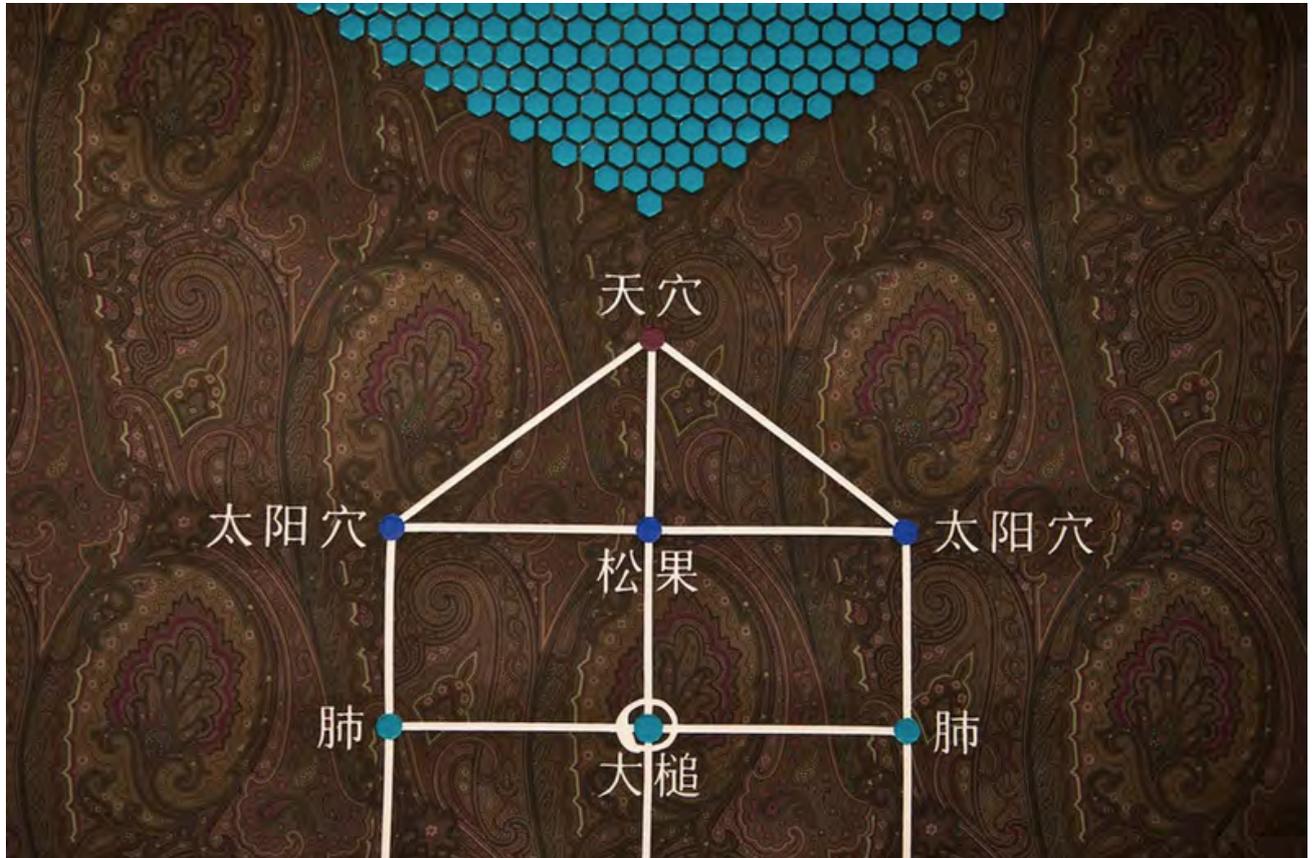
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Etro collaborates with Chinese artist Zheng Guogu

The duo designs a limited edition scarf capsule collection
By Verinia Khoo | Published: 16 Oct 2015

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Chinese artist Zheng Guogu pictured above. (Photo: Etro/Facebook)

Italian fashion house Etro has tapped Chinese artist Zheng Guogu to create a limited edition capsule collection of scarves. Aptly named Vertebra Prominens after the acupuncture point at the back of the neck, the scarves sported design references to the Tibetan imagery that was seen in Etro's ready-to-wear Autumn/Winter 2015 collection.

«I wanted to find somebody who understood this kind of Chinese and Tibetan symbolism, so I asked a friend of mine who organises the FIAC art fair in Paris for some suggestions,» said Jacopo Etro, the brand's Creative Director.

«She sent me about seven portfolios and one of them was Zheng's. I love the patterns and the colours he uses and I found it interesting that he was into nature, which is something that's part of our DNA,» Jacopo added.

Khoo, Verinia. «Etro Collaborates with Chinese artist Zheng Guogu», *Elle*, October 16, 2015.
<http://www.elle.my/fashion/News/Etro-collaborates-with-Chinese-artist-Zheng-Guogu>



As for Vertebra Prominens, Zheng explained the collection to be «influenced by religion and Buddhism, and how energy can flow through the body and bring absolute harmony and balance.» He also shared his hopes for Etro costumers to «correspond to energy points on the body» after wearing the scarf.

The scarves are available at £455 (approx. RM2,148) to £605 (approx. RM2,851) at Etro's flagship store on Bond Street in London.

“Spiritual Mashing” with Zheng Guogu

14.04.2015, 18:04 Uhr / von Penny Rafferty

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Zheng Guogu’s first solo show in Berlin at VeneKlasen / Werner, is a spiritual overload – mashing Chinese, Buddhist and Daoist traditional art with his own unique conceptual framework. He is inspired by the methods of Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp. As you walk through the works you get a feeling of antiquities or relics yet something is unsettling, it brings to mind Philip K Dick’s sci-fi novel “The Man in the High Castle” which is set in a world dominated by Japanese and German forces, where a booming trade survives in counterfeit cultural objects.

Yet Guogu refers to them as visual tools to explore energy centres. He creates a kind of pseudo-spirituality for the viewer and enables them to explore their own personal truths. Large oil paintings fill the rooms from various series that he has developed in the last 5 years after he started studying his own personal energy. The works are heavily laden with iconographic subject. Guogu seems to make you want to explore your own spiritual self as a short documentary plays in the last room about his life and practice in China. One haunting phrase from him stands out “thoughts should be empty places”.

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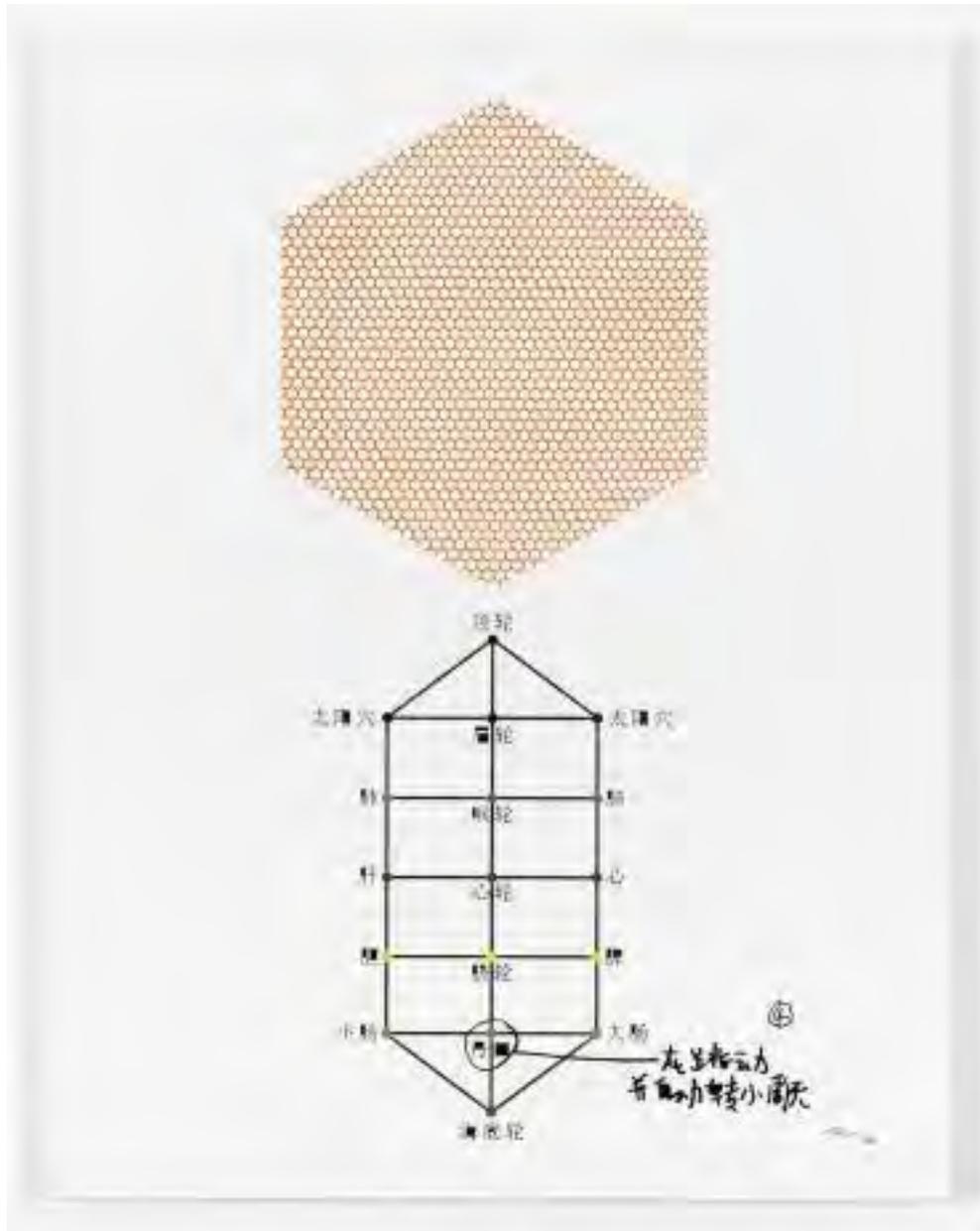
©the artist and Vitamin Archive.

Have you always been Spiritual?

No, its directly related to my own personal history of excess, I used to drink a lot, for 10 years 6 bottles a day, never sleeping, been crazy to the point of forgetting my actions and who I was. I found myself in a state of constant confusion, I was in the hospital, but they couldn't help. I had to quit, I had to cure myself; so I started to learn about Chakra channels and Chinese medicine. When the Chakras are imbalanced you get a continuous feeling of dissatisfaction that leads to looking outside for fulfilment – in my case drink. One must cure oneself. This relates to the paintings called *The Aesthetic Resonance of Chakra No.4* and *No.6*. You have to focus the energy at the highlighted points and within your body as you stand in front of them– it's sort of like a self-healing painting.

When I worked in a collective, I was often drunk. It was more physical and social to be in that state. At that time I worked with calligraphy. When I was drunk, I used to write and write, but if you look back you can't see any distinction in the visual work. So I see it as two outlets from my soul and from my energy. However, I understand more now, in my current state of enlightenment. When I look back at the works I understand them, and the energy that was present in this period. My Teacher is a perfect example; I consider it my first contemporary piece. I found a man, of whom many said that he was insane, crazy and I asked him to teach me. We went all over the city and I copied and studied him. We had an organic bond, I felt safe with him, even when squatting on an intersection in heavy traffic simply laughing at the sky – everything made sense. I learnt more from him than from any other teacher, book or scripture I have ever seen.

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Zheng Guogu, “The Aesthetic Resonance of Chakra No. 4”, 2014 Courtesy: VW (VeneKlasen/Werner), Berlin

It seems a rebellious act to the art world and state at the time?

It was, yet he gave me everything, more than an Art School could ever begin to teach me.

Around 600 BC there was a scientist named Thales who made the first observations on static electricity. He saw something nobody else could see and this is something I am looking for. Take the Brain Nerves Series: I am mapping the unseen on these paintings. The curve shows the left and right sides of the brain, it shows the energy levels of both sides for a particular person. I used Beuys, Duchamp and Jesus among others and when you look at the respective portrait, you should feel the same energy vibrations as they did day to day. It works with shape: a circle would be a complete state of mind. For me its important that the viewer is feeling the direct energy of the works; the shapes and colours act as guides.

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Zheng Guogu, “Visionary Transformation of an Insight 2”, 2012 Courtesy: VW (VeneKlasen/Werner), Berlin

So the collector of the work, can use the work spiritually, too?

Yes, this is my intention and for me painting is a tool to tap into spirituality and to physically engage the viewer. Art is a socially acceptable way to spread these idea's, it's the beginning of a greater field of communication. I chose art because I think it's the highest level of spirituality and it's the most beautiful energy in the world, but I would also happily work on the street with my teacher rather than in a commercial gallery.

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Is humanity losing touch with its human-ness in the era of such abundant technology?

Well I see positive change in technological advancement; we started in the mythological era, and then moved into the religious and now the technological. Each period created more signs/language and with that we developed our sense of soul. Science is a very physical era, but we have to go back to the spiritual as well, we should maintain our sense of intimacy with the soul. But the advanced knowledge actually helps. Now we know about particles and atoms and how they make up the universe. Consider Buddha, we can now see that he is the energy that feeds all these particles. When people die their bodies become atoms again and we see the cycle completed. Science just allows us to see this very precisely.

SHOW CLOSES 25. April 2015.

ZHENG GUOGU: VISIONARY TRANSFORMATION

VW (VeneKlasen/Werner) / Rudi-Dutschke-Str. 26 / 10969 Berlin / Tu – Sa 11 – 18h

Cover Image: ©the artist and Vitamin Archive.

The New York Times

Yangjiang Group Opens ‘Mass Group Incident’ in Sydney

By JANELLE CARRIGAN - FEB. 24, 2015



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A detail from “Final Days” (2015), an installation by Yangjiang Group. Credit Zan Wimberley, Courtesy of Yangjiang Group and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou

SYDNEY — In a serene Chinese garden in the heart of the city earlier this month Sun Qinglin danced across a large square of cardboard secured to the ground with overturned rice bowls. With a thick calligraphy brush he deftly formed black Chinese characters, and then their English translation: “Your lover’s love appears in your mind’s eye.”

Then with 300 people watching the art performance, Mr. Sun and his two partners, who make up the Chinese artist collective Yangjiang Group, placed gnawed chicken wings, thin strands of jellyfish and strips of tofu atop the sweeping brushstrokes. The last letter was punctuated with a shiny cube of sweet potato and globs of rice.

The three-dimensional work they created, “After Dinner Shu Fa,” is part of the trio’s first exhibition in Australia, which was curated by 4A Center for Contemporary Asian Art in Sydney, the first installment in “Mass Group Incident,” a five-month project that runs through May 31.

The New York Times

Yangjiang Group is famous for subverting ancient calligraphy and bringing everyday pleasures, like food and drink, into their mixed-media art. Their show at 4A, “Actions for Tomorrow,” runs until March 7 and is an ambitious start to “Mass Group Incident.”

Zheng Guogu, already an acclaimed solo artist, formed the group in 2002 with Chen Zaiyan and Mr. Sun in the southern coastal city of Yangjiang, which is best known for its production of Shibazi knives.

“The big city has already been polluted in both an environmental and cultural way,” Mr. Zheng said. In Yangjiang “it is still pure, which is more inspirational.”

Yangjiang Group’s calligraphic works and performances have been widely exhibited around the world, from Tate Liverpool in Britain to the Mori Art Museum in Japan and the San Diego Museum of Art. They have also been shown at Art Basel and the Venice Biennale, and there is a strong commercial market for their work, according to Reuben Keehan, curator of contemporary Asian art at the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art. “That hegemony of the Beijing/Shanghai domination of the art world is really starting to break down,” he said. “Different parts of China are starting to evolve. It’s still very, very fresh but it’s a good time for Yangjiang Group. The art world has come to them.”

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“Ink on Your Face” (2015), part of a performance work by Yangjiang Group. Credit Blue Murder Studios

Mr. Keehan visited the artists’ bold self-designed studio last year while on a research trip to China. “We’re quite familiar now with the slightly older generation of Chinese artists who were around in the 1980s and ’90s,” he said, “people like Ai Weiwei, Cai Guo-Qiang, Zhang Huan. They’re people who went through

The New York Times

the Cultural Revolution and directly experienced the events of the late 1980s.”

The members of Yangjiang Group, born mid-way through the Cultural Revolution in the early 1970s, experienced the full brunt of China’s consumer-culture boom of the 1990s.

This is reflected in the group’s “Action’s for Tomorrow” exhibition at 4A, which plays with the notion of time. The artists’ “Final Days” installation on the ground floor of 4A’s Chinatown gallery, seems like a retail store at first glance. Clothes custom-made in Yangjiang hang on racks and are neatly folded on a central table. Slogans on the wall in Chinese and English advertise sales. But every item is encased in dripping wax, frozen in time, as globalization and online shopping encroach on local businesses.

Aaron Seeto, 4A’s director, commissioned several new pieces for the Yangjiang Group exhibition. Upstairs, new works include a 24-meter-long calligraphic mural in scrawled Chinese and English proclaiming, “God is dead! Long live the RMB!” The statement was the result of a discussion the artists had with a local Sinologist over dinner about the property market, economics and Australia’s relationship to China. “We have both Western standards for art and Chinese standards for art and we combine these together,” Mr. Zheng said. “Then we get a new standard.”

Unlike the bold political statements of artists such as Ai Weiwei, the members of Yangjiang Group say they’re more interested in challenging social conventions. “I don’t want to distinguish between political or not political,” Mr. Zheng said. “It’s a very sensitive issue. We travel from art to beauty, then from beauty to social issues. Beauty is the thing that always exists. Political issues change.”

The artists also want to have fun. “That’s one of the fantastic aspects of the work,” Mr. Keehan said. “They’re very interested in collaborating with audiences. They let people really participate in the process.”

At the night in the Chinese garden, guests were invited to play a game of chance with the artists. At the roll of a dice, winners were rewarded with a free cocktail and losers had their faces painted with random black markings. By the end of the night, dramatic curly moustaches and third eyes were as prevalent on faces as lipstick.

“Actions for Tomorrow” was partly funded by a new partnership between Art Basel and Kickstarter, the online fundraising platform. Last year, 4A’s collaboration with Yangjiang Group was one of four nonprofit visual arts projects supported by Art Basel, and more than 20,000 Australian dollars, or nearly \$16,000, were raised for the show between September and October 2014.

The next installment in 4A’s wide-ranging “Mass Group Incident” project is from nine artists diverse in geography and practice, ranging from Shilpa Gupta of India to FX Harsono of Indonesia. The project, “Tell Me My Truth,” explores the individual in relation to the group. The project will end with “48HR Incident,” a continuous program of live performance and other art over two days. “We are asking audiences to really engage, to visit us at odd hours, to commit to the project in ways which galleries often don’t ask,” Mr. Seeto said.

燃点 Ran Dian

Sincerity a Story of a Humble Guangzhou Artist

2015.05.19 Tue, by Christopher Moore

Zheng Guogu: Visionary Transformation

VW (Veneklasen / Werner) (Rudi-Dutschke-Str. 26, Berlin), **Mar 21–Apr 25, 2015**

In the village of Yangjiang, in the province of Guangzhou, in the home of a musical instrument maker and opera singer, lived a youth whom nature had endowed with the most gentle manners. His countenance was a true picture of his soul. He combined a true judgment with simplicity of spirit, which was the reason, I apprehend, of his being called Zheng Guogu (郑国谷, b.1970). In 1988, a traveling magician turned the village into a town with factories, saying, “All is for the best in this, the best of all possible worlds.” Guangzhou was full of 18th-century Parisian risk and ripe with 20th-century Californian hope. The town became famous for making scissors and knives.

Around this time, Zheng moved to Guangzhou to attend the Guangdong Academy of Art. There he met the Big Tail Elephant, a group of artists—Lin Yilin, Chen Shaoxiong, Xu Tan and Liang Juhui—who through their own performance and conceptual magic questioned the world created by the magician. In the years to come, Zheng would emulate his new uncles rather than the magician. He worked and played. He built a house of experimentation called Vitamin Creative Space—now one of the most famous galleries—but he himself renounced his ownership, becoming merely one among its mendicants.

燃点 Ran Dian

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Zheng Guogu, "Visionary Transformation of an Insight 1", oil on canvas, 196 x 139 cm (77 1/4 x 54 3/4 in), 2013 (courtesy: VW (Veneklasen/Werner))

In 2002, Zheng founded "Yangjiang Group" (阳江组) with his fellow artists, Chen Zaiyan (b. 1971, Yangchun, China) and Sun Qinglin (b. 1974, Yangjiang, China). The group eschews traditional artistic practices, more often using performance and installation, yet still focusing on calligraphy, the cultural crossroads of art and poetry in China, and also philosophy and power.

I am not going to tell you the truth anymore. It would take too long and maybe it will change anyway. As Dr Yu Tsun comments: "Having read various interviews and articles on Zheng, I have some idea of some of his projects but no one has really got to grips with why he is an artist." Hu Fang wrote an opaque poem. It is the most useful text.

燃点 Ran Dian



Zheng Guogu "One Manipulates into two, two integrates into one No.2", oil on canvas, 240 x 206 cm (94 1/2 x 81 in), 2013, (courtesy: VW (Veneklasen/Werner))

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Rudi

Rudi Dutschke (1940–1979) was the most famous student activist in West Germany. On April 11, 1968, he was shot three times on Kochstrasse, Berlin, by a right-wing activist following a strident campaign by popular conservative newspaper *Bild* and its publisher Axel Springer (1912-1985), whose offices were nearby. Though Dutschke survived, his injuries led to his early death. In 2008 this stretch of Kochstrasse was renamed after him.

It is appropriate and weird that Zheng has his first solo-show in Germany on Rudi Dutschke Strasse at VeneKlasen/Werner, the experimental studio of Michael Werner Gallery, famous for its provocative artists including the likes of George Baselitz (b. 1938), Jörg Immendorf (1945–2007), Markus Lüpertz (b. 1941), A. R. Penck (b. 1939) and, most relevantly philosophically, Marcel Broodthaers (1924–1976).

The VW exhibition introduces a recent range of objects Zheng has produced since 2000. "Impacted Chairs" are traditional Chinese chairs made of African ebony, their surface carved to resemble pitting by golf-ball sized hailstones. A similarly carved traditional wall panel comprises a piebald jigsaw of wooden pieces. "The Aesthetic Resonance of Chakra No.4" (oil on canvas, 2014) presents the Buddhist Chakra, important in tantric and yogic traditions, as a "chemical" formula. "Computer Controlled by a Pig's Brain" (oil on canvas, 2014) is from a series dating from 2006, which extracts the "hormone" of logos and branding from popular magazines, presenting them as a distillation of thrilling, neon commercialism for mainlining consumption—endorphin-packed pleasure. Our brain is the pig's brain—a delicacy—and thus consumerism is equated with autophagy. In a variation—"Frieze" (2014)—the data floats as hypertext over a packed bureaucratic (and Western) waiting room.

燃点 Ran Dian

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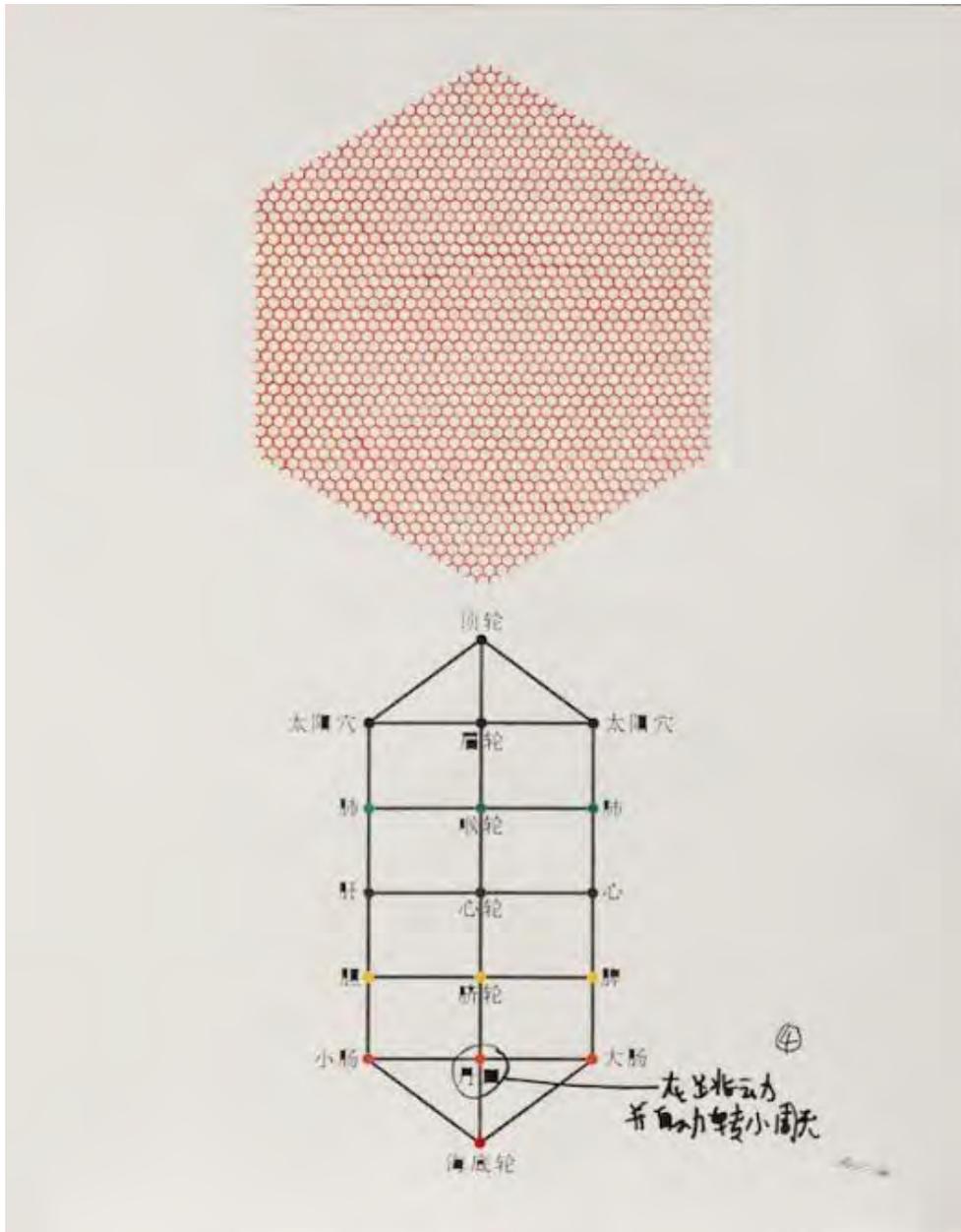
Zheng Guogu "Computer Controlled by Pig's Brain", Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm (39 1/3 x 39 1/3 in), 2014, (courtesy: VW (Veneklasen/Werner))

The literal heart of the exhibition is a room—a kind of temple—dedicated to a constellation of Buddhist-derived works. The real religion of both America and China is not Christianity or Communism, rather Capitalism. It is not possible to be atheist in a Communist country—always you have to believe in a god, whether Mao, Buddha, Confucius, Athena, Hobbes or Levitation. It is not important that the god exists: belief suffices. Capitalism merely describes a value-exchange system but belief makes it karma. At the center is the Buddhism-inspired "Visionary Transformation of an Insight No.1" (2012), an oil painting that mimics a photographic negative. Either side hang mandalas—"Mantra Wheel (for Career II)" (2012) and "Mantra Wheel (Liberation, III)" (2013)—and on the adjoining walls, opposite one another, classical Buddhist scenes, "One Manipulates into Two, Two Integrates into One" (Nos. 1 and 2, 2013).

Zheng designed these oil paintings. He then commissioned a specialist painter to manufacture—to make by hand—the product/commodity. Originality is unimportant; yet Zheng has employed traditional methods to produce traditional objects, elaborate souvenirs, of his artistic modus operandi. The negative mandala involves the child-like fun of optical tricks, super superficiality—nothing hidden—reading depth, formal or philosophical, where this is none. And yet it does bewitch. An "original" painting of a photographic manipulation, the dedicated quality of the copy matters. Here the copying counts more than the copy itself.

燃点 Ran Dian

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Zheng Guogu "The Aesthetic Resonance of Chakra No.4", Oil on canvas 173 x 134 cm (68 x 52 3/4 in), 2014, (courtesy: VW (Veneklasen/Werner))

Retreat into history and tea ceremony

Defining a critical position in China is like lashing oneself to a ship's mast in a storm. If the mast is not Communism, then at least cultural nationalism allows a nominal license to be critical. Part of Zheng's practice is to host a tea ceremony, as he would partake at home. It is not simple but opulent, including rare and expensive teas of great age. Elegant or hubris—you decide. I am skeptical but that doesn't matter. Take it all in context—the Buddhism, the calligraphy, the hermit-like retreat to rural Guangdong, the making of furniture, the production of painting—and all this is about defining a space for people, historical and cultural, that sits apart and in judgment against the superficiality of consumption, whether Communist or otherwise. In a monotheistic universe, Buddhism or aesthetic detachment à la China's literati artists, or just sex and comedy, become critical systems simply by being employed as alternative systems. The Other, which they represent—because they themselves are not, and even cannot, be dominant—is a provocation to supreme egotism. Consumerism is only a symptom.

The Garden of Forking Paths

燃点 Ran Dian

Zheng has been building a paradise in Guangzhou. It is called “The Age of Empire”. It is illegal. He has occupied the land like squatters in London do the empty mansions of rich foreign investors. It is a type of revolt against a type of colonialism. Amidst a government crackdown, ostensibly and actually on corruption, what if this is investigated? What if someone complains? Value has to be provided to the party and the community, albeit largely a self-selecting community who takes the time to travel to the outskirts of Guangzhou. Negotiation is a word much abused by curators as a synonym for “discussing” but here the artist must really negotiate, with the peasant “owners”, with local government officials, even the police. Instigation is the idea and negotiation the practice—the artistic expression splicing freedom and responsibility, social and political, environmental and communal, albeit in a self-assumed role.

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Zheng Guogu “Mantra Wheel (Liberation, III)”, 2013 Oil on canvas 200 x 200 cm (78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in), 2013, (courtesy: VW (Veneklasen/Werner))

One pre-2000 work is included in the show, an image from “Me and My Teacher” (1993), a project in which Zheng befriended a local beggar and followed him for a month. Under other circumstances it would be termed stalking and yet as documentation it is also a record of existence. The two are shown squatting in a public area as people walk by. They are laughing.

We could pontificate endlessly over the multiple possible meanings of each of the works mentioned so far, and others besides, not least his series of “homages” to Modernist apostles—Duchamp, Beuys, Warhol, etc.: “The Brain Nerves” (2014). Equally they can be taken on face value—the series includes “My Teacher”.

Zheng could have just stayed in Yangjiang, but he went to Guangzhou and one thing led to another. As much as he saw a world being made anew, he worked to recreate a version of the old world, idealized certainly, but also through a negotiation with cadres and collectors, between images and reality, originals and copies, hierarchies and you.

“All that is very well,” said Zheng, “but let us cultivate our garden.”

artnet Asks: Zheng Guogu

Hili Perlson, Wednesday, March 25, 2015

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Zheng Guogu *My Teacher* (1993)

Image: courtesy VW (Veneklasen / Werner) Berlin

Chinese artist Zheng Guogu is hard to pin down. Working in a variety of media, his versatile practice is characterized by a thematic approach rather than a signature style. Zheng's complex vision of a world in constant flux is, on the one hand, informed by an intimate knowledge of traditional Buddhist and Daoist art, while on the other hand reflecting on the rapid changes brought on by technology and societal transformations in China.

Zheng, who's shown at numerous international exhibitions including the 50th Venice Biennale and the 2007 Documenta, hails from Yangjiang, in China's southwestern Guangdong province.

He was a founding member of the Yangjiang Group, together with Chen Zaiyan, and Sun Qinglin, who regarded art as being about social action in everyday life, and pushed for a new practice of calligraphy—along with shopping, football, gambling, drinking, and eating—in contemporary art.

In the last few years, Zheng has shifted his focus from means of conviviality (which included, for him, heavy drinking as well) and towards a research of underlying energies, that is closely linked to Buddhism. To cleanse the space and prepare the viewers for the exhibition of his new works at Berlin's [VeneKlasen Werner gallery](#), Zheng conducted a tea

ceremony prior to the opening last Saturday.

The first two paintings the viewer encounters are reminiscent of scientific charts. The one hanging opposite them shows a Buddhist Thangka. How do they relate to each other?

[The series] *The Aesthetic Resonance of Chakra* focuses on the point in your body where you should breathe. Take a deep breath as you stand in front of them. Then move the air up. You have to breathe from your center. It prepares your energy for viewing the rest of the show. My whole practice is beyond abstraction or concept. It's a direct interaction with your body. You don't have to read or to know anything, but to feel it. You yourself become a part of the artwork. The Thangka is pure energy. You shouldn't think. It's not Pop or symbolism, it's about the subconscious.

But people have different subconsciousness. It strikes me as impossible to anticipate what the viewer will feel standing here. How can you be sure visitors will feel this energy?

You must be under the influence of an education of art history, so you always automatically look for references, you might think maybe this artist invents a new way to make art, but you don't need to think at all. Just match the vibrations of the piece so only you and the work exist, you are the reflection of the existence of the energy. You can still feel the energy when you go home.



Zheng Guogu *The Brain Nerves* (Marcel Duchamp)(left) and *The Brain Nerves* (Joseph Beuys) (both 2014)

Image: courtesy VW (Veneklasen / Werner) Berlin

Art history is also prominent in your work, though. *The Brainwaves* series (2014) references Duchamp, Warhol, and Beuys. Formally, too, these paintings feel different from the others in the show, though they are all from the same period. What is happening in these?

When you stand in here [takes position] you are right behind Marcel Duchamp's brain. This lower back part of your brain? Focus on it, and see what you feel. The U shape is what everybody's brain energy looks like. The right and left sides of your brain, emotional and rational, are sending energy to the lower part in the back for your activity.

This image represents Duchamp's brain, his consciousness. It's the final image of his life's consciousness. The ideal would be a complete O shape, like for Buddha, but his is already at a very high level.

I work with a special medium who sees the magnetic image of the brain, that's what the date and time stand for. The magnetic brain test only works on deceased people. Otherwise the brain is still too active. Because people usually tend to copy or imitate things they see, your brain might imitate the activity of Duchamp's brain when you stand in front of it. It might receive a message.

There's also a painting of your teacher's brain, it seems like it's functioning on a very high level. Who was your teacher?

The work connects to the photograph from 1993, hanging in the other room [pictured above].

It was taken in my home town, where I have my studio. I spent one year with him. He has a mental problem, he's special, he is always in this extremely happy state. His emotional and physical systems are beyond ours, he eats all this rotten food and he doesn't get sick. We might die if we eat that. I then realized how I should be making art. I realized this man was my teacher, the inspiration he gave me was beyond my entire education, more than Duchamp, Beuys, and Warhol. What he can give me is untouchable, like heat. So therefore I also tested his brain.

What are the intellectual processes depicted in your painting *Computer Controlled by Pig's Brain* (2014)? Does this work also relate to brain activity?

My hometown is across from Hong Kong, so we see the lit signs from there. You never see slogans in English characters in China. Nothing mixed, but in Hong Kong, the Cantonese mixes with English in a total hybrid of east and west, which becomes a new thing. But the content of the signs [we see] is really flat, it's gossip and entertainment. The titular pig is actually me. I don't know anything about computers and I processed the signs and slogans on a computer before painting them, so I'm in control but I don't know what I'm doing.

What is different in your solo work compared to your work with the Yangjiang Group?

The group originally intended to bring calligraphy into contemporary art. But for me it's more expansive than that, the medium is not limited to one type. I do architecture, painting, even video.



Zheng Guogu *One Manipulates into two, two integrates into one No.2* (2013)
Image: courtesy VW (Veneklasen / Werner) Berlin

I also get the sense that your solo work is more leaned towards the spiritual world. For example, the Thangka works in this show, or the Mantra wheels.

I bought these Thangkas from the local lama years ago, and painted over them. In Buddhism, there's this notion that the world is inverse. What we believe and do is the opposite of the teachings. So I bought this Tibetan Thangka and painted on top with the opposite colors. The oil paint covers the natural materials used for color, which are ground stones and granite. These original materials possess such a strong energy that the oil paint can't really cover them. The energy comes through. So that here, the negative color completes the other side.

Tibetan Buddhism is also called the Religion of Energy. Energy is under the law and principle of things, under their surface, so this work also seemingly hides something. It emphasizes the energy. It will also give you energy. The Thangka is always talking about the rule of the universe, energy.

In Tibetan culture what they refer to is beyond our world, and what we're doing is earthly. So I want to find the crossover, which is, for me, contemporary art, to combine the two.

Your practice oscillates between being tongue-in-cheek and very sincere. How do humor and sincerity coexist in your oeuvre?

I used to drink a lot and do calligraphy, and the following day I couldn't remember having drawn them. Then I quit drinking, as doctors warned me they can't help me if I don't stop. But I also tried to cure myself. So I found acupuncture, and maybe the world needs to tend to this energy. Maybe 2,500-year-old Tibetan culture once gave wisdom to people, but society is moving away from it. That's how I came to focus on the topic of energy in my work. Every tradition is a break with something older, and it's always transforming. What we think is traditional now, used to once be just the most popular fashion, that's how it became a prevalent tradition. Every tradition actually changes the previous thing. The world is always transforming and isn't still.

Zheng Guogu, "Visionary Transformation" is on view through April 25, 2015 at [VeneKlasen/Werner](#), Berlin

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Conversación de Hans Ulrich Obrist con Zheng Guogu

(English version below)

Zheng Guogu nació en 1970 en Yangjiang, provincia de Guandong. Se graduó en el departamento de grabado de la Academia de Bellas Artes de Guangzhou en 1992. Artista con-

Hans Ulrich Obrist

ceptual, Zheng experimenta a menudo con diferentes medios con el fin de explorar los límites entre arte y vida cotidiana. Mientras que un número incesante de artistas se trasladan a Pekín, Zheng

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permanece en su ciudad. Sólo en los últimos años le ha sido posible vivir de la venta de su arte, y su éxito actual le ha permitido continuar un proyecto de desarrollo rural de gran envergadura en las afueras de su ciudad.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: ¿Puede decirnos cuál es su contribución a *Do it*?

Zheng Guogu: Es uno de mis proyectos del videojuego *La Época de los Imperios*. Se me ocurrió transplantar un árbol cortándole todas sus ramas y raíces y volverlo a plantar para ver si crecía de nuevo. La idea fue podarlo hasta lo esencial, convertirlo en tronco y dejarlo crecer después. Es una forma de hacer de lo virtual algo real. Hu Fang dijo que iba a editar el libro *Do it*, así que esta fue mi propuesta.

HUO: El eminente historiador inglés, Eric Hobsbawm, dijo que en nuestra actual nube de amnesia tenemos la obligación de protestar contra el olvido. Tengo la sensación, cuando leo sus comentarios sobre *La Época de los Imperios*, en la que evoca del río de su infancia y la almohada de su estudio como recuerdo de la demolición del Auditorio del Pueblo de Yangjiang, de que la memoria siempre resurge de algún modo.

ZGG: Muchos de mis recuerdos están en ese trozo de tierra. Cosas que han desaparecido de la fábrica social, física, de Yangjiang. He querido utilizar esta tierra para preservar algunas de ellas. Pero sólo puedes conservar unas pocas, porque no hay manera de que se pueda reconstruir por completo el Auditorio del Pueblo. Es como un acto de reencarnación: estas cosas dejan de existir en un lugar pero reviven en este trozo de tierra.

HUO: ¿Qué parte de *La Época de los Imperios* se construye y cuál no?

ZGG: Quiero construir un espectáculo. Como en el videojuego, en el que el poder y el material humano alcanzan cierto nivel, puedes comenzar a construir cosas que no tengan un valor funcional. Quiero coleccionar todos esos espectáculos y hacer de ellos un museo: El Museo del Espectáculo.

HUO: ¿Cómo funcionaría ese museo?

ZGG: Yangjiang es una ciudad pequeña. No estoy seguro de cómo funcionaría. Podría empezar invitando a amigos a que realizaran sus proyectos. No creo que tuviera que hacerse una planificación estricta. Se basaría en preferencias anecdóticas, no en rendimientos económicos.

HUO: ¿Cuál es el nexo de unión entre el juego de ordenador y el mundo real? Parece tratarse de una realidad paralela. El físico cuántico David Deutsch dice que el mundo contemporáneo es cada vez más un universo paralelo...

ZGG: ¡No creo que vaya a producir nunca más videojuegos! He jugado tanto con este juego que comencé a odiarlo. Podía pasarme toda la noche jugando para darme cuenta de que había perdido otro día. Pero al menos pude desprenderme del juego por algunos días. Ahora tengo que enfrentarme a esta realidad y pienso en lo que todavía necesito hacer a diario.

HUO: ¿Es esto una utopía?

ZGG: Podría serlo. De un sueño a otro y a otro... No puedes despertarte. Anteriormente solía diseñar edificios, pero eso se ha acabado. Aunque aún tengo mis propias ideas sobre la construcción y la arquitectura, así que tal vez esto sea el sueño de una arquitectura personal e ideal.

HUO: ¿Cuál es su ideal arquitectónico?

ZGG: Es complejo, como un juego. Quiero traer cosas de fuera a Yangjiang. Aquí no hay montañas, en cambio, en Yangchun, la ciudad natal de mi madre, hay hermosas montañas llenas de rocas, por lo que decidí traer cuatro rocas a Yangjiang. Pero son bastante altas: 20 metros cada una. Habría que construir algo que las sostenga, y esto se convierte en arquitectura en sí mismo: un armazón de acero y hormigón que albergue las montañas. Este es el tipo de arquitectura que me gusta.

HUO: Usted ha dicho que el espacio tiene que ver con el dibujo arquitectónico. ¿Qué papel tiene el dibujo en sus prácticas?

ZGG: Tengo que trazar planos durante el proceso de construcción. Lo importante es comunicar mis ideas arquitectónicas a los ingenieros, pero puedo hacer un simple esbozo para que ellos sepan convertirlo en un edificio. No dibujo por dibujar: necesito trabajar en algo real para coger el lápiz.

HUO: *La Época de los Imperios* nos lleva hasta *Imperio*, el libro de Michael Hardt y Antonio Negri, quien describe la idea de "logo, no logo." El logo juega un papel importante en su pintura...

ZGG: Siempre me ha gustado el consumismo. Por ejemplo, cuando viajo en avión, me gusta hacerlo en primera clase. Algunas de mis pinturas también incluyen logos, que hablan del consumo de alguna manera. Las pinturas se convierten en una guía secreta del consumismo, enseñando cómo gastar el dinero. Es un siste-

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ma cerrado de consumo y circulación, igual que el proyecto de *La Época de los Imperios* es un acto de consumo.

HUO: ¿Cuál es el papel de la pintura?

ZGG: Trabajé con la fotografía durante siete u ocho años y me volví escéptico ante la idea de que una imagen valga más que mil palabras. ¿Por qué no disponer entonces de esas mil palabras? Así que decidí que solamente la pintura me permitiría hacer eso. He trabajado con anterioridad como diseñador gráfico, por lo que pasé un año reuniendo pasajes de textos de revistas y rediseñándolos. Utilicé la pintura para representarlos, aunque no mucha gente verá estos trabajos como pintura en el sentido tradicional.

HUO: Usted colecciona gran cantidad de palabras e imágenes...

ZGG: Encuentro cosas y las almaceno, y actualizo este archivo constantemente. A medida que los medios de comunicación cambian, las cosas desaparecen. La manera en que se hablaba en 2001 ha cambiado hoy. Las cosas están cambiando siempre. Ya no es posible describir las cosas de esa forma. Se convierten en historia.

HUO: ¿Cuál es el papel del estudio? ¿Tiene ayudantes?

ZGG: Tengo un estudio para mi colectivo de caligrafía, el Grupo

Yangjiang, y otro para mi trabajo personal. En el de caligrafía tengo ayudantes, pero es algo improvisado. Preguntamos a la gente en la calle cuánto ganan al día. Si dicen 100 RMB, les ofrecemos 200 para que hagan caligrafía con nosotros. Cuando trabajaba en la construcción, solía pedir a los carpinteros que hicieran mampostería. De esta manera sacudes la cotidianidad de la gente...

HUO: Usted es el único artista con el que me he entrevistado en China que tiene todavía un grupo. Ya no hay manifiestos ni grupos. China tuvo algunos movimientos en los 80, incluso en los 90, como el grupo Gran Cola de Elefante, en Guangzhou. En un entorno creciente de tendencia al mercado, los grupos han desaparecido, pero usted fundó uno en 2002, lo que es casi un manifiesto contra la actual discusión en China sobre caligrafía/anti-caligrafía, devolviendo las palabras a sus orígenes.

ZGG: Cuando estaba en la escuela, mis profesores me advirtieron de lo fea que era mi escritura. En 2002 conocí a Chen Zaiyan y Sun Qinglin, lo que me hizo descubrir que siempre tuve capacidad para escribir, así que formar un grupo fue una manera de superar mis tempranos azoramientos con mi caligrafía. Uno puede aprender de las virtudes de otros, subsanar sus propias deficiencias, discutir y debatir.

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HUO: ¿Quiénes son sus héroes?

ZGG: Son muchos, o ninguno. El videojuego *La Época de los Imperios*. Tengo tantos que me confundo. Beuys, Duchamp... Cuando comencé en la escuela de arte en 1993, leíamos mucho sobre ellos pero entendíamos muy poco. Jeff Koons, Andy Warhol..., todos ellos eran nuestras referencias.

HUO: Para algunos artistas jóvenes usted es su héroe. Rilke escribió la maravillosa *Cartas a un joven poeta*. ¿Qué consejo le daría a un joven artista?

ZGG: Sólo tienes que atreverte. Eso es tener media batalla ganada. Simplemente, ¡hazlo!

HUO: ¿Ha escrito algún manifiesto?

ZGG: Hace tiempo. En 1995 y 1996. Volver a ellos es una forma de teorizar. Escribí un ensayo sobre fotografía en el que decía que incluso accionar el disparador era excesivo. Tengo un manifiesto en el que afirmo que incluso los analfabetos tienen la capacidad de escribir caracteres.

HUO: Rirkrit Tiravanija declara que el futuro es el cromo...

ZGG: La mejor respuesta es la Damien Hirst: "El futuro lo será sin mí". Confundiremos y mezclaremos muchas cosas en el futuro.

Hans Ulrich Obrist es uno de los críticos, comisarios de exposiciones y escritores más activos y prolíficos de la última década. En 1993 (cuando tenía 25 años) fundó el Museo Robert Walter y dirigió el programa "Migrateurs" del Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Actualmente es co-director de la Serpentine Gallery (Londres).

Zheng Guogu's talk with Hans Ulrich Obrist

Hans Ulrich Obrist

Zheng Guogu was born in Yangjiang, Guangdong Province, in 1970. He graduated from the printmaking department of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 1992. A conceptual artist, Zheng often experiments with different media in order to explore the boundary between art and everyday life. While an increasing number of artists head to Beijing, Zheng remained in his home city. It is only in recent years that Zheng has been able to live from the sale of his art, and his recent success has allowed him to pursue a massive rural development project on the fringes of his city.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Could you explain your contribution to *Do It?*

Zheng Guogu: It's one of my projects in the computer game *Age of Empires*. I had the idea to transplant a tree, cutting off all its branches and roots and replanting it, to see if it could grow again. The idea was to cut the tree down to its essence, a log, and then to let it grow out again. It's a way of making the virtual into the real. Hu Fang said that he was editing this book, *Do It*, and I thought of using this as my proposal.

HUO: Eric Hobsbawm, the eminent English historian, says that in the current cloud of amnesia we have an obligation to protest against forgetting. And I have the feeling when I read your comments on *Age of Empires*, where you talk about the river of your childhood and the pillow in the studio as an embodiment of the memory of the demolished Yangjiang People's Auditorium, that memory somehow surfaces.

ZGG: On that piece of land there are many memories. Things that have disappeared from the physical social fabric of Yangjiang. I

want to use this land as a place to preserve some of those. But you can only preserve a little, because there's no way I can rebuild the entire People's Auditorium. It's like an act of reincarnation; these things cease to exist in one place but they come to exist on this plot.

HUO: Which part of the *Age of Empires* is built and which unbuilt?

ZGG: In the future, I want to build a spectacle. Like in the video game, when your human power and material power get to a certain level, you can start building things that have no functional value. I want to collect all of these spectacles into a museum: the Spectacle Museum.

HUO: How would that Spectacle Museum work?

ZGG: Yangjiang is a small city, I'm not sure how this would operate. I could start inviting friends to come realize their projects. I don't think it would necessarily involve any strict planning. It would be based on anecdotal preferences, not on hard economics.

HUO: What's the link between the computer game and the real world? It seems to be like a parallel reality. The quantum physicist David Deutsch talks about this idea that the contemporary world is more and more of a parallel universe...

ZGG: I don't think I would ever produce computer games! I played this one game for so long that I started to hate it. I would stay up all night playing and then at morning I'd realize I had wasted another day. But at least then I could leave the game alone for a few days. Now I have to face this reality. I think about what I still need to do everyday.

HUO: Is this a utopia?

ZGG: It could count as one. From one dream into another. You can never wake up. Before, I used to design buildings; that's over now, but I still have my own ideas about construction and architecture. So perhaps this dream is a personal architectural ideal.

HUO: What is your ideal of architecture?

ZGG: It's complicated, like a game. I want to move things into Yangjiang from outside. There are no mountains in Yangjiang, but in my mother's hometown of Yangchun they have lovely mountains made of rock, and I decided to move four to Yangjiang. But they are quite tall: 20 meters each. You have to build a support to hold them up, and this becomes architecture in its own right: a shell of steel and concrete encasing the mountain. This is the sort of architecture I like.

HUO: You mentioned that space has to do with architectural drawings. What's the role of drawing in your practice?

ZGG: I have to draw plans in the process of construction. The important thing is to communicate my architectural ideas to the engineers, but I can draw a simple sketch and they know how to translate it into a building. I don't draw for the sake of drawing. I have to be working on something real to pick up the pen.

HUO: *Age of Empire* brings us to *Empire*, the book by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who describe this idea of "logo, no logo." Logos play a big role in your painting.

ZGG: I have always liked consumerism. For example, when I fly, I like to fly first class. Some of my paintings also include logos, which speak to a very gossipy form of consumption. The paintings become a secret guidebook for consumerism, teaching you how to spend your money. It's a closed system of consumption and circulation, just like the *Age of Empires* project is an act of consumption.

HUO: What is the role of painting?

ZGG: I worked in photography for seven or eight years and got skeptical of the idea that a picture is really worth a thousand words. Why not just have a thousand words? So I decided that only painting would allow me to do that. I had worked previously as a graphic designer, so I spent a year picking passages of text

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from magazines and redesigning them. I used painting as a way to display them, but not many people would see these works as painting in the traditional sense.

HUO: You are collecting a lot of words and images...

ZGG: I find things and then I store them. I update this archive constantly. As media continues to change, things disappear. Whatever they were talking about in 2001 has changed now, things are always changing. You can't describe things that way anymore. It becomes history.

HUO: What is the role of the studio? Do you have assistants?

ZGG: I have one studio for my calligraphy collective, The Yangjiang Group, and another for my own work. In the calligraphy studio we use assistants, but it is more improvised. We ask people on the street how much they make a day. If they say 100 RMB, we offer them 200 to do calligraphy with us. When I was in construction, I would often ask carpenters to do masonry. You shake up these people's lives in this way.

HUO: You're the only artist I've interviewed in China who still has a group. There are no more manifestos or groups. China had movements in the 1980s, and even as late as the '90s with the Big Tail Elephant group in Guangzhou. In the more market-driven environments groups have disappeared, but you founded one in 2002 which is almost like a manifesto against the current calligraphy/anti-calligraphy discussion in China, bringing words back to their origins.

ZGG: When I was at school, my teachers told me how ugly my writing was. In 2002 I met Chen Zaiyan and Sun Qinglin, and I realized that I had always had the power to write, and creating the group was a way of getting over my earlier embarrassment about my handwriting. You can learn from others' virtues, make up your own shortcomings, discuss and debate.

HUO: Who are your heroes?

ZGG: Too many. Or none. The computer game *Age of Empires*. I have so many I get confused. Beuys, Duchamp... When I started art school in 1993 we would read about them but understand very little. Jeff Koons, Warhol, we looked at all of that.

HUO: For some young artists you are their hero. Rilke wrote the lovely *Letters to a Young Poet*. What would your advice to a young artist be?

ZGG: You just need to dare to do it, and that is half the battle. Just do it!

HUO: Have you written any manifestos?

ZGG: Long ago. In 1995 and 1996. Back then you could theorize. I wrote a piece about photography where I said that even releasing the shutter was excessive. I have a manifesto that states that even the illiterate have the power to write characters.

HUO: Rirkrit Tiravanija says the future will be chrome...

ZGG: The best answer is Damien Hirst's: "the future is without me". We'll confuse and mix up a lot of things in the future.

Hans Ulrich Obrist is one of the most active and prolific critics, writers and curators of the last decade. In 1993 (when he was 25) he founded the Robert Walter Museum and directed the program "Migrateurs" at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. He is currently director of the Serpentine Gallery (London).

O C U L A

Ocula Conversation

A conversation with Zheng Guogu

Founding Member, The Yangjiang Group, China

Stella Rosa McDonald Sydney 12 Nov 2014

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Over the Australian summer, cult Chinese artists Yangjiang Group will present a new multi-site work commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Actions for Tomorrow will take over both the public and private areas at 4A in addition to a one-night only participatory performance and garden party at the Chinese Gardens of Friendship in Sydney. The exhibition was one of only four major international projects featured in the first wave of the Art Basel Crowdfunding Initiative. Known for their performative work that invites social action and private reflection for audiences through expanding the boundaries of traditional Chinese calligraphy, this will be the group's first time in Australia.

Stella Rosa McDonald met with member Zheng Guogu on a recent site visit to Sydney to discuss the politics of handwriting, the Group's ideology, the symbolism of the Chinese Garden and the importance of getting drunk.

OCULA

Does the Yangjiang Group “perform” commonplace activities such as meeting, eating, drinking and gambling or are you just enthusiastic eaters, drinkers and gamblers? What, if any, are the boundaries between art and life?

The Yangjiang Group is a way of life. In particular the way we use calligraphy as a medium to challenge the traditional notion of calligraphy apart from its usual context in everyday life. Everyone is an artist in their own right and everyone is entitled to create a way of life that they can enjoy. The creation of art is a desire for a better everyday life.

Can you talk about the politics of calligraphy in China, for example the introduction of simplified characters in Mainland China in place of traditional script?

Traditionally calligraphy is a form of social status. For example if you’re working for the government, you have to have perfect handwriting. It would be rare for someone in a government position to have bad handwriting. In a modern society we mostly use computers so it doesn’t require you to have the skill to write calligraphy and I think its better that way. Calligraphy becomes, as it used to be, a medium of artistic expression that gives ordinary people an outlet for artistic expression. It no longer has the social significance it used to.

Modified script was implemented in the Qing dynasty and the Song dynasty, as well as in China today, so I see it as part of continuity in Chinese history in which language is always evolving. Those in power introduced the simplified Chinese characters deliberately; it served a special need in time. Lots of people in Mainland China were uneducated and the traditional script is complicated for ordinary people. It was socially liberating for many people.

The critic Peter Schjeldahl, in describing the word paintings of Ed Ruscha, describes the experience of these works as “a tantalizing standoff in the brain, between looking and reading.” There is something of this visual and cognitive divide in the work of the Yangjiang Group, where writing is often unreadable, written in food, written while drunk or made illegible in other ways. Language exists both materially and conceptually. Can you talk about the Yangjiang Group’s relationship with language?

Other people might see it as junk and may think that we don’t know what we’re doing but for us we are always conscious of our practice. We want to show that there are different ways to use calligraphy as means to express ideas. We want to create a new understanding of the traditional form in a non-traditional setting. Traditional calligraphy restricts expression because of the need to have perfect handwriting. What we do is to challenge this tradition and to bring back the form it used to be, free and without rules. We began to drink when we wrote because traditionally if you were a master of calligraphy the drink enabled your Chi, allowing you to finish the work. I see Chi as not just energy but an ideology as well that transfers between the artist and the audience.

How important is it to be understood when you write in this expressive way, free from traditional rules?

It’s not very important that you understand the meaning of a specific character. It is important for you, as the audience, to understand the creative process of making and have a personal connection to the artwork. It’s not essential for the audience to understand Chinese in order to understand what we are trying to say. The Yangjiang Group often create alternative social spaces do you think that being drunk is important as an alternative space in this sense?

It’s very important! [Laughs] Because lots of unexpected things happen after drinking and it is a way to

OCULA

escape the boundaries of the everyday. After many years of practice we have realized that if we are drunk enough, to a certain point, we always feel a sense of achievement when we look at our work afterwards because we see it as being a result of being the best we can be. Getting the limit right is the key; sometimes we do have too much.

A lot of people, particularly in Sydney, are familiar with the proposed site of Actions for Tomorrow, the Chinese Garden of Friendship. The gardens are a strange, timeless place where there exists a unique relationship between culture and commerce. It is a fantasy playground where you can hire Chinese dress and play make believe for an afternoon. How did you interpret the site?

We visited the site for the first time this afternoon and we were wondering the same things. How to use the garden as a space? It seems like an idyllic setting for a traditional Chinese scene - an old man doing calligraphy for example. But our challenge is how to contemporize this space.

I see it [the Chinese Garden] as similar to the western concept of a church. People go to church to get peace of mind. The Chinese garden is full of the same symbolic significance as a church - there is a balance created between heaven and earth that allows visitors to absorb the energy of the universe. In Chinese culture the garden is usually privately owned, and is a way to showcase the social class of its owner. Objects and plants are not organized arbitrarily but carefully planted and arranged to express the unique character and status of the owner.

Similar to our practice, these gardens are an alternative space that allow for an escape from your ordinary life. The garden is the same as an artwork. What makes a great artwork that sustains its power for generations to come? It really depends on the Chi of that artwork; if it represents, in some way, the power of the universe then it can sustain itself. This notion of balance applies to both western and Chinese culture.

In China, drinking tea has a cultural significance because it's not a practice that's accessible to ordinary people. It is a social practice that, like calligraphy, shows your status. There is a tearoom in the gardens and one idea might be to bring some very good tea from China for people to try and see if the energy of the tea becomes important in that space. One thing that is striking about this garden is the bamboo. In Chinese culture bamboo describes the honesty of a person because the middle part of bamboo is empty, symbolizing that the person has nothing to hide.

Is a cultural context or location important to the work of The Yangjiang Group?

For some artists it is important to have a connection to the place they are making work and to find the history behind it, but for us we believe history is history. We don't have a selection process in terms of the location or the cultural background of a place, we just respond intuitively to the space.

What remains after you have left?

The best outcome is for the audience to get something out of the work and take it away with them. This means that you as the audience have become part of the work. It is just a moment in life.—[O]

L'UOMO VOGUE | People & Stars | Zheng Guogu

Zheng Guogu

From interior design to art. The absolute visionary, Zheng Guogu, with an utopian dream. English and Chinese text

Tag ZHENG GUOGU - THROUGH POPULAR EXPRESSION - EMPIRE TIME



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He lives in Yangjiang, in the province of Guangdong. **His art is the result of the use of very different techniques and materials**, which range from embroideries on canvases, to wax with which he creates huge artworks, photography, painting, sculptures and installations. **In 2006 he won the Chinese Contemporary Art Award.** He's an all-around artist and is famous worldwide: he has been featured in exhibitions everywhere, from Saatchi in London to the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, to the 50th edition of the Venice Art Biennale, to France and, of course, Beijing. **He's inspired by folk stories that he prints on fabrics or replicates in the form of photographs, or that he embroiders directly on a canvas**, like his contributions to the series *Through*



PEOPLE & STARS

Yung Ho Chang

Yung Ho Chang is a visionary, an artist, and an architect. Chinese text

L'UOMO VOGUE

Popular Expression, which represent his answer to the most commercial side of art.

These artworks reflect the use of those kinds of media that invade and influence our life and use, once again, the most diverse materials, from Hong Kong's pop culture magazines to the places of consumption. **His photography correlates the post-Cultural Revolution generation with today's world.** Guogu doesn't want to judge through his works, but only show how reality has had its horizons widened. **He also loves to correlate, through his sculptures, the evolution of Chinese economy, which happened suddenly, with the country's thousand-year old tradition.**

He's thin, pale, and has a bright look. He studied interior design at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, and after working as an interior designer he understood that **"everything that I was imagining was being incredibly limited by reality and usefulness. I wanted to pursue my dreams, which were impossible for an interior decorator.** The only job that lets you wander off without limits in any field and that never sets boundaries between creativity and creation is art". For Guogu "being an artist is a state that you must build on your own. It's like setting off towards a journey, a natural skill". And he wants no limits.

Today he's working on a colossal project: starting from a very popular Internet game, *Empire Time*, he's trying to bring art into his own life. He has bought a piece of land where he can build houses and every kind of object for himself, thus wanting to create his own Utopia. He's an absolute visionary and is extremely determined. His "Empire Time" will be real, strong. Guogu will live inside his own art. **"By transforming a utopia into reality I've understood what art really is",** he adds.

L'Uomo Vogue, October 2012 (n. 434)

Above. Coat: Gucci

郑国谷生活在广东省的阳江，他的艺术形式是运用技术和不同材料创作：他的作品遍于布布艺的刺绣品，大块的蜡烛，照片，绘画，雕刻和装置。在2006年，他



PEOPLE & STARS

Chen Man

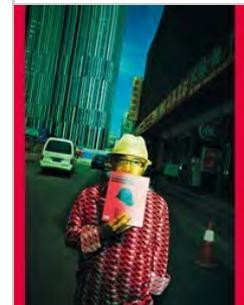
Chen Man is the first fashion photographer to portray China in a contemporary way through clothing. Chinese text



PEOPLE & STARS

Han Han

Han Han: the most famous blogger in the world. Photogallery and Chinese text



PEOPLE & STARS

Ou Ning

An outsider, Ou Ning, with imagination without boundaries. Chinese text

L'UOMO VOGUE

Magazine News Shows Suzy Menkes Trends Beauty **L'Uomo Vogue** PhotoVogue VEncyclo VTalents VBlack VCurvy VFNO VFDE

活，并且使用多样的材料。他很喜欢通过他的雕塑作品与中国经济的发展进行联系，通过上千年的中国传统进行着无意识的创作。他面色消瘦，脸色有点苍白，但表达上却十分地生动。他毕业于广州美术学院室内装饰专业，后来从事家居环境装修，他明白“在现实和实用的面前，我的一切想象都太有限了，我会尽可能地去坚持我的室内装饰这一专业。艺术的创新是唯一一个在任何领域里没有限制，没有国界的工作”。

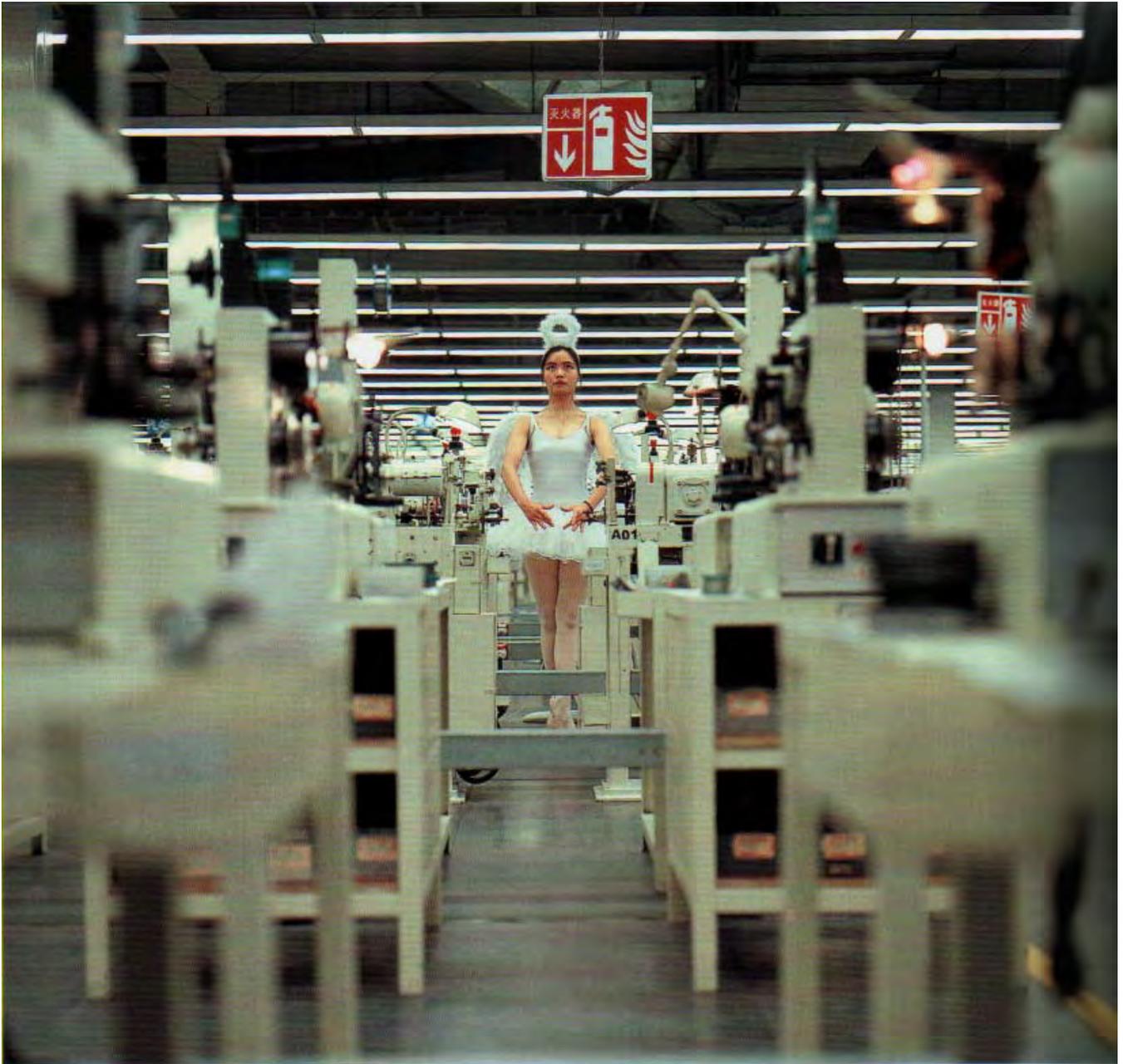
对于国谷，艺术的本质是要保持一个必须单独来创作的状态，如同行走在街道上，是一种天生的能力，他不喜欢被限制，如今，他正在做一个很大的项目：是关于在网上非常流行的游戏，“帝国时代”，他正在寻找把艺术带向真正的生活的方式。他已经拥有了一个很大的场地，在这里可以建造家和他自己想要的任何形式的艺术。这样子他想以此实现他的乌托邦。国谷生活在他自己的艺术里。(大衣 GUCCI)

di Franca Sozzani

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Utopia & Contemporary Art

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Cao Fei, *Whose Utopia*, still from video, 20 min, 2006.

Cao Fei created *Whose Utopia* in connection with her project at the Osram Factory. In the video scenes from daily life in the factory are mixed with performances involving among others a ballerina dressed as an angel, a peacock dancer, and an electric guitar player.

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UTOPIA IN ACTION Chinese Contemporary Art Confronts Consumer Society

Hou Hanru

The 1990s saw the rise of a consumerist utopia in China. Works of art and culture are no longer seen as something purely intellectual that transcends the market. Instead, they have very rapidly become widely hailed as the most valuable and prestigious commodities in the high-end consumerist system. In addition, they are considered to be the most globalized products with most of their consumers—collectors and dealers—coming from abroad, while artists are gaining many opportunities to exhibit abroad. For the last ten years, more and more Chinese artists have been showing their work at major international art fairs and the works have fetched extremely high—occasionally irrationally high—prices. For most people, being a contemporary artist no longer signifies being part of a cultural and political avant garde and utopian resistance to the dominant ideology. Instead, they are seen as superstars, embodying success in the neoliberal capitalist utopia. Ironically, the artists and the art scenes in general find themselves in a double-bind, an ethical and existential dilemma that confuses value systems: how does one negotiate a balance between intellectual values and market values, which often conflict, while the utopian dimension of the commitment to freedom, social justice, political ideals etc. is being substantially defied and even corroded by another “utopia”—the worship of market power?

Utopia in Modern Chinese History

Throughout the last century, the concept of utopia, or more precisely social projects engendered by the concept and vision of utopia, has been a central reference and to a considerable extent a driving force prompting major changes in Chinese history. Utopia as the ideal society, a perfect place for the social solidarity, justice and freedom that exist only in an imaginary world (or a no-place) has been extremely attractive to revolutionary activists—politicians, intellectuals, students, entrepreneurs, workers, farmers, and of course artists—in their efforts to subvert the thousand-year-old imperial dynasty and to create a modern nation-state. In spite of the variety of names for their concepts and projects for the ideal society, the revolutionaries have essentially been inspired by and have aspired to a Western lineage of utopian thought from Plato to Trotsky via Thomas More, the French *lumières* and Revolutionaries, Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Mikhail Bakunin and so on, rather than resorting to the Chinese tradition of heavenly retreats for the literati who have failed to achieve their political ambitions, famously represented in the Chinese Poet, Tao Yuanming's *Shiwei Taoyuan* (Blooming Peach Garden Outside the Mundane World).¹

The mid-nineteenth century Taiping Rebellion movement founded a short-lived Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace based on a kind of Chinese imagining of an ideal Christian heaven that could replace the corrupt Qing Dynasty and the dominant culture derived from Confucianism, Buddhism, and other traditional religions. Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the

¹ Translation in (x): John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *An Anthology of Translations, Classical Chinese Literature*, vol.1, (New York, 2000).

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movement and a self-proclaimed "brother of Jesus Christ," apparently invented his own utopia and managed to turn it from a fantasy into a plan for ideological, social, economic, and military revolutionary action. And for the first time, a grassroots revolutionary attempt to take down the dominant power in the Empire of the Center was mainly prompted by an imagined encounter with a Western system of ideology and social vision, and moreover with Western modernity in general. Utopia now stepped out of its confinement to the library, the campus or the church, and transformed itself into a real weapon for revolutionary struggle. For a moment, this ideal society was created and established, and despite its short life, this Utopia was not only a plan of action, it was also the action itself.

This triggered a new epoch in modern Chinese history: learning from its failure to control the rebellion, the Qing Dynasty started to resort to Western knowledge to reform the Chinese tradition, and imported the new scientific, technological, and industrial systems from the West in order to confront the invasion of China by Western powers. But it failed when real political reforms were needed. With a much more ambitious and idealist political scheme, Sun Yat-sen and his Nationalist colleagues succeeded in destroying the Dynasty and ending the Imperial system forever. On the basis of a modern and somewhat utopian blueprint for the new republic, the Three Principles of the People (*Sanmin Zhuyi*), which proposed Democracy (*Minzhu*), Nationalism (*Minquan*), and Welfare (*Minsheng*), the Chinese managed to give birth to one of the earliest modern nation-states outside the West. Again, the idea of utopia was at work, in spite of the chaotic beginnings of the young republic. And we are celebrating its one-hundredth anniversary this year.

Almost at the same time, another utopian project was put into action. As part of the international communist movement, encouraged by the triumph of communism in Russia, and based on an even more utopian vision of social revolution, the Chinese Communist Party was created. And under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the party and its army took over the mainland and ended the Nationalist Republic in 1949. The establishment of the People's Republic heralded an even more energetic, intense, and naturally more violent age of development. The vision of the new society, aiming at the elimination of social classes and the achievement of absolute social equality, was unprecedentedly utopian. And its *mise-en-action* was both powerful and disastrous. But its radicality—represented by the Great Leap Forward, and especially the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution—turned out to be one of the most frenzied moments in human history in terms of the dilemma of "destructive" creation and the ultimate alienation of humanity.

Then came the age of Deng Xiaoping and his followers. They turned this radical utopianism of the revolution into an essentially pragmatic movement of reform. For the last three decades, China has seen highly efficient economic development, and

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the country has made spectacular progress in many domains. China has now been quickly integrated into the system of globalization and is becoming a champion of economic and social change, with all the contradictions and problems that come with it. A new radicality, or utopianism, which embraces development and prosperity, has been born. Chinese people are now encouraged to embrace the utopia of consumerism, urbanization, communication, etc. for the sake of national empowerment and the well-being of the people, especially those who manage to create immense wealth for themselves at the expense of social justice, equality and environmental health. China now represents the new Eldorado, or "capitalist utopia," of the twentyfirst century.

However, like all attempts to turn utopia into reality, the utopian vision inevitably provokes dystopian outcomes. The utopian movements in China over the last 150 years have always ended up destabilizing the status quo of people's lives, destroying social harmony and frequently causing disasters—both natural and human. Ironically, this also provokes the most dynamic and intense periods of cultural and artistic creativity: thinkers and artists are always inspired and impelled most by social tragedies and chaotic moments in history, and are affected by the dramatic and "sublime" forces of the unknown, unexpected and uncontrolled—that is, the dystopian events. It is demonstrable that the most mind-expanding works of Chinese modern and contemporary literature, theater, cinema, and of course the visual arts have consistently been produced at these historic turning-points at the crossroads between utopian aspiration and dystopian reality. In other words, Chinese art and culture incarnates the same historical destiny as the social utopia in action. The rise and evolution of avant-garde art and cultural movements, starting from the end of the 1970s with the "Xingxing" (Star Star) group and the "Menglong Shipai" (Misty Poets) and reaching its peak in the 1985–1986 New Wave Art Movement, have perfectly echoed the historical transitions between the collapse of the Maoist utopia and the formation of a "neoliberal" utopia in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Contemporary Art and Consumerism

1989 marked another key moment in Chinese history. The drama of the Tiananmen event is now commonly considered to have been a prelude to a major change in contemporary world history: the end of the Cold War and Apartheid, the rise of neoliberal capitalism and its globalization. At the same time, it was a crucial year for China's avant-garde art. At the beginning of the year, the first nationwide retrospective exhibition of China's experimental art scene since the early 1980s was mounted at the National Art Gallery (Zhongguo Meishuguan). This was a highly utopian event, full of enthusiasm and euphoria. On the other hand it was also a totally dystopian experience, with two forced closures during the two-week period of the exhibition as a result of the "happenings" plotted by some artists; and it provoked great polemics and scandals.

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Since the 1990s, the increasing social tension and division caused by the uncontrolled economic boom and incompatible political development force the art world to confront some impossible choices between its ethics and its social function in a changing environment driven by the desire for success, both local and global. Certainly, the golden age of the innocent, pure, utopian revolution of the avant garde is gone. And the new age of material success and celebrity is looming.

Understandably, a large number of artists and intellectuals are seeking ways to avoid this new kind of pressure. They are now building their own personal refuges, new kinds of utopian spaces beyond the seductive world of material profit. They often refer to melancholic, nostalgic heavens and spiritual paradises from ancient or remote legend, while the language of futility, suspension, doubt, inquiry, and ultimately emptiness—often with reference to an exotic “orientalness”—is becoming prevalent among the generation raised in the 1990s. Interestingly, this tendency coincides with the rise of a self-consciousness of being Chinese in an age of identity crisis when China is rapidly being integrated into the globalized world system. One can observe this tendency most clearly in works by artists like now-renowned Yang Fudong, who looks for a revival of the good old times of the paradise of the literati as in *Seven Intellectuals in the Bamboo Forest*. Ironically, this turns out to be most accommodating to the taste for “Chineseness” of Western “clients”—dealers, collectors, and even curators and leads to considerable media and commercial success. Thus the utopian concerns are smoothly subsumed into and digested by the mainstream. Other artists like Lu Chunsheng, Jiang Zhi, Chen Shaoxiong (with Tsuyoshi Ozawa and Gimhongsok as Xijing Men Group), Qiu Anxiong and Sun Xun seek a deeper questioning of the truth of history, and thus the roots of the dominant system of beliefs and values. With their more critical and independent attitudes to the dominant system of beliefs and values, they share a common position. They all lay claim to alternative visions of history by asking what would happen to our present life if history were not interpreted or expounded as in the official narrative. This is obviously a radical, utopian proposal for intellectual and ideological subversion.

Art as Direct Action

However, the claim to utopian visions of possible new worlds should not be limited to the symbolic and metaphorical level. As shown by modern Chinese history, utopia is always more than a plan of action. It is the action itself. It is rooted in a critical understanding of and resistance to the present reality in a time of crisis, and in the meantime unfolds in the very process of realizing the plan of action itself. In the world of contemporary art, most utopian artists express this in their projects, in direct action that is performative, process-based, participatory and open to unpredictable outcomes. It is through this kind of mobilizing process, mainly involving collective intelligence, sharing and participation

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**Yangjiang Group, Yangjiang
Group Studio, Designed by Zheng
Guogu, 2011.**

The Yangjiang Group's headquarters functions as studio, office, gathering place, and open platform for all sorts of experiments. The building has no plan, and new elements are in fact constantly added while old ones are modified.

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that they can create timely, effective moments—or momentums—of utopian life that profoundly influence and even alter the future lives of all the participating individuals. Over time, this can revive a grassroots potential for laying the foundations of critical social change that is by definition utopian.

Artists like Cao Fei, Ou Ning, Zheng Guogu and his Yangjiang Group, among others, are certainly the most important people involved in such a process of putting utopia into practice. Interestingly, it is no accident that they are all originally from the Pearl River Delta area in Guangdong, which has historically been the most important region for China's opening towards the world, and the first laboratory of China's integration into the contemporary global economic system since the 1980s. It has carried out audacious experiments in terms of economic, social, cultural and even political reforms and provided a model of a utopian future for China's modernization. Artists from this region have been particularly sensitive to calls for diversity, individual independence and alternative values, and have always resisted the hegemony of any dominant aesthetic and ideological model. They share a profound, quasi-instinctive, love of the dream, liberty and utopianism, while their imaginations and productions are always wild, ignoring any kind of dogmatic canon, and uncontrollably open to all fantastical ideas and practices. They are capable of ignoring the distinction between official and unofficial, correct and incorrect, old and new, local and global, high and low, and always manage to fuse them together to create something that both transgresses against established models and categories and is eternally mutating. In other words, they are by nature anarchist and utopian.

Cao Fei, the international star emerging to the fore in the global art scene over the last few years, has firmly rooted her work in such a context. In 2006, Cao Fei was invited to realize a project in a factory of the Siemens group as part of an art project supported by the company. She decided to penetrate and collaborate with the community of migrant workers in the Osram factory based in Foshan, near her home town Guangzhou. Under the title *What Are You Doing Here*, she inquired into the complex issue of the motivations for the workers to abandon their homes and emigrate to the PRD to work in the international joint-venture factory producing consumer goods for the global market, as well as their desires, aspirations and dreams for the future, while at the same time they had to accept the extremely hard labor conditions. More importantly, she hopes to awaken their oppressed consciousness of freedom and happiness and help them develop cultural and artistic activities that can momentarily make their dreams of becoming artists, creators, and masters of their own destinies come true, no matter how utopian and short-lived they may be. She mobilized the workers to "build a platform for equal conversation" among them and to struggle to improve their conditions of life, not only in terms of everyday needs but also in cultural and philosophical terms. Out of the

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quasi-dystopian conditions of factory life, the workers ended up training as dancers, musicians, painters, writers and actors, etc. and succeeded in mounting fantastically original and inventive art festivals in which they performed their newly-acquired roles as creators and enjoyed wonderful moments of optimism about their future. The factory was turned into a temporary utopia.

Then, at the end of the art project, the workers had to return to their routines. Utopia has returned to "normality," or dystopia. Cao Fei was clearly conscious of such a rise and fall in the lives of those who participated so enthusiastically in the project. She asked them and herself in her own work consisting of video documentation, installation and text: "Whose utopia is this?" And the workers confessed, in a slogan presented on the T-shirts in which they were to perform for the end of the festival: "Life is a not a dream!"

Since 2007, Cao Fei has extended her exploration of utopia into an entirely new realm—virtual space. Attracted by Second Life, the most popular online space attracting global-scale gaming and, especially significant, experiments with the creation of new worlds serving as testing grounds for innovative lifestyles and economic, cultural, social and political projects, she decided to focus her work on building a city in this utopia-like new world. However, she is not simply interested in the freedom provided by fancy online gaming and transnational flirting. She is much more concerned with the connection between this apparent virtual world and reality—especially the new social relationships brought about the impact of the global economy and urbanization. Instead of conceiving her Second Life project as a transcendent invention of a no man's land, she views her project as an unlimited laboratory for the bold actions that she intends to create and critically examine. Naming her project *RMB City*, referring to the name of the Chinese currency (Ren Min Bi, or People's Money), she proposes to build a kind of "brave new world" that collages various emblematic landmark buildings marking the achievements of new Chinese cities ranging from Tian'an Men—the symbol of Communist power, to Rem Koolhaas' CCTV building and Herzog/De Meuron's Beijing Olympic Stadium—tokens of China's rise in the globalized world and its utopian ambitions. These are inserted in a dramatically swirling, chaotic urban scenario including congested highways, crashed airplanes, filthy slums, and polluted countryside. Here, an infinite territory called "RMB City" unfolds spectacularly, amusingly, but somehow also apocalyptically. The artist not only invites her audiences to fly across it and bring in elements of buildings they wish to add to the scenario; more importantly, she plans to reconstruct the actual economic and social relationship between the artist and the public—especially the market system (dealers, collectors, institutions, etc.)—in the "first life" world by selling her virtual products to collectors and museums in order to develop a real business. Hence, Second Life completely loses its utopian dimension and becomes a demonstration site or battlefield

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of the power game of the real material(ist) (art) world! The action continues. And utopia continues to be deconstructed and deluded into dystopia.

This strategy of connecting utopia and reality, of turning utopia into real world-making action, is shared by Zheng Guogu and his Yangjiang Group (with Chen Zaiyan and Sun Qinglin), based in a medium-small provincial town in the south of Guangdong province. Their vision and actions are even more rebellious, radical, and anarchist, and thus more utopian and dystopian at one and the same time. They mix daily life—especially its extravagant moments when things become extreme—with artistic activities. Eating, drinking, karaoke-ing, gambling, fast driving, and lovemaking are no different from painting, performing, making videos, and mounting installations. Drunkenness and out-of-control behavior are the best moments for them to create the most extraordinary works that mix reality and fiction, truth and lies, new technology and amateurism, while their artistic activities can take place at any moment and are open to participation by anyone. They refuse to draw any lines between the traditional and the modern, between East and West, between high and low, while all kinds of cultural and anti-cultural elements ranging from Chinese gardens, goldfish, the literati lifestyle, and Dadaist actions to the Internet and contemporary design, are incorporated in their installations. They are not only interested in staging their actions in art galleries and museums. In fact, they are more inclined to create their own locations to provide ideal sites for such uncontrollable activities. And they can literally live there with total dedication. Zheng Guogu, a self-made architect and designer, takes the lead in turning his own home and those of his friends into architectural laboratories for unconventional and even “illegal” construction.

Over the past three decades, China has been a center of urban expansion. Cities are booming and expanding at a speed and on a scale that are unprecedented and even unimaginable in Chinese history. It is an age of “post-planning”—cities are built and inhabited before any effective planning can even be conceived. Urban planning only serves as a kind of post-factum tool for remedying problems and crises. The distinctions between legal land use and illegal development, as well as between formal architecture and informal construction, is literally an irrelevant issue. It is in such eternally transitional processes that one can discover amazing opportunities for imagining the unimaginable and inventing the uninventable. This provides a fantastic opportunity for Zheng Guogu and his friends to express their utopian visions. In 2001, inspired by the online video game *Age of Empires*, he acquired a piece of land of 40,000 m² from the villagers next to the city of Yangjiang through an unofficial and presumably illegal transaction, and started building his own “empire.” It is a complex consisting of several large buildings with unconventional designs in the middle of a large garden with canals. The heaps of eccentric, hybrid and ever-changing elements continuously form a melange of styles

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and functions over time. Artists and other people are invited to gather here to produce whatever they want, whether in the name of art or not. It forms a true haven for the most rebellious and creative minds at a time when everything is under surveillance, control and censorship by the dominant power in the political, economic, cultural, and social domains. In the meantime, the existence of this de-facto independent "empire," heavily invested in by the artists, is constantly under threat because of the ambiguity of its legal status. The artists have to negotiate with and bribe the local officials, the villagers and other influential groups to keep the project going. This process proves to be delicate and fragile. But the utopian vision of the project and its audacious actions continue to live and develop. Lately, the Yangjiang Group has also been constructing another extraordinarily bold, inventive building—the headquarters of the group. They have purchased a piece of land in the midst of a high-end residential area full of villas in nouveau-riche styles, usually inspired by Californian gated-community houses. Here they have decided to construct a building without any plans. They collaborate with construction workers to invent a new section every morning, and end up with a four-story studio that resembles nothing less than a kind of contemporary Merzbau, something impossible to describe in "normal language." Like an insurgent soldier, it stands there defying all the norms and normality of the city and its urbanistic, ideological, and political orders.

This utopian vision, prompted by an anarchist impulse, involves the intention to create alternative social reform projects, even if it is not directly described in such language. Far from being accidental, isolated cases, Zheng Guogu and Yangjiang Group's actions, along with Cao Fei's and others, are actually among the most significant vehicles of the spirit of the age, and reflect how a new generation of Chinese artists and intellectuals are struggling to invent and develop their own ways of contributing to social transformation towards a better, and hence more utopian world.

For the last couple of years, the media activist turned artist/curator Ou Ning has been working on a sociologically ambitious and profound project: *Bishan Commune*. Inspired by the historical example of pioneering rural reformers like James Yen (Yan Yangchu) and the "anarchist communist" Peter Kropotkin, and especially by Erwin S. Strauss' *How To Start Your Own Country*, Ou Ning began to understand the importance of rural reform for China's present and future transformation. Following in the footsteps of James Yen's earlier experiments with founding modernized rural communes, especially in terms of education and the revitalization of the public sphere in the rural areas, he decided to settle partly in Bishan, a small village in Anhui Province with a rich historical and cultural background, and to create a new commune which he invited a wide range of intellectuals to join. He drafted the blueprint of the commune in a Moleskin notebook with a comprehensive program laying the foundation for an independent commune with its own

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constitutional principles, social organization, and symbolism. Over the past year, dozens of artists, architects, poets, writers, journalists, and other professionals have been invited to come and investigate rural life and work with local inhabitants and to create cultural products such as sociological documentaries, literature, craft objects, buildings, films, etc. They hope to gain a more relevant understanding of China's reality and its future by exploring its real cultural and economic core—rural life. At the same time, through their dialogues and collaborations, they try to gain a better understanding of their own ethical positions. What is even more important is that Ou Ning and his "communards" are looking to create an alternative social entity that is relatively independent from the government's control and capable of demonstrating a "third way" towards a better society, in which principles of freedom, equality, democracy and love are encouraged and practiced.

So far, a large number of works—texts, books, images, design, films, etc.—have been realized as the first steps in this adventure. An exhibition presenting them was mounted at the Times Museum, Guangzhou, in June. At the very moment that this essay is being written, the large Bishan Festival, is taking place in the village to celebrate the first anniversary of the founding of the commune. Numerous exhibitions, film screenings, performances, and markets are being produced to create an event as a festive gathering.

This is certainly utopian. And its future is unknown. But those who are involved in the action are optimistic and hopeful. It is a veritable utopia in action. And this utopianism is sorely needed in China today. And it is even more urgently needed in our globalized world which is now facing a major crisis! •

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Ou Ning, *Bishan Commune*, 2011.
The villagers saw the historic photographs of Bishan Village during the *Mutual Aid & Inheritance* exhibition at Bishan Harvestival in 2011.



Many strands of one story

MARK AMERY

Local knowledge is a charged subject in art. Globalisation sees artists on the move, while locally funded institutions bring together the local, national and international in ever-closer exchange and, sometimes, tension.

While a lot of art moves around independent of its context, there's increasingly an interest in work about local needs or concerns. Artists can be both local and global.

As outsiders they can act as introduced agents of change. Wellington artist Maddy Leach, for example, worked in 2011 with communities as distant from each other as Tasmania and Cork, Ireland.

Contrast this to artists whose history and practice are grounded in one place, such as Veranoa Hetet. Her work in the Dowse show *Local Knowledge* is all about taking forward her whanau's artistic practice here at Waiwhetu.

Local Knowledge is a smart, thoughtful exploration of different approaches to our grounding in place and time. Viewers may initially find its breadth confusing, yet it's asking you to take some time to do some thinking. The strength of underlying connections between works sees it continue to turn over in my head.

In its triangular mosaic and tukutuku-like configuration of pattern and materials, Hetet's work doesn't feel like a progression of local form, more a collecting together of many strands as one story. As vital as its local contribution to this show is, I find the containment of techniques and materials awkward.

Joe Sheehan's cassette tape carved from pounamu is distinctive and eloquent. The cassette contains a tape of the sound of the river from which the stone was sourced, reminding us of the power an object has as a holder of place and time.

Chinese artist Zheng Guogu's film presents his ongoing project to acquire land and build his own empire – fascinatingly, a physical realisation in his homeland of buildings from an online game. As a local viewer, however, I felt frustrated by the oblique rather than documentary presentation of the project.

Ans Westra's photographs of Lower Hutt in 1989 recognise a local artist's take on the local, yet they also make us think about the power of the outside eye. Westra wasn't a resident when these photographs were taken, and her work has been much discussed in relation to her as a photographing outsider.

Fiona Hall's Living Halls project is another strong twist on the tensions wrapped up in the theme. She made an open call for people around New Zealand to paint pictures of their memorial halls, and they're exhibited here collectively as a new community.

Part of the project's bite is that what the paintings often lack in artistic distinction they make up for in local warmth and pride.



Julian Priest and Simon Faithfull find delightful new ways to consider the artificially constructed relationship between time, activity and location. Like Guogu, they ultimately assert people's power to create their own structures and paths.

While with Priest's public clock I find the exhibition of computer gear an unnecessary way of making visible the mechanism behind it, getting time to be governed by activity at the Dowse is thought-provoking – not to mention sinister in how it makes us consider information collection via surveillance of our physical and digital movement.

Mike Heynes' work also messes beautifully with the relationship between time and place, inserting figurines from foreign historical wars into miniature historical scenes of the Hutt – previously made for a local museum by a local artist. As standalone works they're lightweight, but strong in the context of the show.

In contrast, Dan Arps' installation ably demonstrates why he was winner of the 2010 Walters Prize, yet its links to the show are more indirect. A tent town of cheap overseas-produced furnishings in the process of being unpacked and installed, it speaks powerfully of how we now as a culture often construct our space in a place with little regard for material, as if it were for a limited time only.

Local Knowledge, The Dowse, Lower Hutt, until April 22.

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艺术经纬

January 2011 01

ZHENG GUOGU
VISIT IN VIRTUAL SOCIETY AND
PLAY IN REALITY

郑国谷

在虚拟里观奇，以现实中游击

ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH 2010
2010年巴塞尔迈阿密海滩艺术博览会

TADAO ANDO
THE STRENGTH OF ARCHITECTURE
IN FEELING SPACE

安藤忠雄

情感本位空间中建筑的力量



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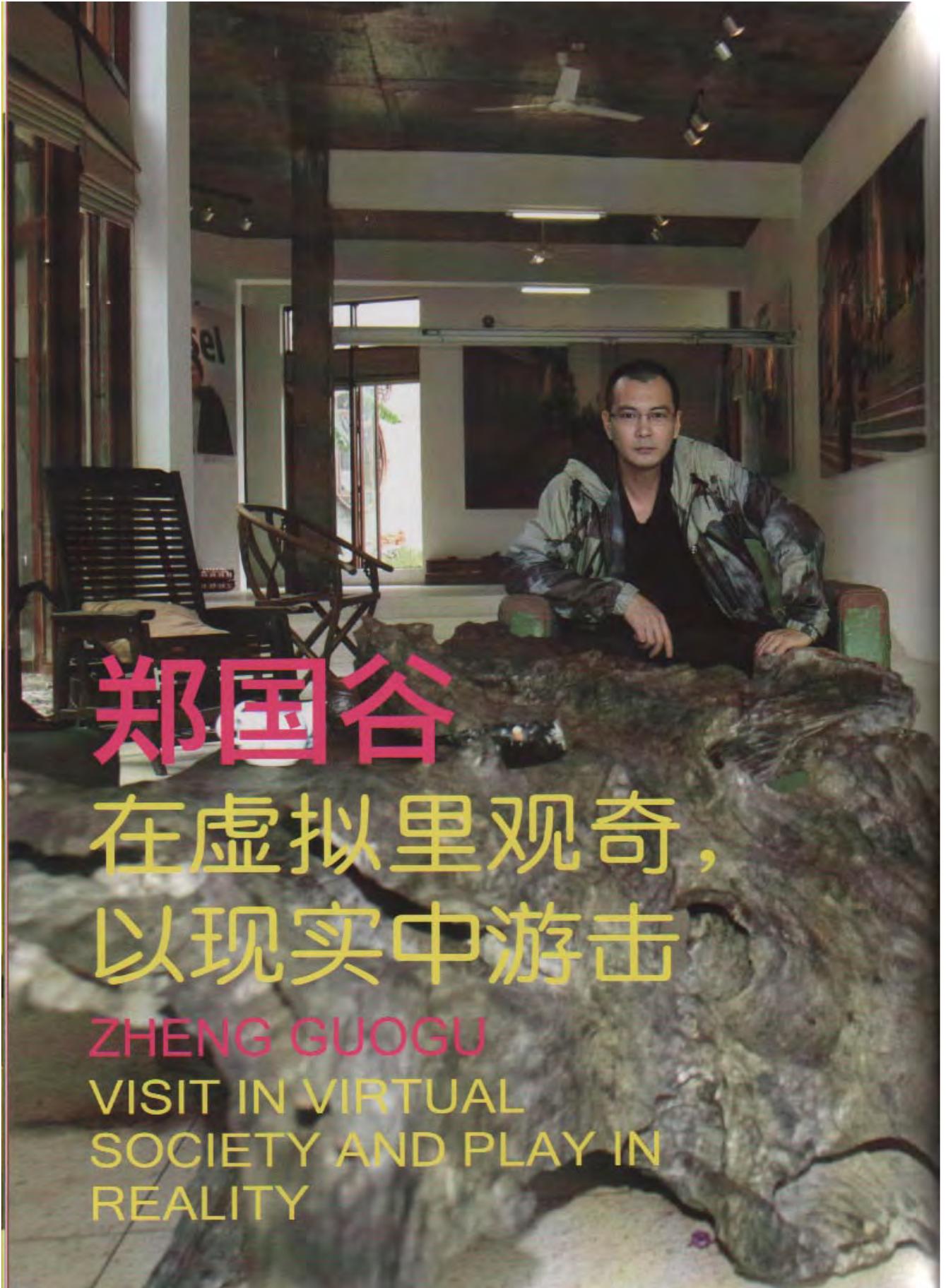
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郑国谷

在虚拟里观奇，
以现实中游击

ZHENG GUOGU

VISIT IN VIRTUAL
SOCIETY AND PLAY IN
REALITY





当你看到郑国谷的作品时会兴奋吗？如果你看到赛车手的漂移超越，你会喊出酷！帅！或者尖叫……这同时赛车手同样会发出KAO！或者YEI的狂吼。

身临其境是一种快乐，驾驭是一种愉悦。

当代艺术与传统艺术的不同就在于叛逆、反对、颠覆或挑战，这些词听起来很刺激，但对艺术家来说是一种超越，这种超越是作用于前人和自我的；是革命性的；只有这样的反作用力，艺术才能向前推进，新的历史才能一篇一篇的重新书写。

就像1996年的《10000个客户》，西方的摄影师的一张摄影拷贝是600份版50美元，他向西方摄影师提出了挑战：10000张拷贝（每个版本的小底片一样，而整体看起来又有分别，相对独立），2000美元一件，一个可以千变万化的作品。

1996年的《度蜜月》完全打破了作品和现实的界限，虚拟与现实变得模糊没有界限。

1999年的《油炸坦克》为收藏提出悖论：收藏它吗？损毁它！

2000年的《公元两千年，再锈两千年》这些规格不一，形状不一的金属容器都是实心的。他质疑和嬉戏了“雕塑”的传统属性。以最单纯、最物质化、最形式主义的作品，提出了生产、产品和消费三个概念，同时消解了产品的形式。

2000年对于郑国谷来说，是具有划时代意义的千年开篇。

2002“阳江小组”的成立，将文字与书写打回原形，“跳出三界外，不在五行中”郑国谷飘然把小事放大，把大事分解。不经意间，惊呼之余，问题浮现，思考有余……

2005年广东美术馆主办的第二届国际三年展实现了他的人工降雨方案。美术馆为山岭松林丛生在美术馆的外墙上，直升飞机在美术馆上空盘旋降雨。极其壮观之举，又是来自阳江的漂移。多少人为此惊呼不已。

时间在不经意间一点一点流逝，如果说1993年郑国谷从《我和我的老师》悟到了如何介入当代艺术。那么，2002年的“跳出三界外，不在五行中”的顿悟使他进入更高境界。10年间，随着《帝国时代》的不断深入，使我们清晰地看到了他作品的发展脉络，一个积累与沉淀的过程，从当初的单一影像发展到多种材料的运用，从平面纵深到立体空间的多维视觉的互动体验，每一件大手笔，令人反思的作品无一不让我们兴奋。

作品从阳江到广州、上海、北京到香港、日本、韩国到法国、德国、美国……你不觉得他漂移的空间越来越大吗？在阳江，他的原点，又建立起了自己的庞大帝国。随着他的《帝国时代》的向前推进，“农副产品”不断输出，就像赛车手驾驭自己的爱车一样，刺激而又愉悦地营造着自己的帝国。他的思想在阳江的《帝国时代》里，心在世界旅行。阳江，中国南部的小城在人们的心中烙下永久的印记，“阳江青年”也将是他在美术史上永远的代名词。

Art you excited when you read the works of Zheng Guogu? When you look a moving and transcendental racing driver, you would yell out: "cool!" "smart!" or crying…… simultaneously the drive would cry "Kao" or "yeah".

The visitor who is personally on the scene is happy and the driver feels joyful.

The difference of contemporary art and traditional art lies in rebellion, opposition, overthrow and challenge, which words look like very excited. But to an artist, it is transcendence which acts on the predecessors and himself; it is revolutionary, only the counterforce, can art progress and the history write again one by one.

It likes "10,000 clients" in 1996, a western photographer's one photograph copy is that each 600-version is \$50, and he challenge him to a work which 10,000 copies (the little negative of every version is same, it have difference in terms of whole and are independent,) each is \$2,000, it is a changeable work.

"Honeymoon" in 1996 totally broke the limit of work and reality, the fiction and reality become vague and they have no limit.

"Fried tank" in 1999 advance paradox to collectors: Collect or damage it?

"A.D. 2000, rust again 2000 years" in 2000, is a work which is different specifications and forms solid metal make containers. He query and play the traditional attribute of sculpture. Using the most pure, material and formalism work, he put forward three concepts of producing, product and consuming, in the meantime clear up the form of product.

The year of 2000 to Zheng Guogu, it was epoch-making meaning millennium begin.

"Yangjiang group" was established in 2002, they played back they words and writing.

Zheng Guogu, who likes "jump out three borders, out of five elements." Amplifies the small thing easily and disassociate the big matter. Carelessly, he exclaims it. When the questions are appeared, we think more……

In the second edition international triennial was held by Guangdong Museum of Art in 2005, his man-made rain plan was accomplished. Surrounding the exterior walls of the museum is



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mountains and pine forest, the helicopter circled round and rain in the sky of the museum. The splendid scene came from the transcending of Yangjiang. Too many people exclaimed it.

The time passed one by one carelessly. In 1993 Zheng Guogu understood that how to intervene the contemporary art from "my teacher and me", in 2002 understood "jump out three borders, out of five elements." deeply. In the ten Years, following "empire times", we can see that the development skeleton of his works and its process of accumulation and precipitation, from first single image to using of multi-material, from plane depth to multidimensional visual interaction experience of three-dimensional space. We are excited about his every piece big work and reflected work.

His works from Yangjiang to Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, France, Germany, America…… don't you think his moving space are more big? In Yangjiang, his original point, he built own huge empire. Following the progress of "empire times" and output of fam and sideline products, he likes a racing driver drive his love car and build his empire with exciting and happy heart. His thought is on "empire times" in Yangjiang, his heart travels on the world. Yangjiang, which is a small city of south of China, give a lasting impression on people, "Yangjiang youth" also is his synonym forever in the history of fine arts.



《10000个客户》：您目前有多少客户了？您认为在有生之年能完成这件作品吗？假如您仙逝，还会继续吗？您考虑过，如果继续，由谁来完成？

《10000个客户》从1997年到目前已经找到了差不多300多个客户了，此作品一开始在现实中寻找10000个客户只是一个假设，它只是我一个将摄影溶入生命的作品，有点像玩命，客户在增加，生命在减少。这是我在有生之年渴望获得又无望获得的理想，或者可上天堂或下地狱继续寻找剩下的客户。

10,000 clients: how many clients do you have at present? Do you think you can finish the work before you live? If you died, would it continue? How do you think? If continue, who can make it?

10,000 clients, from 1997 to present, has almost 300 Clients, which just is hypothesis to find 10,000 clients in reality at from the start. It only is my work, which photograph was mixed with my life, it like play, the clients raise and my life decreases. This is my ideal which I longing for and cannot get before I am the living year. If I go to the heaven or the hell, I would continue to find the remains.



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《纽约夜景》这幅作品的创作背景？所有漂浮的文字元素是什么意思？为什么使用反片效果处理？
这是一幅绘画作品，也是我在2007年在纽约曼哈顿附近拍的一张夜景照片，回来在电脑反底，纽约夜景反底的色彩斑斓的效果让我又陌生化地身临其境了一次，陌生得好像到了一个精灵的世界，彩色漂浮的文字让色彩更扑朔迷离，让观众可以产生一个挺奇怪的错觉。

What background in the *Nightscape of New York*? What do all floating writing elements mean? Why do you use negative effect to deal with it?

This is my painting, and also is a photograph of nightscape which I took in near Manhattan, New York in 2007. The colorful and negative effect is made me a strange that I am personally on the scene. The strangeness likes I am in a fairylike world, and the colorful and negative writing make the color become whirling, and the readers produce a strange misconception.

- 1 10000 个客户 摄影 1997-
- 2 纽约夜景 布上油画 2008
- 3 网络图片再画一遍 布上油画 2008

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《网络图片再画一遍》让我想起了充斥在网络聊天中的动态QQ表情，这个作品是不是可以用“荒诞”“亲民”这两个词来形容？

这是我几年前在网络漫游时无意发现的一幅QQ聊天用的一张图像，我发觉图像中的环境与我建造中的《帝国时代》的环境大同小异，画面的主角有着堂吉珂德般的骑士精神，是用来反征收与反拆迁的最好的“荒诞”武器，整个画面令人忍俊不禁，可以软化现实中的生硬面，征地或拆迁干部看了都会不得不“亲民”。

"Draw again web pictures" make me think dynamic QQ expression in internet chat, can we using "absurd" and "closed to people" to describe the work?

It was a QQ Chatting picture which I didn't intend to find when I surfed the internet before several years. I found the background of the picture was similar to that of *empire times*. The leading role of the picture with the knight spirit of Don Quixote, is a best "absurd" weapon which opposes levy and removing. The whole picture made people to feel funny and soft the hard aspect in reality. If the cadres of levy and removing read it, they would have to be close to the people.



中国出来的人我跟你没完！！！！！！！！！！



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我们都知道《再锈两千年》使用了金属容器都是实心的，作品名中的“两千年”有什么含义？为什么不是几百年或是更久的时间呢？

之前《再锈两千年》用的材料是实心铜或铁这些坚硬的材料来见证和穿越我们的未来的2000年，现在我却发现一种植物——“崖柏”，能活上万年，它的木材极难腐朽，因此它能更准确地表达和延续时间的观念，它能用错综复杂的年轮和节骨眼来见证人类的历史的改朝换代，还能每时每刻发出香气来净化空气，更神奇之处是这个作品能像闹钟一样每天9点左右让你自然醒，一查李时珍的“本草纲目”，原来是一种可使人长寿之木，还有四十多种治疗功效，真让人觉得不可思议。

We know that you used metal solid containers in *rust again 2000 years*, what's mean of "2000 years"? Why not several hundred years or more long time?

Using solid copper or iron hard materials was witnessed and traversed our future 2,000 year in *rust again 2000 years* before. But now I find a plant— Cupressaceae, which can live more ten thousand years and it isn't easy to rotten. So it can express and last the concept of time accurately. Its complicated annual rings and vital links can be witnessed the change of dynasties in the history of people and can give out aroma to depurate air all the time. The more miraculous aspect is that the work like alarm clock can you wake naturally at nine o'clock. I searched in Li Shizhen "Compendium of Material Medical" to know that it is a tree which can people long live and about forty cure effect. It is marvelous.



《歇菜》系列作品，妙趣横生，是否也可以说是一个综合材料作品？“歇菜”的主体是指向中国传统绘画？

《歇菜》系列源于今年的世界杯，章鱼哥连续的精确预测让许多国家球迷心爱的球队在迈向世界杯面前歇菜了，因此世界多了一系列用章鱼哥的同类做的新菜式，以此来解恨！我们喜欢的球队也一样歇菜了，这让我们想起了用他的同类加其它佐料来翻新中国传统书画这道旧菜来解恨！

The work "You are napool" is very interesting. Is it a material combined work? The object of "You are napool" means traditional Chinese painting, isn't it?

The series of "You are napool" originate World Cup this year, Octopus Paul's accurate prediction made football teams who many countries loved cannot progress the World Cup. So the world adds new dishes like Octopus Paul. Our loved teams are also napool. It makes us recall that we add another condiment to renovate the traditional Chinese handwriting.





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您的作品《阳江组工作室》除大气之余，还有点“机械感”，像是某天突然重组“变形金刚”。您想用建筑来展现什么？您的这种“大气”是基于您自身性格吗？

这一建筑作品的灵感来源于阳江组2002年的一个用蜡和书法材料做的装置作品《瀑布》。（准确地说是像冰冻的瀑布），它坐落于阳江市像一座永不融化的冰山，为炎热的南方带来了一丝凉意。因它的功能是一个书法工作室，所以必须“大气”一点，在里面非常有利于书写。

Except grand in the architectural work studio of Yangjiang Group, has little "mechanical feeling", it like that it abruptly composes "transformers animated" some day. What do you show? Is the "grandness" your character?

The inspiration of the architectural work originated an installment "waterfall" (accurately speaking, it likes freeze waterfall) which was made of wax and handwriting material by Yangjiang Group in 2002. It locates in downtown of Yangjiang like an unthawing ice mountain and bring cool in the hot south. Because its function is a handwriting studio, it must be "grand" and is easy to write.

《今日猛于虎》的展览现场氛围怪异，用空灵、苍茫这两个词形容也显得单薄。我想知道您为什么要用大量的蜡来“封闭”现场，另外这个作品的契机是什么呢？

用大量的蜡来制作一个雪景松林与我们在阳江日常赌球的环境相结合的非常奇异的场景，这个作品的契机是通过不断的下注而进入了足球比赛的内部，来展开一场十赌九诈、充满冲突的未知内幕与结果的日常游戏景观。在这样一个环境下等待大赔率的爆冷奇迹出现，今天猛于虎，运气最重要。

The exhibition atmosphere in *Today is fiercer than a tiger* is monstrous, and it is so weak that the two words "intangible" and "indistinct" were described it. I would like to know why you adopt the wax to enclose the scene. What's your aim?

Snow pine forest made of a quantity of wax made combine the daily bet environment in Yangjiang and formed the strange space. The aim of the work form a scene that people bet enter the inner of football game and develop a daily game which was full with conflict and unknown dope. In the environment, people wait the emergence of the miracle of dark horse bobbing up. Today is fiercer than a tiger, and luck is the most important.

《风景线》中，材质似乎包含了偶然与必然性，用简单的空间布置描绘出别样的风景，异曲同工之妙使人不得不赞叹，但是您如何理解之中的“偶然”与“必然”呢？

就是做《再朽两千年》时介出的边角木线，让我“偶然”发现的一道风景，这就是个中的“必然”。

In the work "Scenery line", the material contains occasionality and inevitability, which the simple arrangement of space was described another landscape and made us to highly praise the marvelous painting. What do you think occasionality and inevitability?

When I did the *rot again 2000 years*, the side and corner lines was found occasionally, which is inevitability.

- 1 再朽两千年 雕塑 2010
- 2 歇菜 NO.7 阳江组作品 摄影 2010
- 3 阳江组工作室 建筑 2008
- 4 今日猛于虎 II 阳江组作品 2010
- 5 风景线 装置 2010



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《紧急援助》：100个镀金的一元硬币是什么意思？您想救援哪里？

《紧急援助》这个作品是参加2005年Evelyne在车臣策划的emergence 双年展，由于当时局势非常紧张，所有参展作品要求体积要非常小，因只能通过国际红十字会的药箱才能运送进入车臣参加展览。

Emergent aid, what's mean of one hundred one-Yuan coin?
Where did you aid?

Emergent aid was participated in emergence Biennial planned by Evelyn in Chechnya in 2005. Because then the situation in that place was very intense, all exhibition works were required small volume and participated in the exhibition through the medical boxes of the International Red Cross.

《帝国感应篇》：显然是“帝国时代”的衍生作品，但您要说明什么问题呢？

《帝国感应篇》这个作品是应尤伦斯“中坚”展的邀请，展示浓缩版的“帝国时代”，这是一个有感应的空间，观众可从四面感应门进入，并可像身临其境一样感应到远在阳江兴建中帝国时代移一步换一境的不一样景。

Response of empire series: is a work which derived from "Empire times", but what do you tell about?

It was invited to do at "nucleus" exhibition held by Ullens Center for Contemporary Art. It showed the mini "empire time", which is an inductive space. Visitors can enter from inductive doors of four sides and induce the indifferent scenes at empire time built in Yangjiang.





Galerie
Chantal Crousel

访谈 INTERVIEW
2011年1月



《美国“刺客”回国》作品对立统一的矛盾体，这是您想对美国说的吗？

刺杀拉登一直以来是美国在国际政治中对不同政见者的涂鸦。这只是其中的一则有趣的新闻稿而已，当时书写这一书法作品时也挺玩命的，饭局喝了不知多少酒，处于半失忆状态，还嘲笑新闻稿的主角没有必要搞得那么劳累与玩命，换好再再说。第二天晚上清醒时，还处于半死状态，一想，原来那个就是我。

The work *American "assassinator" back home* is a paradox of unity of opposites, and is it what you would like to speak to America?

Assassinating Bin Laden was a doodle which narrated America and political dissidents in the international politics, which is one of interesting news. When I did the handwriting work, I was serious and drunk much alcohol. I was in half lost memory state and mocked that the leading role of the news was too tied, after replaced his kidney and to do it. The next night I waked and was in half dead state. I thought that was me.

您为什么在《MOMA》作品中将国画手法与外国景象结合？有什么其他含义吗？

《MOMA》是我个人的水墨理想，面对中国目前的水墨实验我也雄心勃勃地破典解颐另起炉灶，就像MOMA门口排队的人群，总会轮到您进入去的。

Why did you combine the technique of Chinese painting and foreign scene in the work *Moma*? What do you mean?

Moma is my personal wash painting idea, and facing the wash experiment in China, I have strong confidence to make a fresh start. It likes the queue crowd at the door of Moma and it should be your turn in the end.



- 1 紧急援助 2005
- 2 帝国感应器 装置 2009
- 3 MOMA 水墨脚本 2008-2009
- 4 Evelynze 在 2005 年年图展览的紧急双年展海报
- 5 美国“刺客”回国 阳江纸作品 2005



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Like

Chinese art has made inroads into western galleries since the 1990s, but mostly through institutional means or in the environment of private multinational gallery-corporations. The selection is consequently limited and not entirely free, with the same rotation of names and presented with *Bubenská 11 | Visit Divus gallery, theatre bookshop and cafe in Prague above Vltavska tube station.* liveliness and work of French curator ed by these same

shortcomings. However, Sans is no typical western stooge permitted to stick his nose into the sumptuous workshops of a few pre-selected super-artists. Rather, he is personally trying to write missing or wholly indecorous chapters of contemporary Chinese art, on the new wave of the 1980s for example, which is little-known in the West. He leads the UCCA gallery in Peking (with market access and support from private sources) under the unique conditions of the Chinese imperial resurgence as a continuation of his work at Palais de Tokyo. Now he has let the artists speak for themselves. From a recently-printed publication of conversations with thirty prominent contemporary Chinese artists we have selected three interesting cases, and we have appended the short conversations with their interviewers.

Inasmuch as a certain message repeats itself between the lines of most of the interviews with the artists, it in many cases reflects acknowledgment of the influence of Andy Warhol on the consideration of their own work and a wholly-understandable reflection on historical changes in the last thirty years, both on the individual and the collective level. The selected conversations stand out from the rest of the publication in their incisive frankness and their treatment of personal details, which cast at the least, an uncertain light onto the collective Chinese experience compared to the so-called 'unrecognized obvious'.



that he had not painted the whole thing. So once I knew more about Andy Warhol, my feelings for him changed, although I still respect him immensely, because he traveled an entirely new path, entirely against tradition. He was new and successful and worthy of so much attention.

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JS: Violence is seen as well in your very famous exaggerated hands.

ZFZ: The figures sit there and you see the background. Actually my drawings are not like this; my drawings have the Great Hall of the people in the background, with red flags flying and gold stars. That was the original idea, to imply the brutality of political struggle. But in the end I did not dare paint like that, because in China it's best not to make your painting overly political, lest you create trouble for yourself.

JS: And the hands, they are like the hands of a killer

ZFZ: I just love painting hands, so sometimes when I paint a human figure, I find a way of including his hand. I think that hands are particularly able to convey a person's personality and emotion, especially because I unify their facial expression, hiding them behind masks. I hope to use hands to depict some internal emotions. Even if I cover up all of my sitters' other skin, I cannot cover up the hands, so it seems the best to make the hand exaggerated, bigger, more dynamic. It makes the canvas more interesting.

JS: So the only sign of difference is the hand, telling you a story.

ZFZ: If you are nervous, happy, whatever—all of these subtle dynamics can be revealed in your hand.

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JS: Things have changed a lot since you were going to the toilet in the hospital twenty years ago. Now, where do you go to the toilet? Has your vision changed completely in this time? Things have changed so fast in such a very short time.

ZFZ: I can still see through all these changes, and I think this is my greatest resource. I have had so many experiences in my forty years, from having nothing at all, not even a penny, to having all that I enjoy today. These twenty years of development in China have been extraordinary, and every decade is different. I think this has contributed a great deal to my work. I consider it a great fortune. And since I am lucky enough to have today, I treasure this fortune. I love making art, and the thing that makes me happiest is that I have an opportunity to go on making it.

JS: This last question was mostly to make you end the interview with a smile.

ZFZ: I have always seemed serious when I talk, and sometimes this creates pressure for people. Like when I discuss prices or money with people, I am not unhappy, but people will think that I think the price is too low. So then they add more on. I tell them that is not what I meant, but it's too late.....

Zheng Guogo // // // // My Empire



Jerome Sans: Your works seem to be dealing with youth culture.

Zheng Guogo: That's where I come from. I was young then, so that's what I was interested in. But things change constantly. And here we are today.

.....

JS: What was the series you started with?

ZGG: My teacher. I squatted in the middle of the road with my teacher.



JS: Why did you make this work about your teacher? Normally you kill your teacher, you kill your father. Why did this become a subject for you?

ZGG: At the time I did not consider it a work. I was just squatting in the middle of the street and thought it was interesting, so I shouted for the camera and we took this picture.

JS: Is he really your teacher?

ZGG: No, of course not. I noticed this guy a few days before, squatting in the road out in front of my studio, so I wanted to see who he was, and once I did I thought he was really interesting, so I decided to make a photo. Once it was developed, I was amused.

JS: So why do you call him your teacher?

ZGG: He has a lot of knowledge that I will never, ever have. He's crazy. When he walks, he turns somersaults. For dinner, he picks moldy scraps from the trash and then smiles and laughs as he eats them. I figured the next day he would have disappeared, but he was still there.

JS: Who was he really?

ZGG: He is a lunatic with an immune system unlike ours. He is truly crazy. I have no way of being like him.

JS: And what was your next step?

ZGG: A work called Planting Geese. I learned this from my 'teacher'. When you plant the geese in the ground, they quack. It's crazy.

JS: What was the intention?

ZGG: I didn't know at the time, it was just pulling at me. I didn't have a clear intention; I was interested in doing something that went against reality. I thought of one of my schoolteachers, who taught me that the eyes of geese shrink everything they see, whereas the eyes of cows enlarge things. So little children can tend cows, and geese, because they see you in a shrunken state, do not fear you. You drive a car toward a goose and it still thinks you are tiny. So geese are fearless somehow. This was a physics teacher. I like this idea of the fearless goose.

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JS: How does this work with the geese link to the Lives of Yangjiang Youth photography you took later?

ZGG: The link is hard to explain. The action and behavior of the kids in these pictures are foolish and almost criminal. They do things other people would not dare to do. So perhaps you could say that burying the geese was also a sort of outrageous action. But I never actually considered these works together. I just suddenly get interested in something and then I go and do it. Or you could say that burying geese, like the actions depicted in the photos, are things that if you told your parents about them, they would grow worried. "Ah?! How can you do that?" they might ask. Perhaps they would scold you. Young people like to do things their parents do not understand. Youth culture is not mainstream culture, because the dominant power always lies in the parents' hands.

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JS: Are you happy with your works? If you are happy with them, it means you have a special feeling for them. How do you feel when you look at your works?

ZGG: I like my work. I like almost everything I make. But they move in so many different directions, so can we skip over this question? Sometimes I don't think they are even my own work, but rather a piece of myself, an external expression of my thought and action. I have confidence in my work, but no confidence in how to answer the question, "How would you describe your work?" Put simply, my works are just part of my life.



JS: And your life also a part of your work

ZGG: Yes, art is part of my life, so often I don't even feel as if I am making works. It's like I am living, and something happens, or there is an exhibition, so I finish a work in time for this or that, as a way of killing time. If I didn't have anything to do, I would have no way to go on living.

JS: It depends on your vision of time.

ZGG: True enough. If I didn't have this to do, I could pass the time just as easily by sleeping

JS: So why do you choose to make art?

ZGG: I got sucked in. People decided for me. I was doing just fine in Yangjiang, free to do this or that. And then all of a sudden...

.....

JS: You created a group, a young group of calligraphers, the Yangjiang group, to protest against the present situation of Chinese calligraphy.

ZGG: In 2002, I met Chen Zaiyan and Sun Qingin. They are calligraphers in the traditional sense. Talking with them I came to understand the state of calligraphy in China. There is the Chinese Calligraphy Association, with chapters in each province, city, country, and village. It is quite difficult to enter the Calligraphy Association in your county; you have to participate in certain official exhibitions. When you go from the county to the city, they critique you, saying what you do right and wrong, telling you where your mistakes are. But I started thinking that these judges from the cities might not necessarily have the expertise to accurately judge the calligraphy coming up from the villages. Someone in a small town somewhere might be an incredible calligrapher, but if he lacked the right connections, and the committee of judges doesn't know what it is doing, then hasn't this person's talent been wasted? After I learned about this situation, I decided to form a calligraphy group, with the belief that calligraphy exists outside the official calligraphy world.

JS: And what do you produce?

ZGG: Our first exhibition was titled *Are you going to look at calligraphy or to take my blood pressure?* We write things that we cannot even recognize once we finish writing them. Our goal is to make everyone illiterate, including ourselves. We make installation from calligraphy, a thousand sheets of paper waving on the ground like an ocean, things like that.

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JS: What was the idea behind making your own Empire? It's like being a teenager and telling your parents to stay out of your room, making your own little world.

ZGG: I think that at this point I need to do something that can last, not an installation that is only there for the duration of an exhibition and then taken down. This project is permanent, and I want to make it into a platform, like a missile launching station. I need a platform, from inside which I can research which missiles I can launch at which target, this one toward Venice, that one toward Kassel, or even farther. After I launch them I feel as if everything is suddenly clear and open.

JS: But not open, because there is a wall! The new empire. You are the emperor of your own world, like Michael Jackson in *Neverland!*

ZGG: Walls are easy to build and destroy, I have torn mine down many times. So I am still open. I have already built and destroyed the wall four times. Every so often a peasant will say to me, "I have this piece of land,



ZGG: yes

JS: Can I have my own pavilion?

ZGG: Yes

JS: It is common for an artist to have this sort of fantasy but rare for him to take it so far. This is as concrete as Andy Warhol's factory, which he made in the urban context of New York, where all of his friends could gather together to invent, produce, exchange.

ZGG: His factory was pre-built, but my empire has to be built from scratch. I have no idea when it will finally be complete. It is still just a piece of land.

JS: You cannot yet use it?

ZGG: I am enjoying the process of construction, and it is entirely possible that one day the government will confiscate it. It is illegal, an unauthorized building. But who cares? I'm addicted, and I have accrued invisible capital in the process.

JS: Now the situation in China is that everyone finds a way of dealing with the government to expand their own space, but your example is extreme. The government might not have the ability to confiscate your plot.

ZGG: I am also preparing, thinking about ways to make the project legal.

JS: With lawyers?

ZGG: No. I am just asking around. If you maintain your relationships properly, no one will mess with you. They come and fine you a little bit, but once you pay it, it is as if you're tacitly accepted. No one says anything, but that's how it works. I'm enjoying myself.

JS: How do you envision this territory? What is visually or conceptually your plan for it? Will you move there definitively when it is complete?

ZGG: I have not thought it through yet. I have built a very primitive forest there. I bought centuries-old trees from all over and replanted them there.

JS: What do those trees look like?

ZGG: More than half of them have died. I feel so cheated.

JS: Do you do that quite often?

ZGG: Not anymore. Before I had no experience, but now I ask the experts when is the best time to transplant these trees. It is spring. There were a few times though that I would see a tree and want it so badly that I had to have it then, but as soon as they dug up it would die. I just wanted to move it right away, to look at it every day and be happy.

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JS: It looks a bit like archaeological modernism; it destroys the landscape. Will it always remain in this present half built state?

ZGG: It looks like the shell of a house that a developer couldn't sell.

JS: Will you finish these buildings?

ZGG: Those are not actually buildings; they are skeletons for four giant mountains. At some point they will be converted over with rocks.

JS: So why didn't you buy land with the mountains already?

ZGG: Because you can't just hollow out mountains. People will live inside of my stone mountains. I am fabricating everything, including the forest. It is a very long process.

JS: So you want to do this your whole life?

ZGG: I don't know; I just want to pass the time.

JS: And you will live there?

ZGG: Of course. If I build this whole thing I will want to enjoy it. In the



end it will become a sanatorium. When the wind blows there it is quite comfortable.

JS: How many people work there?

ZGG: At the peak, more than 100

JS: They live there?

ZGG: Some of them

JS: In tents?

ZGG: No, they live in some simple structures they have erected, because some are migrant workers from elsewhere

JS: Do you have one house for yourself at least that is finished?

ZGG: Almost. There is a living room and kitchen where people can eat. Food is the most important problem to solve.

JS: You go there every month, every week?

ZGG: Yes, there is so much you have to show the workers how to do. A lot of the project lies in my imagination. Once the structure is built I have to imagine where the entrance and exits go. It is all in my head.

JS: Will these mountains be like skyscrapers?

ZGG: No, they will still look mountains, natural stone mountains.

JS: You brought the land from the peasants?

ZGG: That's right.

JS: And they give you a deed to the property?

ZGG: Yes, a Guangdong-style deed.

JS: Are you very rich?

ZGG: No, I have thrown all of my money into this project. It is like the Bank of Empire, accruing mountains and houses. I think this is good, that if you make money as an artist, at some point you need to put that money back into your art and allow it to grow into something else.

JS: So this is your main project, your life project.

ZGG: For now at least. If there comes a day when I am no longer interested in it at all, I may move on.

JS: But you would lose all the energy and money you have invested.

ZGG: Not necessarily, because I think the process of accruing invisible capital is more important. Building this compound has opened me up, allowed me to stop caring.

JS: Do you pay attention to feng shui?

ZGG: No.

JS: So you don't care where the mountains and rivers go?

ZGG: If you put enough money into something, the feng shui emerges. This is just a very ordinary piece of land, so there's no point in saying the feng shui is naturally good or bad. It's a piece of shit, I just happened to throw all of my money into it, so of course the feng shui is good.

JS: What is your architectural plan on this land?

ZGG: Let me draw it for you. In the computer game Age of Empire there is a secret weapon, a child riding a tricycle. At the front of the tricycle there is a cannon, and as soon as this child fires his cannon, everything explodes. The plan is based on the shape of this figure. It's a secret weapon, and if you use it to defend a channel, it can hold off an entire invading army. As soon as he sees people coming, he fires a round, and everything around is completely destroyed, turned into ruins.

JS: When will this whole project be built?



ZGG: In another two years.

JS: How long have you been working on it already?

ZGG: Three years, since late 2005. Just building the surrounding wall is incredibly difficult, because you have to resolve the boundaries with the neighboring peasants.

JS: I want to see it. I want to know what you have built for me!

ZGG: I can give you a guest house.

JS: Not a guesthouse, Jérôme's house!

ZGG: What do you want your house to be? Please don't say you want to build a museum!

JS: No, just my own house

ZGG: That's fine, but no air conditioning! [Laughs.]



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A Game Played Without Rules Has No Losers

That contemporary art in China has developed in response to the cultural, political, intellectual, economic, and social conditions of its particular (and highly transformative) environment is beyond doubt. Yet to what extent we view art as merely reflective, illustrative, or representative of its specific cultural context, rather than endowed with the capacity to transcend difference and engage critically to change, readapt, redesign, or push against these contested frameworks, has nearly always been in question. It is this contradiction—between art’s capacity to reveal certain social determinants and its ability or willingness to effect change upon them—that underlies much of contemporary art production today. The tendency to go against prescribed systems and institutional structures in the art world, cross the boundaries of art, or question how we define art in the first place, has become accepted shorthand for closing the gap between art and everyday life, itself a gesture widely interpreted as promoting positive values and contributing to the betterment of society at large. How such transgressions might come to be envisioned, realized, and recognized, in a place like contemporary China—with its underdeveloped art infrastructure and overdeveloped sense of control—still remains to be seen.

China finds itself today in a peculiar position vis-à-vis the global art world. While international art centers struggle to define the role of art institutions, and countless artists and curators appear eager to jettison their modernist frameworks and container aesthetics, China is eagerly adopting the very institutional systems and structures that the Western art world is ready to abandon. The overarching narrative of contemporary art in China, starting with the late 1970s, has been largely predicated on acknowledgement, acceptance, and recognition by the “official” system, even as Chinese artists struggled with its ideologies and prescribed stylistic conventions. The debates and discussions which followed centered on the exclusion of certain art forms from the official ranks, without calling into question the inequalities and injustices of the system itself. Today, ongoing efforts are similarly so mired in the rush to professionalize, to establish boundaries and structures of governance for the sphere of contemporary art to the extent that experiments performed outside or against these efforts have become scarce and of indeterminable gain.

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The legacy of anti-institutional practices that we most readily associate with contemporary art in the West barely exists in the Chinese context; if anything, it represents a conundrum for artists who strive to maintain a critical stance while supporting the aim of mainstream acceptance. The process of reconciling these two goals—of gaining entry into hitherto closed institutions locally while at the same time maintaining an “outsider” or “anti-establishment” aesthetic or political position in the eyes of the global community—produces a tension that underlies artistic production in China, just as it does in many other developing art centers.

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View of Zheng Guogu's *Age of Empire* in process, 2008. Photo courtesy of the artist.



An unusual building being built at the foot of the mountain for Zheng Guogu's *Age of Empire*, 2009. Photo courtesy of the artist.

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The ongoing conundrum around art's autonomy—the degree to which art should be responsible to itself alone or to its own particular context and society—is a global issue left largely unresolved. As the world faces a shrinking global economy and the collapse of world financial markets, questions surrounding art's sovereignty have become all the more pressing. We are all well aware of the ineffectiveness of art criticism in the face of the market, and of the superficialities that have accompanied the art world's recent bout of lavish overspending and self-aggrandizement.¹ But statements that demonize the market or advocate a turn towards sobriety, a “return to substance,” or going back to “art making as it should be,” not only suggest an air of non-complicity, but imply that there is some clear consensus on what it is we should be returning to. By now we are well aware that art has never only been about the market or business-end strategies. The presence of commerce is not anathema to creativity, nor does its absence immediately restore art to a state of purity and innocence. Indeed, the insistence that art production should remain totally free from the market runs dangerously close to one that confines those same aesthetic practices to a space of meaningless insignificance, independent of the social and political conditions that inform and ensure its own very existence.

Rather than look to the market as culprit, we might turn instead to factors that sustain rather than misappropriate artistic production. If we recognize the art market as a subset of concerns contained within a larger entity we know as the art world, then what can be said of the concerns of the art world itself? In order to meet the demands of the market, contemporary art in China has witnessed an unprecedented ramping up of production, and this tendency has threatened outlets for critical reflection and thinking, which in turn thwarts long-term sustainability. Moreover, if the imported aesthetics that inform contemporary Chinese art—installation art, video, and new media—on the one hand trigger suspicion in official institutions and academies raised on a diet of traditional painting and socialist realism, they provide on the other hand a much-needed image of progress and modernization to cover for the government's totalitarian attitudes. Assessing art's relationship to autonomy, sovereignty, and independence in the midst of China's pronounced lack of autonomy in other spheres of life—namely, certain political and social freedoms and values we associate with civil society—becomes entangled not only in social and political concerns, but in increasingly present economic ones. On the surface it would appear that support for contemporary art in China has reached new heights, proven by the influx of art fairs, exhibitions in state-run institutions, and even new forms of government funding.² But the spirit that underlies these ventures remains solidly aimed at capital gain, market interests, and the business end of art production, with little, if any evidence of support for activities outside this sphere. Whatever subversive tendencies that might remain from earlier periods is quietly tolerated, but more often commercially packaged or even neutralized by the government's apparently open stance on contemporary art—a position only leveraged by certain individuals when it is deemed convenient (read profitable) or when it follows the prevailing political wind.

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Xijing Olympics, opening ceremony, 2008. The Xijing Men. Photo courtesy of the artists.

In his essay “The Politics of Installation,” published in this journal, Boris Groys reminds us that although artworks cannot escape their commodity status, they are also not expressly made for buyers and collectors; in other words, the multitude of art biennials, art fairs, and major blockbuster exhibitions has generated an “art public” in which the typical viewer is someone who rarely views the work as a commodity. For Groys, this is evidence that the art system is “on its way to becoming part of the very mass culture that it has for so long sought to observe and analyze from a distance.”³ Such an assessment may hold true for the bulk of the Western art world, but carries less weight in China or in many non-Western regions where contemporary art is still far from being a constitutive element of mass culture. Despite growing numbers of visitors to museums and arts districts in China, contemporary art remains mostly unrecognized by mainstream culture, only haltingly accepted into government-run institutions, absent from the average university art department, and virtually unknown to the average citizen. These truths are often forgotten, especially when one’s time is spent sealed within the gallery-filled espresso culture of the urban contemporary art world. However, there is a sense that this is all about to change, and this makes it all the more important to pay attention to how the groundwork is laid for creative and aesthetic practices that operate apart from, away from, or in resistance to the dominant spheres of

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commercialism surrounding them. The phenomenon of self-contained “art zones” such as Beijing’s 798 Art Zone are symptomatic of both a desire to segregate art from regular life and an effort to enhance its marketability by referencing its own legacy of success. In the absence of any counterpoint with which to understand this activity, contemporary art continues to be treated explicitly as a form of entertainment, a photo backdrop, or a moneymaking scheme for the burgeoning middle and upper classes. Media attention, private sponsorship, corporate ventures, and personal museums do little to counteract a growing perception that equates contemporary art with investment and market value.

The most enduring dilemma lies in the government’s own directives, which consciously limit art’s interactions with the rest of society. Lumped together into the amorphous designation of “creative industries” and isolated within “creative industry zones,” contemporary art has found itself walled off in places that both contain art and impose a sense of hermeticism. The rapid territorial expansion of contemporary art in Beijing in particular has not only stimulated studio-bound, market-oriented artistic practices, but has further limited site-specific practices to being responses to physical sites at the expense of social or political ones. This radicalization of space serves as a constant reminder of the contested nature of public space in China, and of a lurking authoritarian presence that seeks to control artistic as well as personal participation in the creation of everyday culture.

Distinguishing art from the rest of social life serves the interests of certain groups more than others. Keeping art at a safe distance from (or above) meaningful political engagement and in limited contact with society perpetuates its dependence on status quo economic conditions and social structures, no matter how radical its aesthetics might appear. While the Western appetite for “resistance” has a tendency to cast all art production in China as oppositional or “anti-regime,” this is rarely the case. It may be true that in the absence of meaningful civil society, political society encompasses everything, but by the same token this stimulates an utter indifference with regard to politics itself. Contemporary art in China is plagued by the absence of politics and worse, by the banalization of it. What we need are models that do more than critique the commercial atmosphere surrounding art (while operating from a position of safety) — models that engage meaningfully with the social determinants of production that shape and form art in the first place, asking not what is made, but who makes it, for whom, and under what conditions.⁴



Xijing Olympics, 2008. Tsuyoshi Ozawa during competition. *The Xijing Men*. Photo courtesy of the artists.

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Contemporary art throughout China today suffers from being cut off from both the traditions of the past and the life of the present. Attempting to untangle the knot of aesthetic autonomy in this context only magnifies art's two perceived dead-ends: autonomous irrelevance or engaged complicity.⁵ The model of "engaged autonomy" that Charles Esche proposes is thus an intriguing one, suggesting a way to think of autonomy not as something that is invested in the object itself but rather as an action or a way of working.⁶ It advocates not only an active and participatory attitude, but replaces traditional top-down methods of assigning value and worth with more homespun measures of self-declared legitimacy and collective gain.

Efforts to detach contemporary art from its enclaves have already begun. Art collectives, alternative art spaces, deterritorialized social and relational practices all fit within this schema and present possible critical models for how we understand and witness the ways in which art can exert its own energy upon a given environment or social context, rather than simply emerge as its byproduct. I myself have helped initiate one such endeavor in Beijing called the Arrow Factory—a modestly sized art space where artistic production comes up against the social realities of its own immediate environment. Below I highlight two further art projects which embody possible strategies for an "engaged autonomy" that demonstrates a desire not only to create something that lies beyond the boundaries of the art world, but also to reach new, unprepared audiences.

The work of the Xijing Men is rooted in everyday life and addresses the concerns of average individuals while simultaneously embracing and shattering nationalist frameworks by collaborating across cultural and linguistic borders. Their 2008 *Xijing Olympics* project has received wide international acclaim, due in part to its availability on websites such as YouTube. Formed by Chinese artist Chen Shaoxiong, Japanese artist Tsuyoshi Ozawa, and Korean artist Gimhongsok on the premise that there exists a northern capital (Beijing), a southern capital (Nanjing), and an eastern capital (Tokyo), but no western capital as of yet, The Xijing Men have taken it upon themselves to explore the option of making one. Collectively hailing from the fictional place of Xijing, their fixed attitudes towards nationhood and cultural or regional identities are overshadowed by values of plurality, multiplicity, and open-ended experimentation from the very start. Collaboration between these three artists from three different Asian countries conjures complicated notions of Asian-ness while offering a discourse centered less on the homogenizing forces of globalization than on the celebration of difference. One key to understanding the Xijing Men can be found in their method of communication. Without a common verbal language, the artists rely instead upon a mixture of broken English, physical gestures, hand-drawn sketches, and occasional handwriting (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans all share an understanding of Chinese characters) to convey their ideas to one another. Even though they hail from different cultural background, the equalizing factor is language, with each from the very start working outside his 'zone of comfort' linguistically.

Staged in August 2008 during the official Beijing Olympic Games, *Xijing Olympics* presented a humorous yet provocative take on the unabashedly spectacular Olympics mania that gripped China last summer. In the outskirts of Beijing, the artist group carried out their own version, casting themselves as "athletes" and their family and friends as "audience." Drawing from everyday objects and experiences—kicking watermelons instead of soccer balls, marathon napping, giving massages with boxing gloves, and other absurdities such as a three-way table tennis match using shoes as paddles—their version mocked the seriousness and solemnity with which the Chinese government (and by association, the Chinese public) treated the glitzy theatrics of the real Beijing Games. The Xijing Men replaced themes of winning, success, and public entertainment with modesty, simplicity, and failure. If the Games themselves constituted the supreme performance of Chinese national pride under the auspices of international diplomacy (never mind the subtext of China's own eager aspirations to secure its position among the global superpowers), then the Xijing Olympics represented a caricature of these attitudes in which humor, playfulness, and aimlessness are injected into the highly scripted and ceremonial tone of the official games. Their antics worked to present a kind of informal locality to offset the trope of national spectacle, and in the process identified more directly with the concerns of average citizens, whose struggles to negotiate the massive transformations enveloping their way of life go largely unnoticed. The low-tech theatrics of the *Xijing Olympics* reflected a form of practice that is refreshingly human-scaled and attuned

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to the proximity of individuals rather than traditional groupings conditioned by notions of the “mass” and the “people.”



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Xijing Olympics, 2008. Table Tennis Competition. The Xijing Men. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Continuing the logic of game-playing, artist Zheng Guogu’s ambitious *Age of Empire* (2001–) is part land art, part playground, and part social experiment. Inspired by the computer game series *Age of Empires*, in which players control historical world civilizations, Zheng is gradually transforming an agricultural area on the outskirts of Yangjiang city into a real-world replica of the game’s virtual community. It began in 2000, when a friend gave him a tip on some cheap land in the outskirts of the city, after which he soon bought up 5000 sq m. By 2005 he had acquired more neighboring plots to arrive at 20,000 sq m, which has today grown to 40,000 sq m (approximately 10 acres) and counting. Zheng has since replaced the existing landscape with an entirely new one that includes hills and mountains and a small village area, all surrounded by a stone wall.

Age of Empire is a project that does not concern itself with making a finished artwork—to date not a single building has been completed—rather, it functions as an exercise in turning the fictional into reality, or, more accurately, as an experiment in the social process of making itself. For many contemporary artists in China, art is viewed as a profession—treated as an occupation rather than a way of life. The prescribed categories of artist, calligrapher, or architect are all designations that Zheng disavows and slowly works to dissolve. Although ostensibly meant to house an artist studio, a small museum, and living and entertainment quarters, the real achievement of *Age of Empire* lies in its integration of life and art. As Zheng recreates his made-up game on real land, he faces real-world concerns about securing money,

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building rights, and the location of materials. Thus the sleepy coastal town of Yangjiang—small by Chinese standards, with a population of some 2 million—comes to stand as a microcosm for survival: underneath lurks a contested ground, a community full of underground systems and partial struggles that inform everyday life, and, by association, Zheng’s diverse practice.



View of Zheng Guogu’s *Age of Empire* site, 2008. Photo courtesy of the artist.

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Though his work deals with familiar themes of consumerism and tropes of transformation, he is also content to show us that which is constant and unchanging—a glimpse into the steady pace of life in his hometown of Yangjiang in the southern province of Guangdong. As Zheng knowingly acquired his land through illegal means (though he exchanged money and signed agreements with all the farmers he bought from, this land was legally not theirs to sell, as all land in China belongs to the state), which essentially means that local building officials can give him constant headaches for building on it and potentially obstruct the whole enterprise. Thus Zheng’s daily activities have quickly become consumed by wining, dining, and bribing the local officials in efforts to curry favor, maintain good relations, and negotiate with the proper channels. In making *Age of Empire*, he cooperates with the system in order to transcend it, becoming complicit yet independent at the same time. As Zheng says, “I live here and drink with my friends all day. I can let them know the traces of an artist. I can talk about art to a fishmonger today, to a man eating abalone tomorrow. Or I can talk to the boss of a snack bar.” His family, friends, objects, experiences, social interactions, and recreational activities—nearly everything in his life and surroundings—embed themselves and leave traces in his art. From this stable position, a certain sense of freedom enables Zheng to take risks that transcend the usual boundaries of art. In this sense, Zheng Guogu presents us with a sort of hypothesis: if real life can become art once it enters the world of art—by means of galleries, museums, and exhibitions—then what are the ways in which art can be returned to become a part of one’s everyday existence?

Projects like *Age of Empire* and the work of the Xijing Men will continue to operate spontaneously with no fixed timeframe, set limits, or defined outcome. Zheng has calculated a means of living his art through his daily actions, calling into question our awareness of our own practices as artists, critics, curators, historians, and audience members—practices that define the boundaries of the art world in the first place. Like Zheng talking to the man eating abalone, or to the fishmonger, we are witnessing the art world’s traditional borders becoming indivisible from those of the social order it is inclined to merely portray. As Zheng says, “The artist is around them, and he does leave a trace. It’s a gradual process to see the effect of that.”⁷ The question becomes whether this trace is deemed immanent in the utopian processes we attribute

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to art.

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[1](#) For more on the state of contemporary art criticism in China, see my text “Critical Horizons: On Art Criticism in China,” *Diaalogues*, Asia Art Archive Online Newsletter, (December 2008), [→](#).

[2](#) By “government funding” I refer to the Beijing Culture and Development Fund’s establishment of the Art Beijing Fund, a fund of 5 million Chinese yuan (roughly 732,000 US dollars) which was recently put to use sponsoring galleries to participate in the Art Beijing art fair.

[3](#) Boris Groys, “Politics of Installation,” *e-flux journal*, no. 2 (January 2009), [→](#).

[4](#) For more on issues of production, see my book *In Production Mode: Contemporary Art in China*, [Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Books, (in cooperation with CCAA), 2008].

[5](#) Charles Esche, Foreword, *Afterall Journal*, no. 11 (2006).

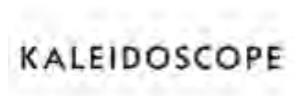
[6](#) Ibid.

[7](#) Zheng Guogu, interview by Hu Fang, *Jumping out of Three Dimensions, Staying Outside Five Elements*. Guangzhou: Vitamin Creative Space, 2007. (unpaginated)

Pauline J. Yao is an independent curator and scholar based in Beijing and San Francisco. Born in the U.S., she came to China in the early 1990s to study Chinese and then returned to the States and received her M.A. degree in East Asian Studies and Art History at the University of Chicago. For five years she worked as Assistant Curator of Chinese Art at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco during which time she curated exhibitions of modern and contemporary art, published her writings in various magazines, catalogues and journals, taught courses in the Graduate Program at the California College of the Arts, and frequently traveled to China for independent research. In 2006 she received a Fulbright Grant and relocated to Beijing. In 2007 she received the inaugural CCAA Art Critic Award and subsequently published *In Production Mode: Contemporary Art in China* (2008). She sits on the editorial board of *Yishu Art Journal* and *Contemporary Art and Investment*

(当代艺术与投资)

magazine and helped co-found the storefront art space the Arrow Factory in Beijing in 2008. Yao is one of four curators of the upcoming 2009 Shenzhen Hong Kong Architecture and Urbanism Bi-city Biennale.



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Breaking Forecast

ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, BEIJING, CHINA



Comprising eight artists under 40, 'Breaking Forecast' – which has the helpful, if grammatically incorrect, subtitle, '8 Key Figures of China's New Generation Artists' – marks the second anniversary of the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing's 798 district. While the UCCA's inaugural exhibition in October 2008 ('85 New Wave') looked back, seeking to both provide an overview of contemporary Chinese art and to pin down a starting-point, 'Breaking Forecast' looks to the future.

So, is the forecast bright? Well, yes and no. While the survey is, overall, frequently incoherent, it doesn't aim for coherency – co-curator (and Ullens Director) Jérôme Sans claims that it is 'a group exhibition of solo shows'. This is a reasonable aim given the non-profit art centre's expansive 6,000-square-metre space, though an inconsistency in approach means that some weak work is afforded a lot of space and vice-versa.

frieze

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Much of the work here favours large-scale technical trickery over modesty, pomposity over the most basic arguments for scale (it's little surprise that around half of the artists shown have been collected by Charles Saatchi). 'Breaking Forecast' opens with husband-and-wife duo Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's *A Moment of Clarity* (2009), a screen and series of fans that blows an impressive two-metre-wide smoke ring along the long space towards the entrance. The billowing ring is finally dispersed by a mechanized, windmilling broom. A similar taste for one-liners is at work in Madeln's *Calm* (2009), in which a neat, room-sized rectangle of rubble slowly undulates, as though it were breathing.

Sun and Peng also present *Tomorrow* (2006) which comprises four waxwork figures that resemble the complete (though seriously ageing) Beatles line-up. At the 2006 Liverpool Biennial these figures were dumped into the city's harbour, before complaints led to them being quickly fished out. Video documentation of this earlier work is presented at the UCCA, alongside the figures, who lean in the corner. Despite their apparent disregard for subtlety, Sun and Peng certainly have a knack for audience-baiting work – I wonder what they will come up with for next year's Sydney Biennial (let's hope it doesn't have anything to do with INXS).



Two of the other artists deal – fairly unconvincingly – with translations. There are several works from Liu Wei's 2006 'As Long as I See It' series (Liu is also represented here with the awful *W-IOW*, 2009, a composite of landmarks made entirely from stitched dog-chews), in which a sofa and an industrial work-surface are sliced through according to what can be seen in a closely cropped Polaroid of the objects. Close by, Madeln's *To See is an Obstacle* is a 22-metre-long rainbow-hued spine of thin columns that represents an 'unknown statistical chart'. (Madeln is the new pseudonym of Xu Zhen, by which all of his post-November 2009 work will be made under.)

frieze



An earlier work of Xu's (made under his own name), *Global peace is the mission of this country* (2009), is also included, and comprises the audio file of the title phrase – taken, apparently, from a clip of politicians discussing the Middle East – etched into rusted metal. Perhaps best known for *Constellation* (2006), a dark room of twinkling computers and household appliances shown at the 2009 Venice Biennale, Xu is an interesting artist, though is ill-served by a poor selection in 'Breaking Forecast'.



Though unfortunately not showing for most of the time when I visited, much more impressive is a large presentation of Yang Fudong's *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith* (2009), nine black and white 35mm films showing simultaneously – an installation that the artist has referred to as 'peripheral cinema'.



The UCCA's vast central space is dominated by *All Those Whom I Have Forgotten* (2009), a black waterfall falling from a series of pumps just below the ceiling, by Qiu Zhijie (who had a solo show here last spring). The deluge falls into a murky pool below, staining the back wall – on which the artist had hand-painted hundreds of lines of calligraphy – and eventually blacking out the text with 25 tonnes of inky water. Qiu is perhaps best-known for his early text-based pieces, such as *Copying Lanting Qu One Thousand Times* (1990–7) – that is, work that *All Those Whom I Have Forgotten* scales up without developing on. Is this what happens when studio spaces start to match museums in square footage?

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Better is *The Birth of RMB City* by Cao Fei, the youngest artist here: inside a fibreglass mountain -- angled and cartoonish -- pastoral electronica burbles, accompanying footage from Cao's ongoing 'RMB City' project. In the *Second Life*-style game, the roaming viewpoint cuts between rusting versions of iconic buildings in Beijing -- Rem Koolhaas' still unfinished CCTV tower, the Bird's Nest -- placed higgledy-piggledy on a small mountain.



Also engaging with China's recent built history is Zheng Guogu's *Face of Empire* (2009), a roofless white pavilion on a scrubby gravel garden of shrubs and boulders. The structure is a replica of his ongoing 'Age of Empire' project (2004--), a working village built on 20,000-square metres of land in the suburbs of his hometown of Yangjiang. 'Empire' is, in effect, a permanent settlement unsanctioned by the state, a satirical version of modern China that is being built by some 100 workers. (Zheng claims that the unfinished houses are actually skeletons; the village will ultimately be covered over to become an underground community.) Large sliding screens show photo-realistic rural scenes from the unfinished village. Both Cao and Zheng critically reflect -- in very different ways -- on present-day China as a work-in-progress. Most interesting, for me, is the way in which their ongoing projects are situated in the ungovernable margins: online or built in semi-secret.

Sam Thorne

Hanru, Hou. «Living With (in) the Urban Fiction (Notes on Urbanization and Art in Post-Olympic China)»,
Yishu / Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art, Volume 8, Number 3, May/June 2009, 2010.



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Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu on
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Xu Zhen's Impossible is Nothing

Conversations with Wang Qingsong,
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The Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester

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US\$12.00 NT\$350.00

Zheng Guogu, *Empire*, 2008,
video still. Courtesy of Vitamin
Creative Space, Guangzhou.



most extravagant and spectacular desires of the investors and that ironically reflects the image and the actual process of the making of the official utopia. It becomes a testing ground for all kinds of intentions by those who are involved with the adventure.

Living in Yangjiang, a "second tier" city in the province of Guangdong, Zheng Guogu, a genuine multitasking provocateur, and his friends in the Yangjiang Group, have enjoyed the absolute freedom offered by this city in an

endless and uncontrolled transition from an agricultural township to a modern industrial and trading urban city. Profiting from the ambiguity of regulation and ideological emptiness that prevails in most of the country located outside of the main political centres, they entirely liberate their creativity to carry out outrageous and inventive actions as their artistic production. Their now-famous installations and performances offered chaotic and exciting solutions to challenging questions such as the relationship between high and low art, the elitist and the popular, criticality and playfulness, tradition and modernity, urbanity and ruralness, globalism and the vernacular. They have now come up with an incredibly audacious and provocative project, *Age of Empires* (2008), an immense, ongoing private colony in the outskirts of the city on a large piece of land that the artist purchased from farmers. Without any official permission, Zheng Guogu, inspired by the online war game *Age of Empire*, is designing and constructing a whole complex of experimental buildings to create a physically tangible and useful utopia, a personal empire. The fact that this project is being carried out with complicated negotiations regarding its legality, and that it unfolds and evolves over a long period of time towards an uncertain future, is particularly interesting.

Eventually, today, in the age of great transition, the state power of contemporary China is making all efforts to impose and maintain its control through promoting a spectacular but profoundly ambivalent urban fiction of a "modernized" society, or a new, post- and pro-capitalist utopia. Artists living in such a context have to struggle with their own contradictory state of being, at once benefiting from the material progress and suffering from the reduction of critical social engagement. They now have to come up with their own versions of utopia that can continuously allow them to maintain a real reason for the existence of their artistic endeavours. Zheng Guogu's project, among others, stands as a permanent checking mechanism that challenges the Chinese legal, social, economic, cultural, and political systems, shows a significant example of such an endless struggle. China is going through a radical massive change. And contemporary art activity, as shown in this extraordinary project, has to turn itself into a permanent and open laboratory to negotiate with massive change.

Notes

¹ Jin Jiangbo, *Retreat*, 2008, self-published catalogue, 9.

² Huang Xiaopeng's statement on the work. (unpublished).

«PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES», 摘自文《口头禅，老三篇——陈舸与郑国谷的东拉西扯（上）》文/陈舸，来自杂志，《东方艺术 大家，Master Oriental Art, April, 2009, pp.48-53.



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48 CONVERSATIONS

PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES

口头禅, 老三篇

——陈舸与郑国谷的东拉西扯 (上)

文/陈舸

外同其尘, 内守其真——过去篇

「环城东路是阳江七十年代当时的主要街道, 武装部、消防队等重要机构就在这条路上。路边还有一个“猪村”, 敬老院就在里面, 有口水井, 附近的居民到那挑水吃。当时还是泥路, 出太阳时烟尘扑面, 一下雨路面就坑坑洼洼。郑国谷小时候所住的房子, 处于路边一个凹地, 挨着路面有一个落差, 要走几级台阶才来到街上。」

陈舸(诗人): 当时你们家是我们常去的地方, 它给我留下的印象是比较幽暗。

郑国谷: 那是个奇怪的房子, 我每个晚上都做梦, 看见很多东西。

每天像生病一样, 有时会看见蜘蛛网, 云, 或者掉进很深的洞里。有一次夜里, 我醒过来, 在二楼的楼梯口看见一头牛, 吓得大叫: 妈! 牛! 有头牛在楼上! 我妈安慰我, 快睡吧, 别做梦了, 牛怎么会上楼梯呢? 原来那是堆在那里盖着雨衣, 放在楼梯口喂猪的几包糠。幻觉(笑)。那时我家里还养猪呢。

陈舸: 那是一栋卡夫卡式的房子, 我还记得院子和天台上种着很多植物……

郑国谷: 菊花, 九里香, 雀梅, 柚子树, 灯笼椒, 芍药。

陈舸: 植物好像是这个星球的轴心, 它们后来成了你作品的一个重要元素, 我在诗里也频频提及它们, 除了个人的喜爱, 我觉得也是有地缘的原因, 阳江的植物资源丰富, 这座县城的

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- 下得从志堂名
- 8 (杂志牌 2008, 寒夏兄弟?) 华尔街放
- 设有乐高 郑国谷
- 9 郑国谷家卫生养猪 (网络图片)
- 10 在杨年作泥 三乘二攻期图 1892年
- 11 郑国谷我助理
- 12 上小学时的郑国谷
- 13 五·一钱皮面
- 14 郑国谷的记者
- 15 五·一钱皮面





它都被植物穿透着。

郑国谷:我较早的一个作品就是在人地上种东西。不过那不是种树,而是栽藕(笑)。鹅眼看什么都是小的,我把藕汁都淋在鹅鬃上,种藕得鹅。

陈舸:你在这栋房子生活了多少年呢?

郑国谷:差不多十几年吧。那时我父亲从部队回来,他是铁道兵,分配在木材公司做货车司机。我们住的房子叫“木材屋”,每个月要交点租金。那时没有路灯,晚上一片黑隆冬。睡觉时候经常听见“啊”的一声惨叫。

陈舸:有人掉进你梦见的洞里(笑)。

郑国谷:哈哈,是骑自行车的人真的从路上摔到我家门口。

陈舸:看来这个地形的落差也是心理上的,它似乎使你的心理出现了一个梦与现实的错位,构成了你对空间的敏感。

郑国谷:对了,你还记得路那头环城河的小桥吧?

陈舸记得,现在环城河已经覆盖了,变成了商业街和花鸟市场。

郑国谷:我还记得,上高中的时候已经有商业街的雏形了,那时候,正好是改革开放初期,我家路段已是旺铺,非常抢手,我在善医站又分了新房子,我爸妈决定把房子高价卖给一个包工头,后来包工头出了小车祸,又转卖给了另一户人,又出了一人命大事,找风水师分析,吓得我出了一身冷汗,怪不得,怪我,我还命硬,只老发恶梦,不讲这些了。噢,你还记得,环城河的水很清,我们经常去那儿用簸箕捞鱼,虾,那是用

来早午餐送粥的,有时会捞起来条大红鲤。

陈舸:哦,红鲤。现在的河里也少见。河流似乎在不断缩小,反而你现在住的家里养着很多的锦鲤。

『从街头到街尾,十分多钟就走完了。当时我们在这条街上走过无数遍,我在这里被一条大黄狗追逐过,被咬掉了鞋子,那是刚从你家里出来,而另一次,也许是在放学之后,我们在路上碰见的不是狗,而是一张五块钱的人民币,这几乎成了一个重大的事件。』

陈舸:人看到地上的钱,一般的反应就是把它捡起来,你一脚把它踩住了,然后才慢慢捡起来。

郑国谷:嗯,钞票很轻,一阵风就会把它吹跑。你在弯腰的时候它就不见了。那时看见那五块钱觉得很大张啊。

陈舸:这有点像牛的视角,它看什么东西都是放大的,那张纸币的图案一面图案是大炼钢铁的工人,一面是有挖掘机和轨道车的沸腾工地,现在已经停止流通了。你这个停顿的动作一直留在我脑子里,这仅仅是捡钱事件的戏剧性开始。

郑国谷:后来我把钱拿回家,我妈就很严肃问我这五块钱是不是真的捡来的。

陈舸:在八十年代,五块钱可不像现在这样是一张零钱了,我在回去的路上被你叫住了。

郑国谷:那时我妈的工资是28块钱,我说你看见我捡钱的,



上图从左至右
1 重庆伍子的草堂
2 Hugo Tisserand 拍的郑国谷的草堂
3 父亲是货车司机
4 陈子善行内的陈舸与陈妹
5 陈舸(左)陈妹
6 陈舸(右)陈妹
7 小时候陈舸在松树盆景的群体与局部
陈舸的草堂(以小见大)





50 CONVERSATIONS

她就让我找你来对证。

陈舸:路上捡钱变成了一场审判。哈哈。这件事有一个喜剧性的结尾。你妈最后分给了我两块钱。

郑国谷:对。我一分钱也没拿到。

陈舸:当你把这五块钱捡起来的时刻,已经触及了某些预设的东西,结果是一件真实的事变成了不可能之事。需要见证人,而我这个实际是旁观者的证人分到了其中两块钱。最后,我拿那两块钱去路口的翘翘公司买了一堆零食,我们两个分吃了。
郑国谷:当时我并不缺钱花,我妈每天给我一毛钱用作零花钱。当时我脑子里有一个想法,捡这五块钱交给我妈,也许和当时的教育有关系。还有件事让我感觉到。我捡的是五块钱的反面,你分到的是正面。

陈舸:你妈妈对你的管教还是很严格的。

郑国谷:对。我小时候不怎么会写字,我妈教我三年才上小学。



达芬奇作品(网络图片)

学。我是比别的小孩晚一年才去读小学。后来考美院附中时她给我一本达·芬奇的素描画册。我还临摹了几张,当时我觉得奇怪。很多图片没有了,是给整齐地裁剪掉的。后来我在美院在广州的书店里看到同样的一本。原来有女人裸体的地方都给我妈剪掉了。

陈舸:还有一件事我的印象很深。那应该是初中的时候,我在不同的学校读书,有很长一段时间没碰面了。有一天黄昏你和你弟弟突然来到我家,要和我交换一张五十年代的菊花邮票。那张邮票是老舍的夫人,国画家胡絮青画的,很优美。
郑国谷:这件事我有点不记得了(陷入回想)。我记得小时候喜欢集邮,别人都是一套套买的,我到了高中以后,都是整版整版买的。

陈舸:哦为什么要整版买邮票呢?

郑国谷:我觉得整版的邮票很好看。在视觉上有一种刺激和冲击……

陈舸:对这种格子式的重复图象的偏爱,也许在形式上暗示了你的《太阳照耀》、《一千个客户》等早期的摄影作品。看来有一些全新的摄影观念装进邮票格子了。你把一张摄影的因步自封变成了摄影对自身的解构和分析。我当时也比较喜欢那张菊花邮票,也忘了是从哪里来的,保存了好些年。开始不是很想换,后来你拿出一套全新的中国女排世界杯冠军的纪念邮票,那时候这个很热门啊,全国都在向女排学习,这套邮票我当时在集邮公司门市部都没买到。最后我答应和你换,也是因为你的坚持。当时你为什么那么钟情那张菊花呢?
郑国谷:不知道,过去可能是单纯的喜欢,现在看回去,交换的是未来。





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郑国谷:有时我去花鸟市场买鱼,碰到喜欢的就买回来了。这几幅画有一幅我的作品,其它是搞艺术的朋友的作品,是像和你换邮票一样换来的。家除了可以睡觉和吃饭,也是一个博物馆。有时你去旅行,会带一些东西回来,都可以放进去。这也是我在和沙业亚·何赞他们搞建筑设计时的一个理念。你可以不断在里面添置东西,它是开放的,不固定的。

『郑国谷的父亲从看不见的房间里走了出来,我们打了一个招呼。他参加了一个民间粤剧团,晚上在中山公园有演出,要去准备排练。郑国谷说他父亲的家族以前是走江湖的。他会做手工,剧团里有些乐器、音箱就是他做的。从一个圆形门洞进入工作室,墙上和架上是一些未完成的作品。』

陈舸:墙上那画好像是再锈两千年这个系列的。

郑国谷:是的。

陈舸:这个系列的演变比较有意思,最早的时候是黄铜铸造的实心可乐瓶,一个装置作品,《公元两千年,再锈两千年》。

郑国谷:后来还做了各种各样的药瓶、酒瓶、洗发水瓶,都是实心铁铸的,足够锈上两千年了。

陈舸:现在是在平面场景上的文字刺绣和涂抹,“锈”和“绣”之间是个文字游戏,但在这个过程中,空间和观念已经发生了质变。

郑国谷:我的兴趣是不断在变化的,想法和作品也是,但其中还是有脉络可寻,任何东西都是有蛛丝马迹的,“锈”和“绣”都是为了另一个“秀”。

陈舸:我看你的作品,有时就像中国套盒,一个套着一个,从

你与陈舸、陈劭雄参与侯瀚如在威尼斯双年展的“紧急地带”而组织策划的集体作品《改变之书(广东快车)》到你个人后来延伸的《易经再易》,都表现了你对矛盾对立和变化衍生敏锐。

『经过由两套房子拼接的工作室,来到了天台。郑国谷把这个空置的公寓楼的天顶变成了一个结构复杂的装置,在走道右边,挨着天台边缘,有一个蓄有十多吨水的升高了的水池,十来条色彩斑斓或者纯色的,肥的锦鲤,正在水里缓慢地挪移着,它们并未意识到是在几十米的高空里潜游,对于鱼来说,似乎位置并不重要,有水就行。』

陈舸:这几年你一直热衷于饲养锦鲤,而且不是普通的,有些是比较名贵的品种,看得我眼花缭乱,哦,这条纯乌鲤的简直像只小猪。

郑国谷:锦鲤的色彩和体形让我觉得愉悦。锦鲤在池子里游的时候,更像目前中国的艺术生态,特别是喂饲料的时候,啧啧……我有几条锦鲤还是参加过锦鲤大赛的,有证书和奖杯,你说小猪就对了,这是标准形容锦鲤体形的,我2006年第一次参加中国锦鲤大赛,看见一米多长的锦鲤惊讶地说了句“猪”。

陈舸:这个设计成条带状的狭长的池子,水清得像山里的溪流,鱼鳞都看得很清晰。

郑国谷:我想在楼顶过水乡的生活,还有句话叫“水至清则无鱼”,我这里是水越清鱼越多,这主要是靠里面的循环系统,将池废物、腐烂的东西过滤清理掉,鱼才能健康生长,要达到最佳状态,循环系统甚至要做到和水池一比一,我这里有三个循环系统,大概是鱼池总面积的三分之一。



从左至右: 1 我如何在楼顶过水乡的生活 2 第八届锦鲤大赛 50 部其它类冠军 3 锦 (网络图片) 4 中国锦鲤大赛的奖杯与奖牌

陈舸:现在你几乎是一个循环系统专家了。

郑国谷:循环系统很重要啊。鱼,人,社会,艺术以及各个领域都是这样。要不断从各自的生态系统里清除一些东西,才有生机。

陈舸:从最初在鱼缸里养,你的锦鲤规模约来越大了,不止在数量上,也在个头上。品种也越来越稀奇,觉得你对这种观赏鱼达到了迷恋的程度。应该是受你的影响,身边很多朋友都做了水池养锦鲤。

郑国谷:它也是我做建筑设计的一部分。一开始是觉得锦鲤很可爱,生动。养下去觉得这种鱼实在是神奇的东西。它们不停地在水里游动,变化,看着会让我进入一种很松弛、飘忽的状态,好像带来了创造力和灵感。我身边有些朋友已经离不开锦鲤了,锦鲤改变了阳江一些人的生活。当时,真没想到。

陈舸:对一些事物的专注和痴迷,有时会成为一种通道,最后的摆脱似乎不重要了,因为边界已经被打破。我在写作时也写过类似的体验。

「穿过木制的曲径、小桥、梯级和亭台,在一个小玻璃房子里,可以看见凸起的圆塔——采光井,在下面可以

望见它的圆形截面和云——成排的竹子在摇晃,几株嶙峋的黑骨茶旁边,杜鹃花开得正浓,地面铺满了小麻石,和下午的碎光混在一起。」

陈舸:商品楼的天顶一般是空置的,你把这里变成了一个大面积的,有小桥,流水,山石的园林,有一种空中花园的意味。在大同小异的楼房之间,这片景观实际上是怪异和非法的,是对荒芜的公共空间的侵犯。

郑国谷:天顶是公共的,到此为止的地方,可以来望望风,不允许再施工建筑,但可以和销售部私下里交易。这种千篇一律的商品楼反而提供了改造的机会啊,当然这是有压力的,要搞掂许多部门。

陈舸:单是要载这么多水,石头,就是很大的物理压力,还有来自邻居的联合阻挠,城建规划的虎视眈眈,你常说这是「违章建筑」。

郑国谷:但也可以慢慢合法化。

陈舸:但还有邻居联合上书告你的状。

郑国谷:因为我拆除了很多又搬来很多东西,让他们很不安。不过现在平息了。现在的城市规划,要求你一条街的建筑场面是一样的,结果那些房子看起来都是雷同。当时我们(一美)做的几个建筑,就开始阳江的房子革命了。现在我没改变这商品房的外观,它和整体还是相安无事,但内部已经全部被打通改造过了。朋友们来我家的感觉是,到了天堂,一出门门口,又回到了现实。

陈舸:这等于是把内部翻转成了外部,一种迂回曲折而又激烈的方式。这种空间斗争,以更为复杂的形式,从室内又发展到了广阔的乡野,你的帝国时代那里。

郑国谷:我叫它做新知识分子上山下乡,又到了另一个天堂,或者是按现在的讲法是城乡一体化。但现实是,城市救农村,和谐。(待续)



从左至右: 1 《七套商品房》一、二层 2 室内一景 3 圆形通道 4 客房

来自文章《PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES-CHEN GE AND ZHENG GUO GU'S RAMBLE》, 口头禅, 老三篇——陈舸喻郑国谷的东拉西扯(下)》文_陈舸, Master Oriental Art, June, 2009, pp.50-55. 来自杂志:《大家 东方艺术》上半月



Galerie
Chantal Crousel





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PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES —CHEN GE AND ZHENG GUOGU'S RAMBLE

口头禅, 老三篇 ——陈舸与郑国谷的东拉西扯(下)

文/陈舸

天地无心而作——现在篇

『阳江组的工作室位于万福路37号,就在望岭山脚下,也是这条宽阔,平静的老街的末端。种在路边的美国杉、凤尾葵、白玉兰,已经高大婆娑。这里原来是陈再焱开的凝碧轩画廊。现在成了凝碧轩当代艺术机构,也是阳江组的工作室。电视广播大学就在前面,一下课,夜色里人流汹涌而过,让街道变得混浊起来,很快,又恢复了原来的清冷,在昏黄的路灯光里,可以看见路面参差的落叶。』

陈舸:你们阳江组是怎样开始合作的呢?

郑国谷:大概是2001年,我当时开始做千禧聊神,想使用国画的形式,就去找人装裱。找到阿炎这里。后来,又碰到了常在这里出现的孙庆麟。他是个书法爱好者,经常写大字(对

联)。喝到早晨6点钟,去公园和那些老头用水在地上比划,也知道了书法在中国体制内的局限。我们觉得书法可以有别的意思。在一起喝酒写字,做作品,慢慢就形成了阳江组的东西。有点曲折离奇,但也是天意。

陈舸:我记得阳江组的第一次展览《你去看书法,还是在鲁毅的世界书店》

郑国谷:那是我们第一次合作,有一些还是喝醉了酒之前特放开。后来又去上海做了展览。

陈舸:当时本地有些书法家去看了,他们有点不屑,说是一帮也有人觉的很好玩。原来书法可以是这样的,这意味着有些颠覆性的东西在里面。

郑国谷:我们当时觉得可以将更多有趣的,新鲜的内容放进去。你看很多人写书法就抄一首唐诗宋词,都有路数跟



来自文章《PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES-CHEN GE AND ZHENG GUO GU'S RAMBLE》，口头禅，老三篇——陈舸喻郑国谷的东拉西扯（下）》文_陈舸，Master Oriental Art, June, 2009, pp.50-55. 来自杂志：《大家 东方艺术》 上半月



1 浙江组外框
2 成型
3、4 阳江组室内一景

「什么不可以写写现在发生的事情呢？那些书法把自己装在一个盒子里，和当今的生活是很隔的，他们不去看书法，也可以去撞撞血压嘛。」

陈舸：像“万吨巨轮撞毁了码头”，“莱温斯基上法庭”等都是来自报纸或日常的内容。你们将悬空的书法放到了地上，进行了展览，即兴的书写，正如你所说的书法之外的书法——“平民和俗层的书写”。从这一点上它具有意识形态，类似于本雅明的“印迹”，有很强的阶级斗争意味。它有当代的面貌，实际上也是返朴归真。因为古人就是这样写字的。你会发现一张书法其实就是一张药方。后来，你们书法小组在水墨上的实践

一发不可收拾，我看着你们将书法做成了一块蜡，一个池塘，和芭蕉树交织出现在美术馆里，甚至变成了沙发。

郑国谷：现在横冲直撞，跳楼价，博彩（鼠牛虎龙蛇，马羊猴鸡狗猪）都在我们的书法和水墨里出现了。

【我和郑国谷、陈再炎、孙庆麟围着一张水浸木茶几（实际是一截保留着原来纹理、充满孔隙的，坚硬，黑色页岩般的木头）喝茶，一堵木板墙上层层叠叠粘帖着他们平时泼墨挥毫的剩余物，白墙悬挂着几条长长的条幅，不是宣纸，而是透明的塑料薄膜，上面有些字是用绿色和橙色的涂料写出来的。还有几张是郑国谷装裱成卷轴形式的，由文字片断、各种符号、几何图形和色块组成的作品。】

陈舸：我有一次看阿麟铺纸在地上写字，写得弹跳起来，比海鲜还生猛。真神！

郑国谷：是一个天才在书写。

孙庆麟：我写字常常会这样，写得痛快的时候，浑身就像有股气在鼓荡。

郑国谷：他和阿炎有一次喝酒之后脱光了衣服，在地上狂写（笑），可以天天对酒当歌，人生几何。慢慢也形成了我们现

《蟹时聚会》 2006年

来自文章《PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES-CHEN GE AND ZHENG GUO GU'S RAMBLE》，口头禅，老三篇——陈舸喻郑国谷的东拉西扯（下）文_陈舸，Master Oriental Art, June, 2009, pp.50-55. 来自杂志：《大家 东方艺术》 上半月



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在旷日持久的作品《醒时墨在》。就是酒醒了墨（书法）还在，书法也是记忆的提款机。

陈舸：阿麟的气场比较厉害。书法的身体性在你这里出现了（指着墙上的挂轴），在塑料薄膜上写字有什么感觉呢？

孙庆麟：和在宣纸上很不一样，没有什么阻碍，觉得很爽快。新华扫其耻，无理其耻也（阳江话）。

陈舸：我看你们这几张薄膜书法酣畅淋漓，字如龙蛇。材料媒介会影响形式，形成创作的动机，甚至会突出成为作品本身的主题。我十年前和阿炎合作在对面开画廊的时候，看他写字注重运笔和气的生动，这些在你们现在看起来有些混杂的作品里还存在吗？

陈再炎：我觉得这些审美性的东西本质上是存在的，只不过换了一种面目，更加率性和本真，贴近现在的生存环境。

郑国谷：……阳江三人（杀人）组，十步杀一人，千里不留痕。陈舸，陈再炎，孙庆麟：哈哈哈，哈哈哈……

天上天上来，海里海里去——未来篇

【帝国时代位于阳江城郊，开车大约十多分钟就到。2001年，郑国谷从村民手里购买了五千平方米的地，开始构造一个虚拟游戏的现实版本，一个在复杂地形上庞大的建筑工程。最初用来圈地的，花岗岩石砌的墙还在那里，就像游戏里一样，为了扩张的需要，里里拆了好几次，但游戏里拆墙推倒从来不用花钱，现实不一样，所有投入帝国银行的钱，已失去了连续性，成了在灌木、芒草和泥堆里偶露棱角的灰白障碍物。过一个有点窄小的，倾斜的入口，我们已置身于这个帝国的内部。】

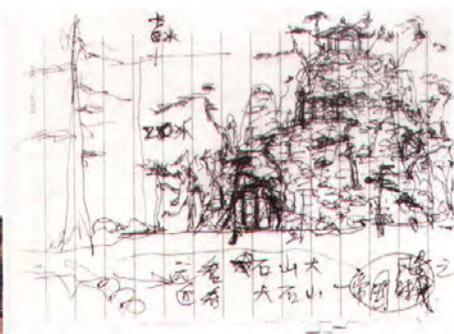
陈舸：去年从深山野岭大规模移植的这批松树，能成活吗？我看有一些针叶已经在转绿了，很花钱吧。

郑国谷：大概有三四成估计。这些野生山松要适应这里的环境。去年的蔗格比台风很凶猛，又毁掉了一些，特别是那



未完成的《帝国时代的风暴》 陈舸 2009

来自文章《PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES-CHEN GE AND ZHENG GUO GU'S RAMBLE》, 口头禅, 老三篇——陈舸喻郑国谷的东拉西扯(下)》文_陈舸, Master Oriental Art, June, 2009, pp.50-55. 来自杂志:《大家 东方艺术》 上半月



从右至左
1. 山西大同的晋华
2. 还有大石山——记看右山人的草图

山上“原始森林”区域，挺花钱的。“谢谢”，刚学的一句口头禅，它让我想起和皮力做展览为钱而发愁的时候的一句广东话“无散架呀”。

陈舸：你对移植很有兴趣，也精于此道。你曾经让松树短暂地生活在广东美术馆的外墙，也是去年，你把一个生产车间整体搬到了北京，在那正常生产了半个月，当然，这是一个恶作剧……

郑国谷：那个作品叫《加工工厂》，车间是一个叫“金中伟”的工厂的，生产一次性眼科的手术刀，我还做了四个和真人一样大的工人在里面，你知道生产那种精密部件，工人有时是一动不动的，结果看展览的人都分不出来，王功新还指着其中一个开他儿子的玩笑，叫叔叔好！

陈舸：乾坤大挪移，哈哈。这棵罗汉松看起来像个俊俏的男孩，这种树长的很慢，有这样相大的尺寸和高度真不容易呢，郑国谷：花了不少钱买回来的，是日本海岛罗汉松，直径有

五六十分公分，大概长了几百年，千年松，万年柏嘛。

陈舸：这块地盘到现在又扩张了不少吧？

郑国谷：对，这几年又陆续买了。嗯，像搞收藏一样，现在有四万多平方吧，我最近还把旁边一块地买下来了，打算在那做一个奇观美术馆。

陈舸：哦，一块拼凑的土地，你不收藏邮票了，收藏土地，这个工程好像没有尽头……它陷入了自身的膨胀和幻想里。

郑国谷：从卫星图片上看我这里，也只有邮票那么大，我也不知道它哪一天会完成，结果怎样都不重要，该往哪走往哪走，只有不停地做下去，在做的过程里会有很多新的想法，人有想象力，这里的能量是惊人的，只要把钱扔进去，总会长出石头、池塘、房子、山溪，还有花草树木，河流，大石山。

陈舸：诗人帕斯就说过，从想象力里诞生了树木、房子和云彩……



小展览
1. 北京 展览现场 2009年 北京
2. 陈舸喻郑国谷



54 CONVERSATIONS

『移形换景，帝国时代的轮廓随着坡地的高低起伏，一层层地呈现出来。在右侧较远的空地有一座塔楼，整个四层的框架是倾斜的，让人怀疑是对比萨斜塔的戏仿。我们脚下是一道几米深的沟壑，通向前面的池塘。沟里交错堆垒着巨大的石头，重几十吨的石头。这些被磨得圆滑的，紧湊而又貌合神离的蛮石，让这道裂口呈现出压缩的记忆形态。』

陈舸：在你的规划里，这石头沟应该是一条小酒吧，或者说是重现的小河。

郑国谷：对，你看那两块最大的石头就是挖沟暴露出来的。这些圆石是搬运过来的，最大的有五十多吨重。还有阳春的四座大石山，也会在这里重现。我已做好一个山脚，真是远看大石山，近看石山大。

陈舸：左边这个建筑群比较特别，房子都是圆筒形的，很多窗户就象凸出来的大鹅蛋。

郑国谷：当年栽藕终于有回报了（笑）。这是客厅呀，饭厅等。如果你从高空俯视，会发现这是一个小男孩骑着三轮车。玩过帝国时代游戏的人就会知道，这是里面的秘密武器。它发射的炮弹就变成了居住区。

陈舸：虚幻的变成真实，人工的成为天然，这些实在是够混的，尽管都有清晰的形式。你这个帝国透露出了融合与切的野心。

郑国谷：这张邮票足够大啊，有生物圈和生活系统，可以自在地作些实验，把各种想法和经验安置进去。在这个套的过程里也会派生出新的关系，或者意想不到的可能。可以邮寄出去几千公里之外的地方。

陈舸：这快成了你的发射基地了，装配着很多武器，那座房子就像工厂的车间，我又看见了那悬空的楼梯……

郑国谷：那是工作室。

『现在是枯水期，两眼连通的池塘里水都不满，郑国谷抓起搁在岸边的鱼食扔到水里，一大群幼小的锦鲤从里冒了出来，一条接一条像条龙在池塘里翻滚着。黑色的水变得色彩斑驳不定。郑国谷告诉我，这些“鱼”有一些是他家里的大锦鲤繁殖出来的，有二千多条。』

陈舸：上次来这里是半年前，现在感觉差不多也是那样。全都是水泥框架，成扎露出的钢筋，泥堆。

郑国谷：什么时候都像“烂尾楼”是吧（笑），无所事事的样子。它在细节上还是在变化的，很细小的东西，一点一点地从外表不容易看出来。



下图从左至右
1 移植的松树 水墨绢本 2007年
2 潭 水墨绢本 2007年
3 许许记 水墨绢本 2008年
4 公路补偿通知书 水墨绢本 2008年
5 远观楼 水墨绢本 2008年

来自文章《PET PHRASES, THREE CONSTANTLY READ ARTICLES-CHEN GE AND ZHENG GUO GU'S RAMBLE》，口头禅，老三篇——陈舸喻郑国谷的东拉西扯（下）》文_陈舸，Master Oriental Art, June, 2009, pp.50-55. 来自杂志：《大家 东方艺术》 上半月



陈舸：时间在这里变慢了，沉积下来，被捏造，那是一个未来的形状。

郑国谷：我现在的脑子几乎都被它占据了。走路吃饭经常会突然蹦出一个想法。有些草图是在国外出差，随手在酒店的帐单上画下来的。一个偶然的想法就会改变一个房子的形状，一块石头的位置。

陈舸：帝国时代就像一个有自我增殖能力的有机体，简直就是“球根状的阿米巴变形虫”。你在今年的广东当代艺术三年展里的作品，就是以帝国时代为主题的。这是它的艺术之变，或者是容器的溢出。

郑国谷：我把这块地的契约，合同书，处罚书都画了出来，还有工地的场景。在广东美术馆有个女记者问我这是什么，我说这是工笔画和书法呀。她有些茫然。

陈舸：重复着书法展览里的故事，帝国时代已经是一个多层次的复合空间了，它在自身的建造过程中必然把相关的社会关系牵扯进来，而不止是一些花岗岩石和松树的移动、分布。

郑国谷：这个比较复杂，也是一种现实的生态吧。在这个过程里，要和各个部门，国土、城建、供电，还有周边的村民，里面的工人打交道，不断的周旋，协调。有些事情解决了，有些问题悬搁起来。

陈舸：例如，土地的合法化问题……这比你当初改造你家里的空间要严峻多了。

郑国谷：这几万平方米土地从农民手里到我脚下，中间只有一张契约。对于土地制度来说，这张纸契的效力很微弱啊，几乎等于无。一旦政府要开发这里，纸契就等于是一纸空文，这个帝国银行可能就被征收了。

陈舸：比起帝国内部迷宫式的结构和善变的形状，这种来自外部社会的不确定性更加复杂了。也许任何帝国的命运都是飘渺的。

郑国谷：它已经上天入地了，不在乎最后是什么模样，最后可能又变成了小时候环城东路的老院子。我觉得重要的是这个过程，你是在建造，获得豁然开朗的经验，有时想想，失去反而是得到。

陈舸：我突然想起罗茨基的诗《雕像残躯》：“你是在帝国，朋友……”，那首诗探讨也是艺术想象力和自然的关系，从改造别人的空间到建构自己的空间，从现实生活到艺术作品，似乎是一个个的圆圈，就像那间屋子那些串在一起的卵形窗户，也许艺术就是一条咬自己尾巴的“噬尾蛇”，谁说得清楚呢。

郑国谷：其实我们可以只谈论花草树木，不谈艺术的。



上排从左至右
1. 有五十多吨重的石头
2. 山寨制作的石头与工人
3. 游戏《帝国时代》里的石头与挖石头的工人
4. 桥堡堡
5. 帝国 烂尾楼
6. 石狮子
7. 池塘



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与后殖民说再见 /
后西方社会 ?

FAREWELL TO POST-COLONIALISM /
TOWARDS A POST-WEST SOCIETY?

ZHENG GUOGU 郑国谷

一个帝国的诞生 THE BIRTH OF THE EMPIRE

新历史小组

NEW HISTORY GROUP

城市与艺术: 柏林“KW”的发生史

CITY AND ART: THE ORIGIN OF BERLIN KW

这个店 THE SHOP

与毛里佐·卡特兰对话

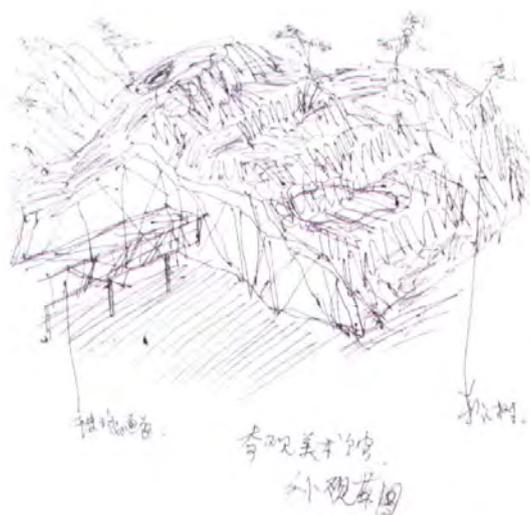
INTERVIEW WITH MAURIZIO CATTELAN



ZHENG GUOGU

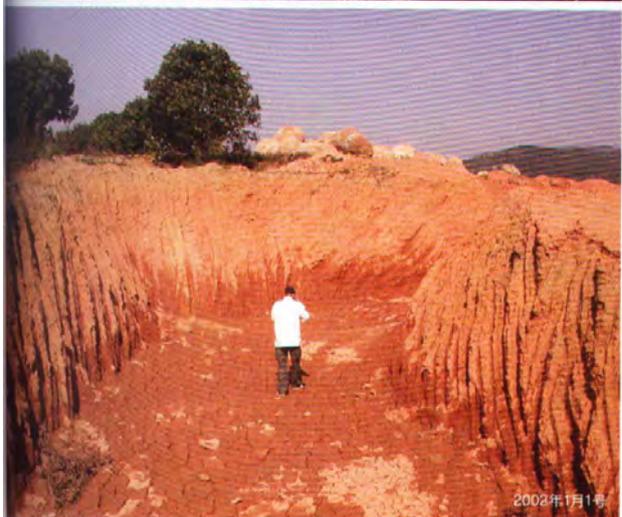
THE BIRTH OF THE EMPIRE

郑国谷：一个帝国的诞生 纸上策划：胡昉 Hu Fang



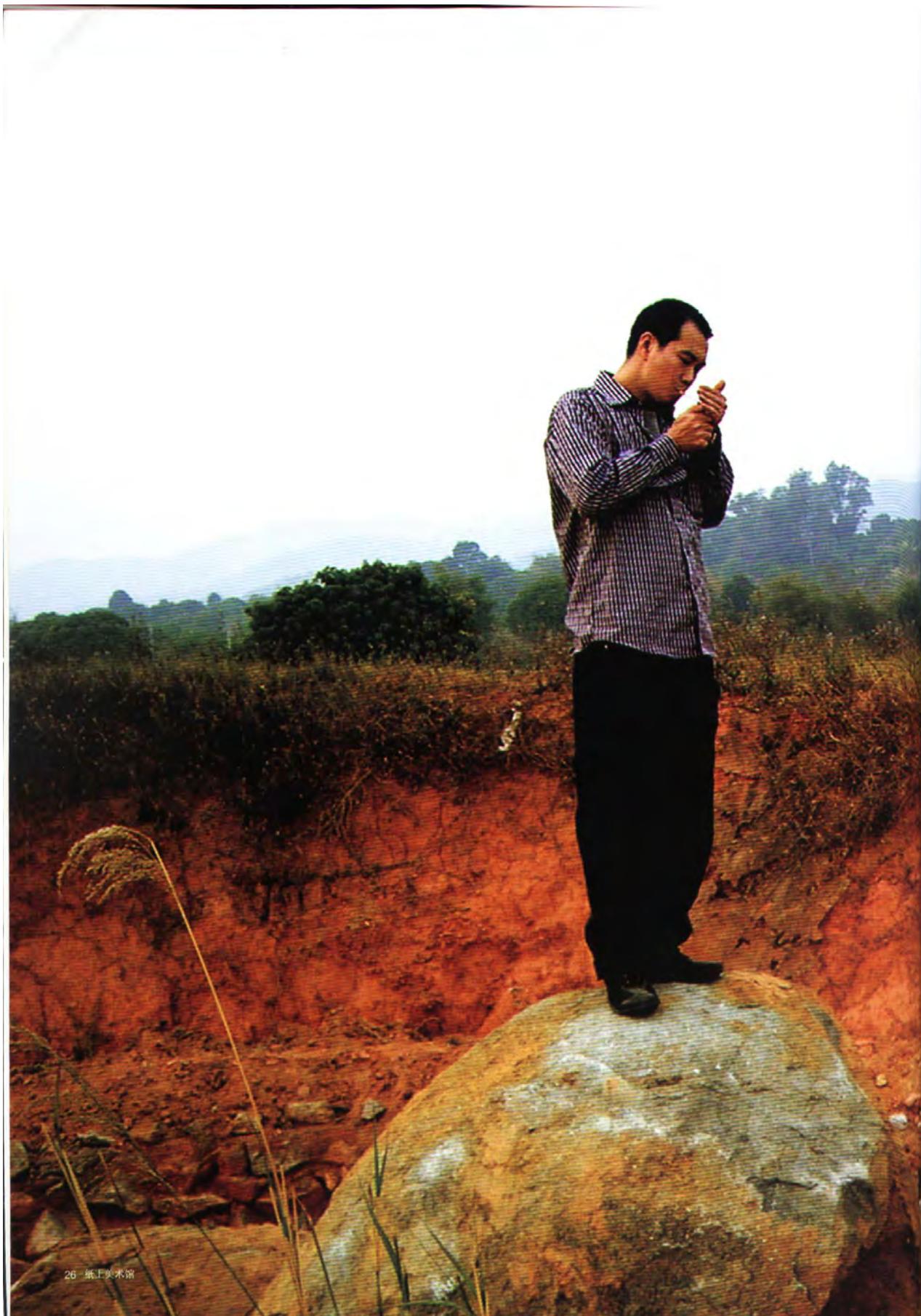
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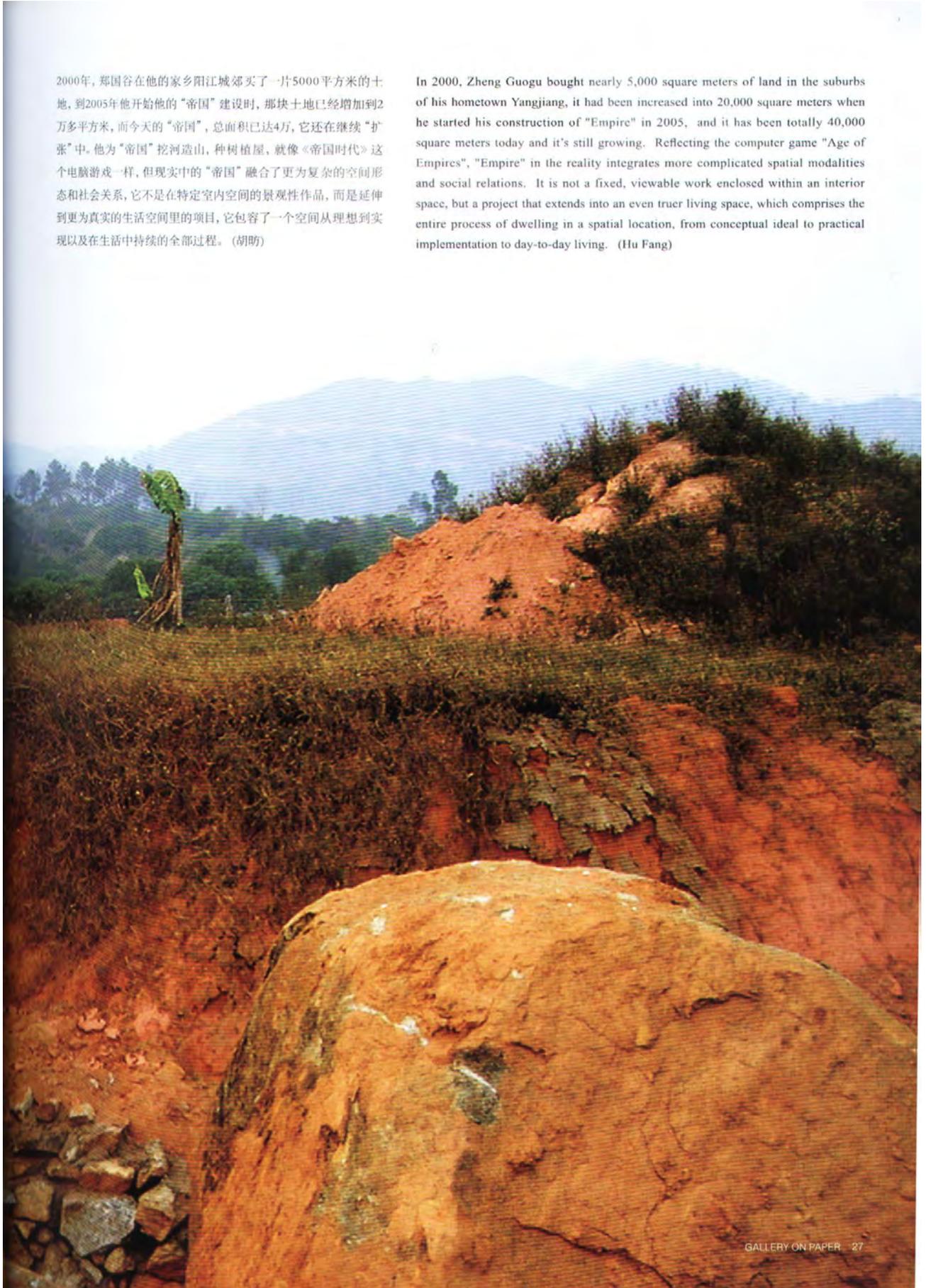


CONTEMPORARY ART & INVESTMENT
當代藝術&投資

2000年,郑国谷在他的家乡阳江城郊买了一片5000平方米的土地,到2005年他开始他的“帝国”建设时,那块土地已经增加到2万多平方米,而今天的“帝国”,总面积已达4万,它还在继续“扩张”中。他为“帝国”挖河造山,种树植屋,就像《帝国时代》这个电脑游戏一样,但现实中的“帝国”融合了更为复杂的空间形态和社会关系,它不是在特定室内空间的景观性作品,而是延伸到更为真实的生活空间里的项目,它包容了一个空间从理想到实现以及在生活中持续的全部过程。(胡昉)

In 2000, Zheng Guogu bought nearly 5,000 square meters of land in the suburbs of his hometown Yangjiang, it had been increased into 20,000 square meters when he started his construction of "Empire" in 2005, and it has been totally 40,000 square meters today and it's still growing. Reflecting the computer game "Age of Empires", "Empire" in the reality integrates more complicated spatial modalities and social relations. It is not a fixed, viewable work enclosed within an interior space, but a project that extends into an even truer living space, which comprises the entire process of dwelling in a spatial location, from conceptual ideal to practical implementation to day-to-day living. (Hu Fang)

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Li, Jianchun & Koppel-Yang, Martina. «Body of Precision Finish», «Zheng Guogu: Circuit of Endless Possibilities», «As long as you dare to move, you're halfway to success”: Interview with Zheng Guogu.», *Art Map 2008.NO.1*, 2008, pp.40-49.

藝術地圖
ARTMAP



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中文/English
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寻找南方的灵山——与高行健对话
Searching For Soul Mountain—A Dialogue with
Gao Xingjian

三个策展人开画廊，为何？
Why are Curators Becoming Gallerists?

绘画未死：胡安·戴维拉的后现代主义战场
Painting has not died: the Post-modernist
Battlefield of Juan Davila

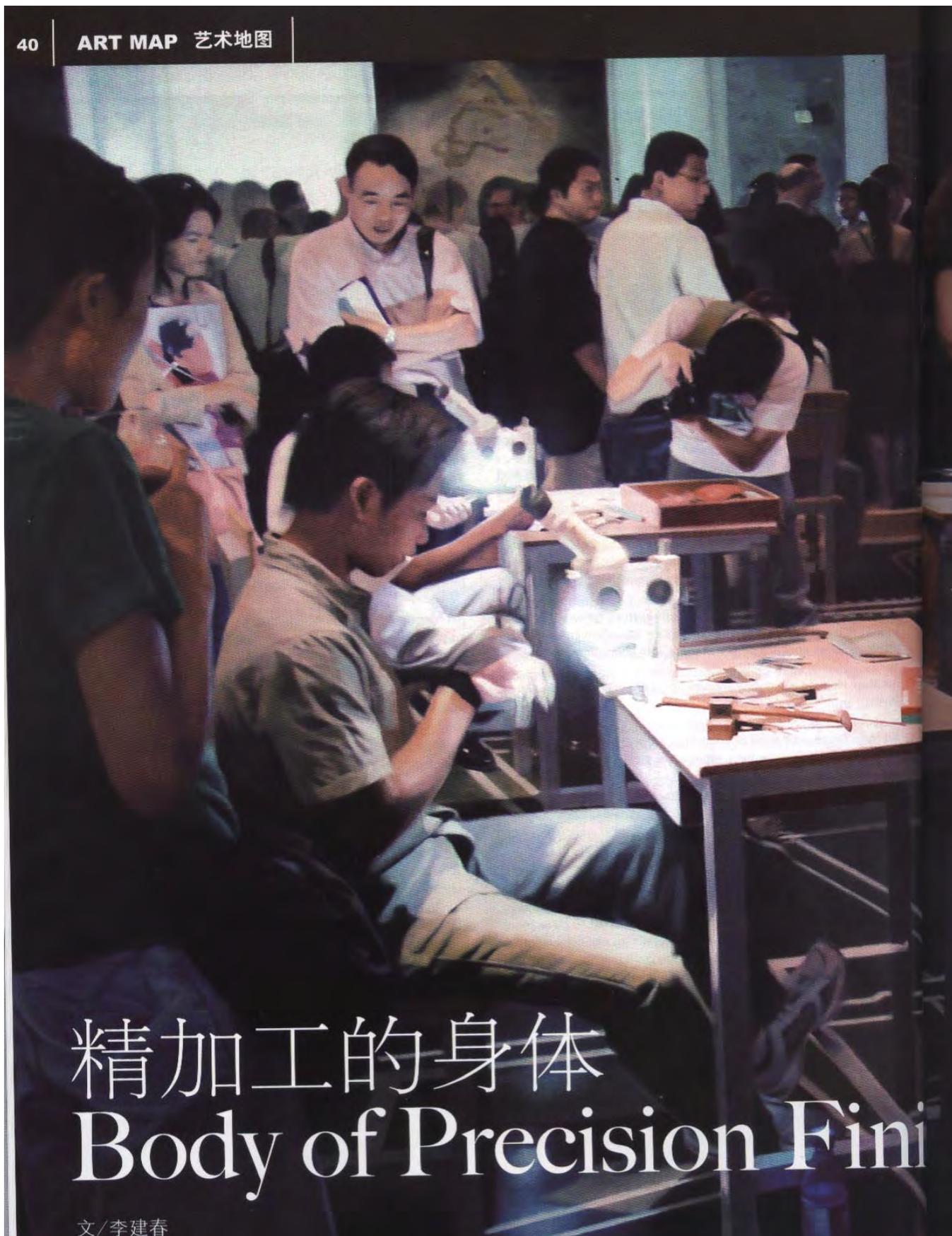
封面人物 郑国谷
Cover Figure Zheng Guogu
精加工的身体
Body of Precision Finish

Li, Jianchun & Koppel-Yang, Martina. «Body of Precision Finish», «Zheng Guogu: Circuit of Endless Possibilities», «As long as you dare to move, you're halfway to success”: Interview with Zheng Guogu.», *Art Map 2008.NO.1*, 2008, pp.40-49.

藝術地圖
ARTMAP

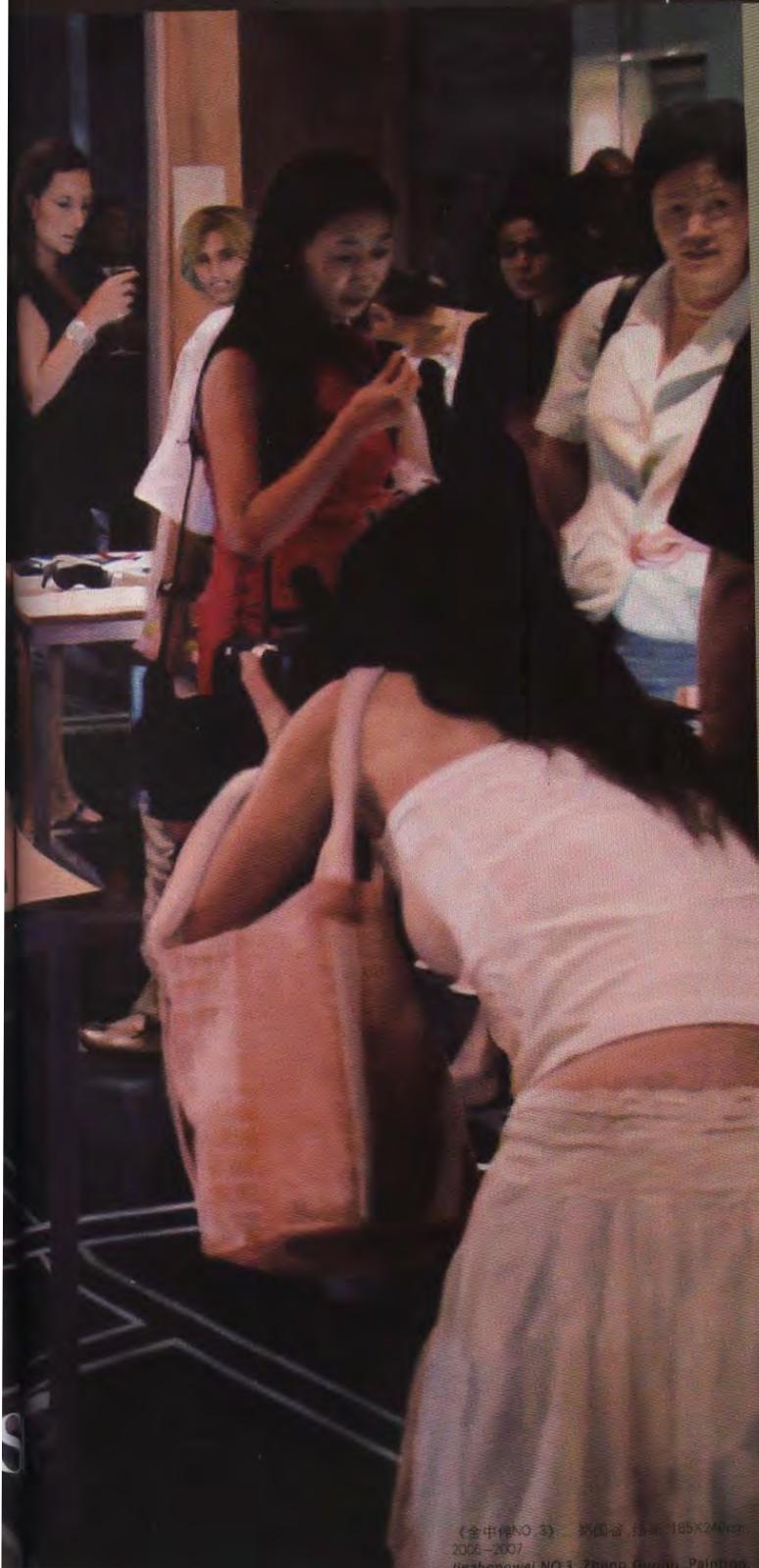
40 | ART MAP 艺术地图

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精加工的身体 Body of Precision Finish

文/李建春



“金中伟”是广东阳江一家专业生产一次性眼科医疗手术器械的工厂。2006年郑国谷曾在上海沪申画廊请该厂的3名工人工作一个月，通过显微镜当众加工他们的产品，这条生产线、生产过程、产品就都成了郑国谷的作品。观众为看艺术而来，却在画廊里看见了技术。工人们在生产过程中身体就像雕塑，细察之下只有手指在微动。似乎还从未有过这样安静的行为艺术。安静，但并不内敛，因为他们是在从事实实在在的生产——这个“作品”是现实需要的产物，或者说取自现实的样本，有全球化的背景，反映了当地经济从粗加工向精加工跃升的愿望，可以说是一个典型，一个值得嘉奖、值得推广的典型。一个有眼光的好政府会做的工作由郑国谷做了。我们已没有任何理由质疑这位艺术家关怀现实的力度和诚意，并且发现：观念性艺术并不总是在观念中高蹈，“观念”，实际是主动地观察和评价现状的一枚棱镜。经过郑国谷多年的精加工，如今这枚棱镜已透明得像一块普通玻璃，一块几乎不再有扭曲变形的好玻璃。

现在郑国谷又把“金中伟”搬到唐人画廊的空间里，让这个工厂与操作这条生产线的工人在艺术空间里从事生产10天，15位工人日日如是地生产。观众们不会减少在上一次展览中表现出来的惊奇，但愿画廊方面能成功地阻止他们把头发丝一样精密的产品取回家收藏玩赏的合理愿望。把技术作为艺术来欣赏吧，在工人们几乎纹丝不动的身体周围穿行参观，但是除了打扰他们、让他们分心以外什么也不能参与。这正是现代技术的特性，专业训练和社会分工在不同的群体之间已划出了一道道不可逾越的鸿沟。展览提供一个让观众与专业人员沟通的机会，但仅此而已，工人或许可以在所知范围内回答你提出的问题，甚至为你示范，你也许可以兴致勃勃地请某一位让开，战战兢兢地动手尝试，但是什么也做不了，你的手、你的身体不听使唤，因为专业化的身体不同于非专业化的身体。粗加工过程由于技术粗浅，所需训练有限，身体的专业差异不明显，参观者不难欣赏到热闹的动作场面。高技术的精加工过程却把动作内在化了，在外人看来，这些专心致志的工人简直像在禅定状态。郑国谷为人们呈现了一个特殊的例子，实际上这种现象相当普遍，比如人们常常抱怨，一旦打开电脑上网，不知不觉地一坐就是几个小时，浪费了多少时间。



上图：金钟伟装置现场
Above: Jinzhongwei
Installation Locate

下图：《金钟伟NO.1》
郑国谷·绘画 185X246cm
2006—2007
Below: Jinzhongwei NO.1,
Zheng Guogu, Painting,
185X246cm, 2006-2007.

信息的泛滥和空洞正是现代技术作用于身体的方式。记得白南准有一个作品，让一尊佛像对着电视打坐。现在我们可以看到，当代技术不仅让消费者，而且让生产者的身体状态发生了根本的变化。

在这次展览中，艺术家开了一个让观众悚然一惊的玩笑，在15位安静地工作的工人中，有4位是假的，是工人的身体模型。工作中的工人和身体模型，真假难辨。郑国谷对身体雕塑的兴趣或许可以追溯到最早的作品《我的老师》，阳江街头的一个疯子因为“身体像一具走动的雕塑”而吸引了他的记录兴趣；《栽

鹅》把五角星形式强加给不懂艺术的动物，让乱扑乱叫的鹅群形成一个组雕，再浇以墨汁，同时满足书写的兴趣。郑国谷的早期作品有一种表现的旨趣，流露出近于疯狂的野性和幽默。近期作品则深深地浸入后工业时代的氛围中，文明、但内含暴力。技术化的身体——伏在显微镜前的、或伏在显示屏前的安安静静的身体，如此理性、清洁，却在高度专注的、内在化了的动作中。用模型置换几个生产线上的工人，犹如给生命掺入死亡的沙子，粗看上去，明明是模型也在工作，生与死、动与静，竟如此浑然难辨。



Jin Zhong Wei is a factory located in Yangjiang, Guangdong Province that specializes in the production of ophthalmic surgical equipment. In 2006, Zheng Guogu invited three workers from the factory to the Hu Shen Gallery in Shanghai to work for a month, creating their product in front of the audience. The whole assembly line, the producing process and the product all became Zheng's work. The audience came for the art, but they saw technique. The bodies of the workers were just like sculptures in the process of production, only, when carefully observed, the fingers were moving. It seemed that there hadn't been any live art quite as quiet. It was quiet, but not restrained; because what they were doing was an act of production. This work was a result of a need for reality. Or to say, it's a sample, collected straight from reality. Its backdrop is that of globalization, reflecting the desire of the local economy to shift from raw processing to finish machining. Zheng's model is worth praise and promotion. Zheng Guogu did work that should be done by a far-sighted government. We have no reason to doubt his power and sincerity in

“只要敢搬就成功了一半”——郑国谷访谈 “As long as you dare to move, you're halfway to success”: Interview with Zheng Guogu

采访：本刊记者
时间：2007年12月
翻译：杨丰颜

Interviewed by: Art Map
Date: December 2007
Translator: Selena Yang

问：你最近为什么不做摄影了，是没感觉了？

答：从2000—2002年间，我的兴趣已从摄影转向了文字绘画以及与阳江组合作的书法，最近又把摄影画成了绘画。因为我想起1995年，我的摄影作品《我的新娘》因被别人认为缺乏作品性而拒绝发表的时候，我的朋友陈侗跟我说过一句话：“要是把它画成绘画情况就不一样了。”12年后，我还在想着这句话。把摄影画成与照片一样的画印在杂志上发表，它会制造一个盲点，你会多留一个心眼，不认真看肯定认为是一张摄影。因此有了目前我最感兴趣的两个绘画项目“巴塞爾”与“香港城市惊喜发掘”，它们保留了我对摄影的一个继续发言的权利。

问：在2007年“上海当代”，唐人当代艺术中心展出的作品，《专业生产一次性眼科手术器械》，有很多观众都感觉是把一个现成的车间搬到了博览会上，他们觉得他们也做得到，此作品是对后现代方式的一种挪用？现在很多人都用这种方法，你的这件作品是否有更深的意义？为什么真人和假人雕塑放在一起？假人雕塑是在为你合作的画廊考虑吗？

答：正如展出时，这个工厂的工人正在用显微镜放大加工肉眼看不见的眼科手术器械和墙上的一句话“专业生产一次性眼科手术器械”一样，中国已由简单加工业向精密加工业过渡，艺术界也在经历着这样的改变。观众认为他们也做得到是挺对的，只要敢搬就成功了一半，就好像我当年拿傻瓜机拍照一样。因搬到艺术博览会是很突出的，至于真人与假人放在一起只是不想照搬，从而让这作品有一种亦假亦真的移形换影、如影随形的特殊感觉。

问：你的作品中故乡阳江的素材越来越少了，是因为阳江的资源都被你用尽了？

答：不是阳江的素材越来越少了，是因为中国的改革开放让阳江越来越国际化了，资源也越来越与其它城市一样了，何干脆超越这一地域限制到更广阔的天地间去寻找一些新的创作资源，我把现阶段时期称为无边无际的“惊喜发掘期”。

问：你曾说自己“喜欢朝事物的相反方向走”，这是你的一种创作策略吗？

答：这是我94年做《裁鹅》这个作品时说过的一句话，也是我当时对鹅的天不怕地不怕的精神的向往。

问：你近几年好像很迷恋空间设计，这与做图片和雕塑有什么不同？

答：与做图片、雕塑不同的是：空间设计的出轨意味着违章，也就是不合法，但通过向有关部门公关一下，交点罚款又默许了合法，也就是通过某种权利让我的违章建筑合法化。《七套商品房》、《何香凝美术馆再盖一遍》、《帝国时代》这些作品就是我这几年很迷恋的违章空间设计。

问：有没有无法实施的作品方案？如果有的话，是资金、策展人、政治审查等原因吗？有没有策展人拒绝过你的作品？

答：都有。

问：你的装置作品都是哪些机构在收藏？这种费钱的装置能挣钱吗？

答：运用综合材料做装置作品的过程是我最喜欢的一种创作形式，我认为有意思的方案，就算倾家荡产也在所不惜，至于能挣钱是最好啦，挣不到也没办法啦！

问：你有代理画廊吗？通常是怎样的合作方式？你认为艺术家与画廊应该是怎样的合作？

答：我的战略伙伴是“维他命”空间，

再由“维他命”与其它画廊项目合作。

问：你现在是公司化运作吗？比如雇佣助手，现在很多艺术家都在这样做，那么艺术家靠作品收入能养活这些人吗？

答：就像做建筑设计一样，建筑师只要设计出方案和画好图纸，其它就由结构师、泥水匠、水电工、焊工和装修工来完成，只须付钱就行了。

问：现在有助手帮你制作，你相当于导演的角色？你认为是否也应该给他们作品署名权？

答：我一直致力和许多的人合作，我认为合作的就应该给署名权，不是合作就不用给。

Art Map: Why have you stopped producing photographs? Have you lost your artistic sense?

Zheng: Between the years of 2000 to 2002, I shifted my interest from photography to painting and calligraphic work with the Yang Jiang groups. Recently I have become interested in transferring photography into painting. I created a photographic work, My Bride that was refused publication 1995 because of its lack of artistic feature. My friend Chen Tong told me, "If you paint this photograph, the situation will be different." Twelve years later, I still remember what my friend said to me. Painting a photograph will create a blind spot. With only a glance, viewers cannot tell the difference between real and fake. I am interested in two painting projects that hold my photographic interest, Basel and Pleasant Discovery in Hong Kong City.

Art Map: At "ShContemporary 2007", the Tang Gallery exhibited your artwork, Professionally Producing Ophthalmologic Surgical Apparatus. A majority of viewers considered that you had in fact moved a ready-made factory into the Art Expo. They thought the piece was something they could also easily make. Is this post-modern appropriation?

藝術地圖
ARTMAP

Galerie
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《香港城市建築地圖》 鄭同谷 繪畫
Surprise Discovery of Hongkong NO.2, Zheng Guogu, Painting

Nowadays, so many artists use such methods in their artistic creation; does your work have a particular meaning at such a level? Why do you juxtapose a real and unreal person in your work? Was this a consideration for your collaborating gallery?

Zheng: In the exhibition, factory workers use the microscope enlarging Ophthalmologic surgical operation apparatus and you see the statement “professionally producing one-off ophthalmology surgical operation apparatus” written on the wall. China is in a similar situation, experiencing a transition from an industry of simple production towards an industry of precise production. This transition is also occurring in the artistic field. If viewers think that as long as they can move, they’ve reached half of success. In “Art Expo”, putting a real person and a fake person together a statement against copying, and creates a particular sense of confusion.

Art Map: You cannot see many materials from your hometown Yangjiang in your work. Did you run out of resources?

Zheng: No. Because of Open Door Policy, Yangjiang has been developed internationally. Its resources have become similar to those of others. Why not simply transcend the geographical restriction and

seek more creative resources? I call this phase as the period of “pleasant discovery”.

Art Map: You once stated “you like walking towards the opposite side.” Is this your artistic strategy?

Zheng: I made that statement at the time I created *Planting a Goose* in 1994. This is my yearning of the Goose’s spirit of fearlessness.

Art Map: In recent years, you seem to have become addicted to the use of space in your work. What is different for you in painting and sculpture?

Zheng: The derailing of space’s design is violating and often illegal. However it is possible to skirt the legality of the derailment by paying government officials. The violation of a building can become legal through certain privileges. You can see these spaces in *Seven Commercial Buildings*, *Re-built He Xiang Ning Art Museum* and *Empire Ages*.

Art Map: Do you have any projects impossible to create? If so, why are they impossible? Is it funding, curation, political or for other reasons? Do you have any work that has been refused by a curator?

Zheng: No, nothing at all.

Art Map: Who are the main organizations

collecting your installation work? Can installation work be sold?

Zheng: The process of using comprehensive materials to make installation work is my favorite form of creation. I will do interesting projects regardless of monetary worries. If it can make money, that will be great. Otherwise, it doesn’t matter.

Art Map: Do you have an agency? Normally, how do you cooperate with it? What’s the best method of cooperation between artist and art gallery?

Zheng: My agency is Vitamin Space, which also works with other galleries.

Art Map: Do you have an assistant?

Zheng: Architects provide a plan and blueprint, and then engineers, bricklayers, electricians and decorators will complete the rest of the project.

Art Map: With the help of your assistants, you play a role as a director. Do you think you should recognize them in your work?

Zheng: I have cooperated with many people. If it is true cooperation, I need to give them recognition in my work. If not, I don’t believe I have to do so.

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WALKER ART CENTER

DORYUN CHONG

YASMIL RAYMOND

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OCTOBER 2007

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MAX ANDREWS & MARIANA CĂNEPA LUNA
DISCUSS TOILETS IN EUROPE AND
SPAIN'S TRANSFORMATION.

CECILIA BRUNSON FOLLOWS A HISTORICAL
TREK ACROSS SOUTH AMERICA.

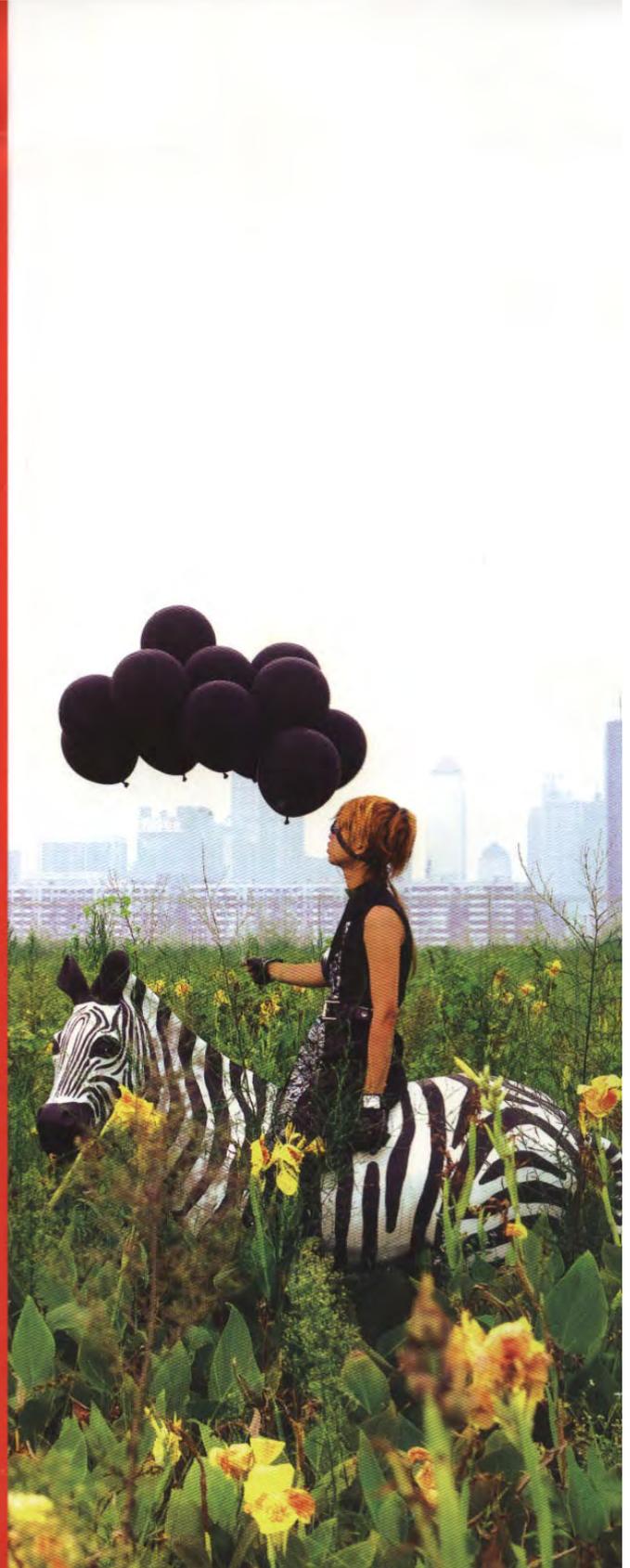
TONE HANSEN MAPS NORWAY'S NEW
TERRAIN OF OUTSOURCED DIVERSITY.

HU FANG MEDITATES ON THE PAIN
AND THE HAPPINESS OF OTHERS.

MIHNEA MIRCAN SIGNS THE DEATH
CERTIFICATE OF MONUMENTS IN ROMANIA.

JOSÉ ROCA ASKS IF PERFORMANCE ART AND
CIVIC ACTION CAN BE ONE AND THE SAME.

ALSO: KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH,
JANINE DI GIOVANNI, ARUNDHATI ROY



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Me and My Teacher 1993 color photograph

ZHENG GUOGU'S POSITION IN THE WORLD

Born in China, 1970. Lives and works in Yangjiang, China.

One of the most unclassifiable yet respected Chinese artists working today, Zheng Guogu is also a conceptualist whose multifaceted body of work blurs the boundaries between life and art. This description, of course, has lost much of its efficacy in recent years from overuse, but is still relevant to an understanding of Zheng's prolific, organic artistic output, which is closely tied to his location. Yangjiang, where he was born and continues to live and work, is a coastal town in the Guangdong province in southern China. The city is far from notable as a cultural center, let alone as a locus of contemporary artistic production, so it is against such a backdrop that his early photographic works become particularly remarkable. In 1995, he asked the woman he was courting to pose as his bride at a local wedding photo studio. *My Bride* (1995), a group of almost saccharine images

embodying the idea of Westernized, bourgeois romance, departs little from the conventions of staged studio photography, an increasingly popular means of expressing status in today's China. Although Zheng's female collaborator later rejected his marriage proposal, he found a bride the following year and produced with her another series of photographs. The highly intimate snapshots that constitute *Honeymoon* (1996), in contrast to *My Bride*, convey the couple's genuinely tender bond.

At the same time that he turned himself into the subject of autobiographical accounts and fantasies, the artist also began to commit those around him to film. *The Vagarious Life of Yangjiang Youths* (1996) consists of many images of his roguish friends acting out glamorized violence. They are seen wielding guns and knives, mock-torturing one another, and generally reveling in thuggish behaviors. Their feigned acts of aggression were, in fact,

inspired by stylized representations in the TV programs and computer games they were watching and playing, and the illusion concocted by these assumed identities is corroborated by the artist's statement: "I'm a director who can't direct, and they are actors who can't act."¹ Zheng's casual, unplanned, and immediate approach here is quite distinct from the popular tendencies in much of contemporary Chinese photography to monumentalize urbanism or theatricalize the everyday. Even though the subjects in this series are "actors" and the depictions cannot be taken at face value as a sociological study, they do reflect and embody the fact that the city of Yangjiang is located in close proximity to Hong Kong and all its commodities. Zheng's work, then, is an expression of a subjective, individualized reception of localized cultural (re)production vis-à-vis a globalized culture. Such consumer goods have informed and shaped his construction of objects

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AD 2000, *Rust Another 2000 Years I* 1999–2000 cast-iron objects

is well. In *AD 2000, Rust Another 2000 Years I* (1999–2000), the artist cast in iron items that he found in local supermarkets, which were increasing in number and changing due to a transforming economy, as a “response to the heavy memories of the commodity exchanges of my childhood.”²

Zheng’s work addresses consumption not only as he and those around him experience it but also as the basis for a new relationship between himself as an art-maker and those of the monied and sophisticated class who purchase his works. *Ten Thousand Customers* (1997–present), a grid of photographic images printed in the same size as their contact strips, bumps the principles of multiple production of an identical artwork by proposing an edition of ten thousand. This yet-to-be-completed work is in fact not an edition at all, as each one, individually assembled from a blend of photographs of TV screens and manufactured goods, is different from the next.

For this exhibition, Zheng presents a new installation titled *My Home Is Your Museum* (2007), conceived and realized in collaboration with curator and writer Hu Fang.³ An evolving and changing environment that adapts to different venues, the work in this particular iteration consists of a type of garden, with a new version of *AD 2000, Rust Another 2000 Years* emerging out of a floor covered in

gravel and hexagonal bricks, and surrounded by a photographic mural and two paintings. *Me and My Teacher* (1993/2007) is a blown-up snapshot of the artist side-by-side with a disheveled, scantily-clad, unbathed man. The two are pictured squatting in the street and having a hearty laugh. The “teacher” had apparently gone mad and was wandering the city, but Zheng says he learned a lot from the man’s direct, unmediated relationship with the world. The paintings *MOMA I Party No. 1* (2006–2007) and *Landscape of the Age of Empire No. 1* (2006) are both photorealist works done by a professional painter: the former is based on a scene shot by the artist of an opening party at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the latter is an idealized scene of a water-and-rock garden he’s constructing at his home in Yangjiang. The depictions of art-world glitterati and a utopian landscape provide a stark conversational counterpoint to the image of the innocent and simpatico affinity existing between the artist and a social outcast. Both paintings are also embedded with clipped headlines from popular Hong Kong magazines. Their sensationalized, trivial meanings are wholly incongruous to the subjects pictured, but the uncanny overlaying effectively alludes to the motherboard of circuitry operating in the mind of an artist who freely shuttles between several incommensurate spheres inside a fluid world of information

and transactions. This *gesamtkunstwerk* is a recombined mosaic of a creative mind defining its position in the world vis-à-vis realms of human relationships, cultural status, commodity exchange, and even built and natural ecologies.

DC

1. Zheng Guogu, quoted in Hans van Dijk, “The Relationship between the Fake and the Real Is Very Subtle,” in *Zheng Guogu: Cross Back and Forth Quickly* (Shanghai: ShangART and Timezone 8 Ltd., 2003), 85.

2. Zheng Guogu, unpublished interview with Hu Fang, 2007.

3. Hu Fang, also a contributor to this catalogue, has written about Zheng Guogu numerous times and worked closely with him on curatorial projects. This essay has greatly benefited from my conversations with Hu and has been informed by his writings.

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top: *My Bride* 1995 color photographs bottom rows: *Honeymoon* 1996 color photographs

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The Vagarious Life of Yangjiang Youths 1996 color photographs

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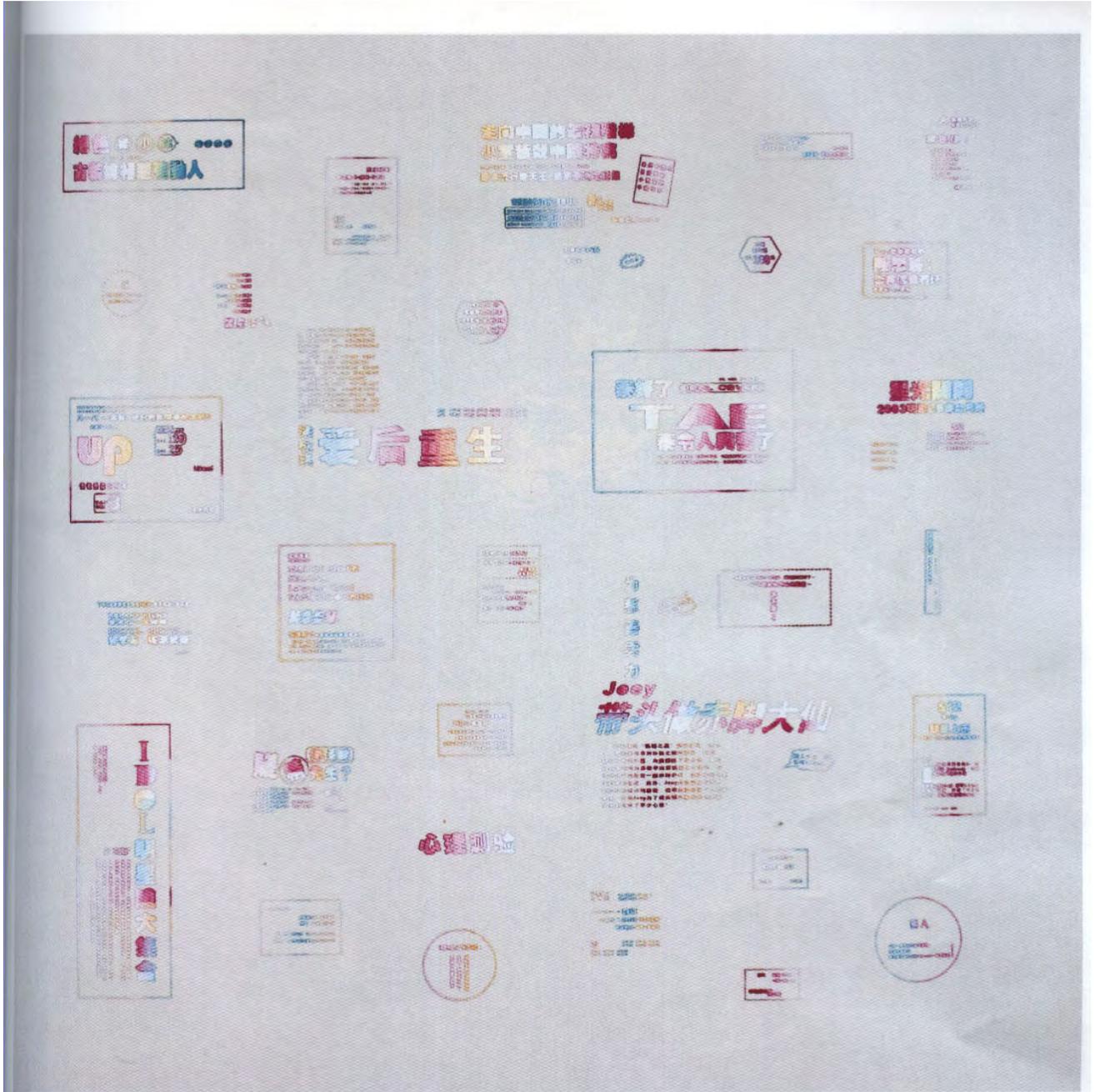
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top: *Ten Thousand Customers, 213/10000* 1997-2005 photographs bottom: *MOMA I Party No. 1* 2006-2007 oil on canvas

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Computer Is Controlled by Pig's Brain—79 2006 oil on carpet

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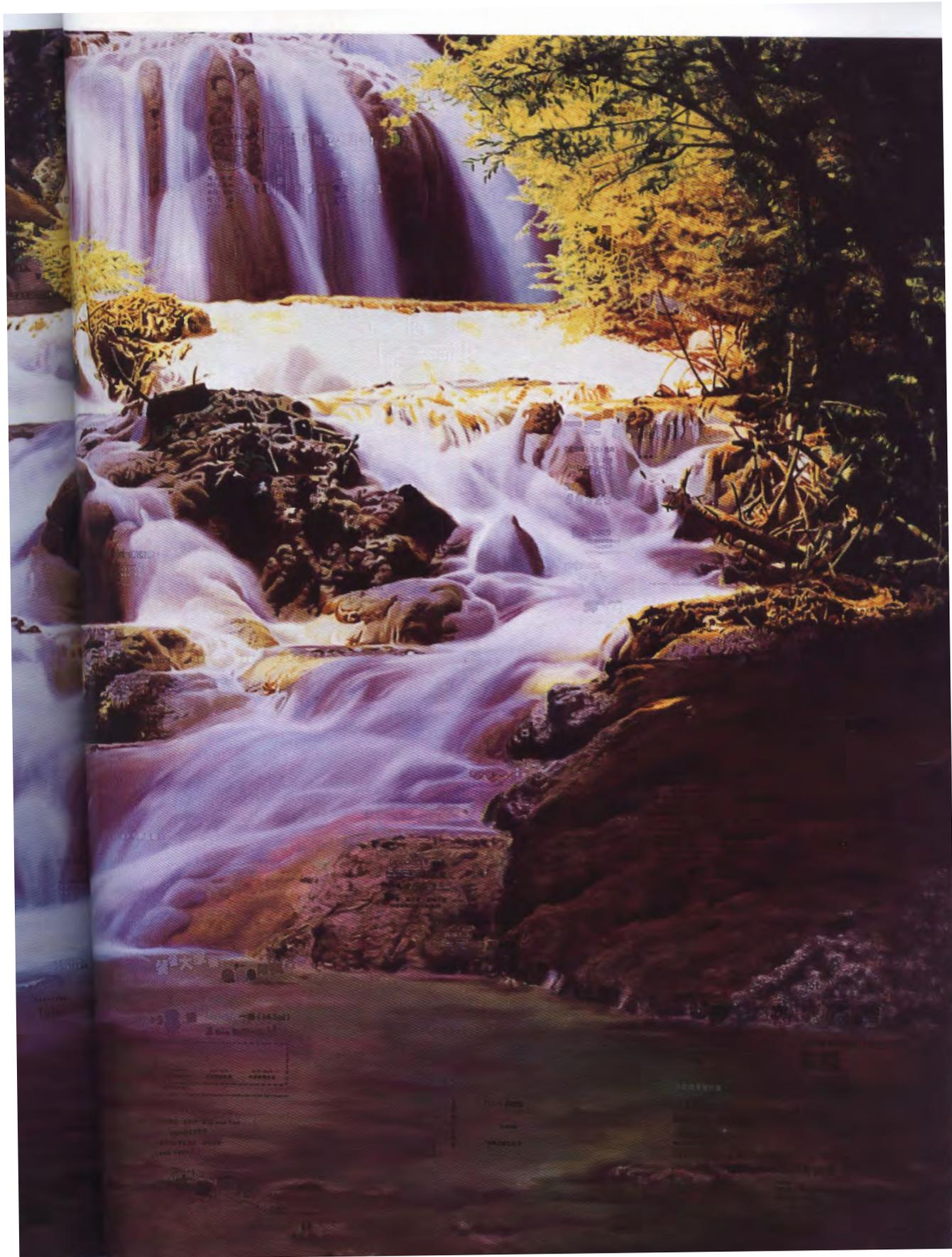
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Landscape of the Age of Empire No. 1 2006 oil on canvas

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China Welcomes You ...
Sehnsüchte, Kämpfe,
neue Identitäten

China Welcomes You ...
Desires, Struggles,
New Identities



China Welcomes You ...

Sehnsüchte, Kämpfe, neue Identitäten

Wenn über die Gegenwart und die Zukunft nachgedacht wird, über Veränderungen und neue Situationen in einer schnell wachsenden globalen Gesellschaft, führt dies heutzutage zwangsläufig zu China. Es ist bezeichnend, wie groß die Faszination für die kulturellen, politischen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungen des Landes und deren historische Verankerungen ist und welche breite Aufmerksamkeit sie in der westlichen Welt erfährt. Berichte über den wirtschaftlichen Aufstieg, die politische Lage und auch über den boomenden chinesischen Kunstmarkt sind fast täglich in den Medien zu lesen und befriedigen die Neugierde des Westens.

Auch der Ausstellung *China Welcomes You ... Sehnsüchte, Kämpfe, neue Identitäten* liegt die Faszination für das Land der Mitte zugrunde, das sich besonders in den letzten Jahren durch eine sehr lebendige Kunstszene hervorgetan hat. Anhand einer ausgewählten Gruppe von Künstlerinnen und Künstlern wird nach Wurzeln und Vorläufern, nach Brücken zwischen dem Hier und dem Dort, zwischen einer so reichen eigenen Vergangenheit, den großen historischen Brüchen im 20. Jahrhundert und der dynamischen Gegenwart gesucht. Der vorliegende Katalog beleuchtet in kurzen Essays und Gesprächen über das Werk der teilnehmenden Künstlerinnen und Künstler Einflüsse, Themen und Entwicklungen zeitgenössischen Kunstschaffens in China.

China Welcomes You ...

Desires, Struggles, New Identities

When we pause to think about the present and future, and about changes and new situations in a rapidly globalising society, we are bound to finish up thinking about China. The cultural, political and economic developments in the country and their historical roots accordingly attract great attention, and the subject of China enjoys widespread interest in the West. Accounts of the economic surge, the political situation and even the booming Chinese art market feature in the media almost every day, to satisfy the West's endless curiosity.

A fascination for the subject is also what motivates our exhibition *China Welcomes You ... Desires, Struggles, New Identities*. The art scene in China has come on in leaps and bounds in recent years. Taking a select group of artists, the exhibition looks for roots and precursors, links between us and over there, between the richness of a past involving great historical changes of direction in the 20th century and the dynamic present. This catalogue examines, in short essays and conversations with the participating artists, current influences, themes and developments affecting contemporary art in China.



Yangjiang Group
(Zheng Guogu, Chen Zaiyan,
Sun Qinglin) und Chen Sirui,
Lin Songfeng, Zheng Daoxing
*Interior Courtyard - The First Line
of Couplet: 一三五七九, The Second Line:
二四六八*, 2007

Zheng Guogu
Me and My Teacher,
1997 (Filmstill)

→ p. 144-147

Zheng Guogu

Interview zwischen Zheng Guogu und Hu Fang Alkohol, Kollektiv und Kalligraphie der untersten Schicht

Kollektiv

Hu Fang Dein stetiges, ausgewogenes Interesse an dieser Art von kollektivem Arbeiten - hat dich die Yangjiang-Gruppe direkt zu dieser Art des kollektiven Arbeitens veranlasst?

Zheng Guogu Ja, richtig. Lange vor der Yangjiang-Gruppe hat unsere kleine Architekturgruppe (Yangjiang - Meishiji/Yangjiang Design) auch gemeinsam künstlerisch gearbeitet. Wenn wir zum Beispiel einen Auftrag bekamen, dann haben wir drei uns gegenseitig beraten, wie wir denn nun diese Aufgabe bewerkstelligen könnten. Oder aber, jeder begann mit einem Modell, um es dann wieder herauszunehmen und anzusehen, wie denn mit der Bauform, wie mit dem Raum zu arbeiten wäre. So war es besser, wir konnten verrücken und verschieben, drei zu einem werden lassen und ein Gebäude daraus vollenden. Die Yangjiang-Gruppe arbeitet ebenso, alles kann untereinander diskutiert werden, verschiedene Denkweisen vermischen sich. Ich bin an diese Art und Weise des Denkens auch gewöhnt.

Hu Fang Die Yangjiang-Gruppe arbeitet mehr mit der Kalligraphie als Medium, das die Arbeit am Kunstwerk eröffnet und beginnen lässt, somit hat jedes Projekt einmal mehr, einmal weniger mit Kalligraphie zu tun. Ist mit Chen Zaiyan die Kalligraphie sichtbar geworden, hat es damit zu tun?

Zheng Guogu Ja, genau. Besonders Chen Zaiyan und Sun Qinglin haben mich inspiriert. Die größte Offenbarung aber gab mir wohl Sun Qinglin mit einer Geschichte: Er erzählte, sein Onkel, oder jemand von den um eine Generation Älteren, war Stahlarbeiter, der den ganzen Tag Eisen bearbeitete und kein einziges Zeichen schreiben konnte. Sein Nachbar war Verkäufer von Neujahrsspruchbändern. Um die Neujahrszeit gab es kein Eisen zu bearbeiten, und er sah, wie belebt sich der Verkauf von Neujahrsspruchbändern gestaltete. Er kaufte sich ebenfalls so ein Spruchband, ging nach Hause und malte die Schriftzeichen genau ab. Ohne die Zeichen lesen zu können, übte er sie zu schreiben, mit hervorragendem Ergebnis. Danach kopierte er die Zeichen und malte oder schrieb sie auf, bot die Spruchbänder zum Verkauf an und er konnte sie auch verkaufen! Das bedeutet,

Zheng Guogu

An Interview Between Zheng Guogu and Hu Fang Alcohol, the Collective and Calligraphy for the Low Class

Collective

Hu Fang Your steady long-term interest in this kind of collective work - did the Yangjiang Group directly encourage you to do this kind of collective work?

Zheng Guogu Yes, indeed. Long before the Yangjiang Group, our small architectural group (Yangjiang - Meishiji/Yangjiang Design) also worked together artistically. If for example we got a commission, the three of us take over together how we could manage the job between us. Or else each of us began with a model, and then let it out again and looked how we could work with the type of building and the space. It was better that way, we could push it backwards and forwards, so the three of us became a single unit and got a building out of it. The Yangjiang Group works in just the same way, everything can be discussed together, various sorts of thinking blend. And anyway, I'm used to that kind of thinking.

Hu Fang The Yangjiang Group works more with calligraphy as a medium, which gets things going on the work of art, so that each project sometimes has more, sometimes less to do with calligraphy. Has the calligraphy become visible with Chen Zaiyan, is it to do with that?

Zheng Guogu Yes indeed. Particularly Chen Zaiyan and Sun Qinglin have inspired me. But the great revelation was probably a story of Sun Qinglin: he told me his uncle or someone from the next generation up, was a steelworker who worked iron all day and couldn't write a single character. His neighbour was a salesman of New Year banners. Around New Year, there was no iron to work on, and he saw how well things were going with New Year banners. So he bought himself a banner, went home and faithfully copied the characters. Without being able to read the characters, he practised writing them, with outstanding results. After that he copied the characters and painted or wrote them up, offered the banners for sale and found he could sell them! That means an



ein Analphabet kann auch kalligraphieren, um seine Existenzgrundlage aufzubessern. Ich schlage vor, ein Analphabet sollte auch das Recht haben zu schreiben, das ist meine daraus folgende Einsicht. Ich erinnere mich, als ich noch klein war, hatte ich einen richtigen Minderwertigkeitskomplex, was das Schreiben anbelangte. Vom Lehrer bekam ich kein Lob, nur Schelte über mangelhaft geschriebene Zeichen, die ich viele, viele Male wiederholen musste. Daher graut mir sehr vor Schriftzeichen!

Wenn ich Sun Qinglin erwähne, dann denke ich, auch schreiben zu können. Gerade Chen Zaiyan ist auch jemand, der die Tradition vergleichsweise gut kennt. Ich kann einen Raum schaffen und der Kalligraphie ermöglichen, sich in den imaginären Raum hinein zu entfalten und somit Vorzüge vereinigen und ein bisschen von etwas Vollkommenem entstehen lassen.

Hu Fang Sun Qinglin hat nie Kalligraphie studiert?

Zheng Guogu Nein, aber er hat sich häufig mit den Alten in Kalligraphie gemessen: Nach durchzechter Nacht und betrunken, in der Früh zwischen fünf und sechs, hat sich Sun Qinglin besoffen zu den Alten, die im Yangjiang Park oft mit Wasser Schriftzeichen üben und untereinander wettstreiten und sich vergleichen, gewandt und gemeint: Ihr könnt alle nichts, lasst mich! *(Lacht)* Die Alten waren völlig verblüfft, so ein kleiner Junge, der hat doch überhaupt keine Kunstfertigkeit. Aber ich finde, im Bereich der Kalligraphie ist dennoch Sun Qinglin der Beste, denn seiner Kalligraphie wohnt eine natürliche Veranlagung und Schreibqualität inne. Schau seine Bewegungen beim Schreiben an, die sind wunderbar.

Hu Fang Auch du scheinst angespornt zu sein.

Zheng Guogu Ja, plötzlich war der Schatten einiger Jahre abgekehrt und mein wirkliches Schreiben kam wieder zum Vorschein.

Alcohol

Hu Fang Die Werke der Yangjiang-Gruppe scheinen in besonders enger Beziehung zum Alkohol zu stehen.

Zheng Guogu Sie trinken alle, ich habe mit ihnen auch einige Male getrunken. Manchmal bis zum Aussetzen des Erinnerungsfähigens. Dann ging ich zurück zum Schreiben. Am nächsten

literale Person kann auch Kalligraphie, um die Basis seines Daseins zu verbessern. Ich schlage vor, Analphabeten sollte auch das Recht haben zu schreiben, das ist die Schlussfolgerung, die ich zu dem gekommen bin. Ich erinnere mich, als ich noch klein war, hatte ich einen realen Minderwertigkeitskomplex, was das Schreiben anbelangte. Der Lehrer hat mich nie gelobt, sondern mich nur für schlecht geschriebene Zeichen kritisiert und mich dazu gezwungen, sie immer und immer wieder zu wiederholen. Deshalb habe ich eine Horrorstörung vor Schriftzeichen.

Wenn ich Sun Qinglin erwähne, dann denke ich, auch schreiben zu können. Gerade Chen Zaiyan ist auch jemand, der die Tradition relativ gut kennt. Ich kann einen Raum schaffen und der Kalligraphie ermöglichen, sich in den imaginären Raum hinein zu entfalten und somit Vorzüge vereinigen und ein bisschen von etwas Vollkommenem entstehen lassen.

Hu Fang Didnt Sun Qinglin ever study calligraphy?

Zheng Guogu No, but he often challenged old people in calligraphy. Having tumbled the night away and being drunk, between five and six in the morning Sun Qinglin went down to the old people in Yangjiang Park who often practise writing characters in water and compete with each other and compare the results, and he said: "None of you are any good, let me!" *(laughs)* The old men were completely taken aback, a young chap like that, he couldn't have any skill. But even so, I find as far as calligraphy goes Sun Qinglin is the best, because he has a natural aptitude and writing quality. Just look at his movements when he's writing, they're wonderful.

Hu Fang It seems to have encouraged you, too.

Zheng Guogu Yes, suddenly the shadow that's been hanging over me has gone and my real writing surfaced again.

Alcohol

Hu Fang The works of the Yangjiang Group seem to have a particularly close relationship with alcohol.

Zheng Guogu They all drink, I drank with them for a number of years. Sometimes to the point of blotting out memory. Then I went back to write. The next day there was extra calligraphy added on the wall - how did that



Abend war dort an der Wand eine weitere Kalligraphie hinzugefügt – wie denn nur? Es war häufig genau so, beim Aufwachen am nächsten Tag entdeckte ich weitere Kalligraphien. Manchmal war der Wagen beschrieben, der ganze Wagen vollgepinselt mit Schriftzeichen.

Hu Fang Dies ist aber doch völlig unterschiedlich zu deiner eigenen Arbeitsweise, verglichen mit deinen Bildern und Fotografien.

Zheng Guogu Stimmt, das ist kein betrunkenen Zustand, so kann ich nicht arbeiten. Aber ich meine, Schreiben hat mit Alkohol sehr viel zu tun. Ich habe entdeckt, unten auf der Straße gibt es einen noch verrückteren Menschen, vielleicht ist „mein Lehrer“ („mein Lehrer“ dieses Wort kommt von Zheng Guogus Fotografie *Ich und mein Lehrer*, er bezeichnet einen auf der Straße lebenden Irren als „meinen Lehrer“) ein Arbeitskollege, der jeden Tag schreibt, eine ganze Straße voll schreibt.

Hu Fang Er schreibt auf den Boden?

Zheng Guogu Genau, er schreibt auf den Boden, wir schauen täglich hinunter, es ist immer anders. Er weiß nicht, wo er diese weißen Dinge findet, die er schreibt. Er macht einen Kreis und innen noch einen Kreis, oder er schreibt das Zeichen für Reis und fügt einen Kreis hinzu und dazu noch irgendetwas. Es sind wohl irgendwelche unverständliche Kennzeichen. Diese Straße hier und jene Straße dort schreibt er voll, er kommt immer erst zum Arbeiten heraus, wenn die Nacht tief ist und die Menschen ruhig sind. Eines Nachts kehrte ich zwischen vier und fünf Uhr zurück, da war er gerade beim Schreiben.

Hu Fang Daher hast du nur seine Schulter aufgenommen.

Zheng Guogu Ja. Aber wenn ich wieder klar und wach bin, dann wahre ich Abstand von ihm. Ich habe diesen Menschen nicht beachtet, er schläft unter diesem Baum, sobald er sich hingelegt hat, entdeckt man nicht mehr, dass hier ein Mensch ist. Nun habe ich wieder einen ...

Hu Fang ... wieder einen „mein Lehrer“ hinzugefügt.

Zheng Guogu Richtig! (*Lacht*) Das ist mein Kalligraphie-Lehrer. Genau, ich habe ihn jedoch erst vor ein, zwei Jahren entdeckt. Oder er ist die vom Schicksal für mich bereitete Inspiration.

happen? The same thing happened often, when I woke up the next day I discovered more calligraphy there. Sometimes the whole car was covered, the whole car was inscribed with characters.

Hu Fang But that's completely different from your normal way of working, compared with your pictures and photos.

Zheng Guogu True, it's not a state of drunkenness, I can't work like that. But I think writing has a lot to do with alcohol. I've discovered that down below in the street there's an even crazier person, perhaps "My Teacher" (the phrase comes from Zheng Guogu's photo *My Teacher and I*, he refers to a madman living in the street as "My Teacher") is a working colleague who writes every day, filling the whole street with writing.

Hu Fang Does he write on the ground?

Zheng Guogu That's it, he writes on the ground, we look down every day, it's always different. He doesn't know where he finds these white things that he writes. He draws a circle and another circle inside it, or he writes the character for rice and adds a circle and then something else. They're probably some kind of incomprehensible marks or so. He fills this street or that street, but only comes out to work at the dead of night when people are quiet. One night I came back between four and five, and there he was, writing.

Hu Fang That's why you only show his shoulders.

Zheng Guogu Yes, but if I'm awake and clear-headed, I stay away from him. I've never observed the man, he sleeps under a tree, as soon as he's stretched out, you'd never notice there's a man there. Now I've added a ...

Hu Fang ... added another "My Teacher".

Zheng Guogu Right. (*laughs*) That's my calligraphy teacher. Though I only discovered him a year or two ago. Or else, he's the inspiration fate had ready for me.



Kalligraphie

Zheng Guogu Der Zugang der Yangjiang-Gruppe zur Kalligraphie scheint eher ein Ausdruck von großer Unstimmigkeit mit der politischen Meinung zu sein.

Hu Fang So ähnlich wie bei dir, als du damals mit der Fotografie begonnen hast?

Zheng Guogu Mit der Fotografie ist das genauso, damit kritisiere ich die politischen Ansichten ganz besonders. Was auch immer die Regierungspartei sagt, wir stellen uns dem entgegen. Sie kritisiert, die Fotografie lege das Interesse auf Straßen und Gassen, und sofort gehen wir nach Hause und machen genau das. Sie kritisiert, die Fotografie solle sich um die Menschen kümmern, und schon fertigen wir genau dafür ein Modellbild.

Auch die Kalligraphie sehen wir so. Zum Beispiel hatte die Kalligraphie in jener Zeit exakte Regeln, das brachte mich sehr zum Lachen. Beim Kalligraphieren sollen die einzelnen Zeichen zur orthodoxen Schule werden. Nun, wir haben abgeschrieben und geübt, die Zeitung abgeschrieben und noch einmal abgeschrieben. Man sollte ganz korrekt schreiben, und wir haben daraufhin kreuz und quer und durcheinander geschrieben. Nun, wir waren Regimekritiker, und sie dachten, die Kalligraphie hätte eine endgültige Aussage. Wir haben daraufhin angedeutet: „Gibt es außerhalb der Kalligraphie noch Kalligraphie?“ Jetzt waren wir in ihren Augen Exil-Kalligraphen, Kalligraphen, die draußen Zuflucht fanden. Damals, bei der Ausstellung über Tusche, sah jemand unseren Raum *Der letzte Kampf* und meinte, die Yangjiang-Gruppe sei eine Bande von Tusche-Gaunern, sie führe schmutzige Tricks vor und die Künstler überschritten die gebotenen Grenzen immer mehr. *(Lacht)*

Hu Fang In Wirklichkeit hat sie keine Regeln und doch Regeln.

Zheng Guogu Eben. Ich finde, die ganze so genannte Orthodoxie in der Kalligraphie ist eine Art von Inzucht. Wenn man sich zum Beispiel der Grasschrift nähert, muss man unbedingt wie Zhang Xu oder Huai Su schreiben, wenn man das „Lanting Ji“ lernt, muss man genau wie jene Schule um Wang Xizhi schreiben. Und ohne es zu merken, ist man schon hineingeflüchtet und kommt nicht mehr heraus. Dass ich allerdings jemanden, der einen Motor bedient, ersuche zu kalligraphieren, diese Einfachheit gibt es in der Geschichte der Kalligraphie nicht. Plötzlich haben wir verstanden, dass für die Kalligraphie

Calligraphy

Zheng Guogu The Yangjiang Group's approach to calligraphy seems rather an expression of the great difference of opinion with the official political view.

Hu Fang Similar to you, when you first launched into photography?

Zheng Guogu It's just the same with photography. I criticise political views in particular with it. Whatever the ruling party says, we're against it. If it criticises photography for focusing interest on streets and alleys, we immediately go home and do just that. If it criticises photography for worrying about people, we immediately produce a model image of it.

We see calligraphy just the same way. For example, calligraphy had precise rules at the time. I used to roar with laughter at them. When you were doing calligraphy, individual characters had to be the orthodox school. So we copied and practised, copied the newspaper and copied it again. You were supposed to write completely correctly, so we immediately wrote all over the place and in a jumble. So we were critics of the regime, and they thought calligraphy had a conclusive message. We immediately suggested: "is there calligraphy outside calligraphy?" That made us exiled calligraphers in their eyes, calligraphers who had escaped abroad. During the exhibition about ink, someone saw our room called *The Last Struggle* and thought the Yangjiang Group was a band of ink crooks always up to dirty tricks, and artists are going more and more beyond what's allowed. *(laughs)*

Hu Fang In reality it doesn't have any rules and yet does have rules.

Zheng Guogu Exactly. I find that all this so-called orthodoxy in calligraphy is a kind of inbreeding. For example, when you get down to grass writing, no question, you have to do it like Zhang Xu or Huai Su, whereas if you're learning the "Lanting Ji", you have to do it exactly like the Wang Xizhi school. And without noticing it, you're trapped in it and can't get out. Of course, trying to get someone who works on motors to do calligraphy, this simply does not exist in the history of calligraphy. But



Zheng Guogu

Interviewed by Carol (Yinghua) Lu

Carol (Yinghua) Lu: It is not so normal for a contemporary Chinese artist to live in a city like Yangjiang. Have you always been there?

Zheng Guogu: I was born in Chengcun, a small village near Yangjiang. I came to Yangjiang with my parents when I was six years old. By the time I reached 20, I wanted to live in Guangzhou and start up my career. But I got terribly sick and had to return to Yangjiang to recover. Halfway through the trip back to Yangjiang, I already felt much better. So I thought that I could only live in Yangjiang.

Is there something more that attracts you to stay in Yangjiang aside from making art?

You could say that Yangjiang is a city heavily influenced by the popular culture of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Yangjiang is something like a mirage of both. When I was in middle school, I loved reading martial-arts novels. I remember a story about a guy who had won many battles and acquired the best sword in the world. As a great warrior he thought he could have a face-off with Dongfang Bubai, the Invincible Master of the Orient. Entering his home he asked a servant girl, doing embroidery, where Dongfang Bubai was. Not receiving any kind of reaction, he got upset and raised his precious sword to attack the girl. But before he was of any danger, he gave out a loud cry: the servant girl, who was actually Dongfang Bubai in disguise, had hit his vital part simply with a flying needle.

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Apart from this kind of art, I like keeping fancy carp and goldfish as pets. I like gardening, growing trees. I am working on architecture projects and I hang out with friends. All these kind of things could be integrated in my next art project, as we already did in *Indoor Garden*, a Yangjiang Group project.

What is the Yangjiang Group?

The Yangjiang Group has been active on the contemporary art scene in China since 2002. It was formally established in 2005. Its members include Chen Zaiyan, Sun Qinglin and me. From primary school on through today, I have had very little confidence in my handwriting and have always believed it to be very bad. The founding of the Yangjiang Group marked the beginning of my practice in handwriting and my search for a new direction. It reflects China's struggle between traditional and contemporary artistic practices. Our mission is to attack the current state of 'calligraphy' in the new China.

Chen Zaiyan is someone who got hooked on calligraphy since he was little, but had great difficulties getting into the Calligraphy Department of the former Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou. Back in Yangjiang he joined the local calligraphy association, but there his career was obstructed by the hierarchy of calligraphy associations in China. He couldn't enter the more famous ones necessary to be successful. It's hard for someone living in a small town to make a living this way. In 2002 he dropped out of the associations. Personally, I believe that critics in big cities don't necessarily have the competence to evaluate a work from a small town.

Sun Qinglin's case is even more hilarious. His passion for calligraphy came from his uncle who was a blacksmith, and completely illiterate. He had three sons, all of whom

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were mentally ill. In order to supplement his income, when he saw that his next-door neighbor was doing good business selling red couplets (to hang outside the door of one's home), he made copies of red couplets mechanically for sale. Before he passed away, he insisted on giving Sun Qinglin his tools. What he then said was something like, "Lin Ji, I could write calligraphy even though I am illiterate, so you can do it, too."

You are an artist who works without being limited by a specific vocabulary or medium. What do you think has given you such tolerance and flexibility?

I make my works where my interest is focused on. But my interest is changing quite easily. As a result, I have to reinvent myself again and again. I keep the spirit of innovation but I don't reject the old stuff either. It's quite funny. I like it when photography doesn't look like photography, when painting doesn't look like painting, when architecture doesn't look like architecture, and when calligraphy doesn't look like calligraphy. When looking at existing photography, painting, architecture, calligraphy and so on, I ask myself: is it really what they should look like?

Your earlier photography series showed your fascination with the grassroots culture in terms of both medium and content, which was about the lives of average people. From those earlier works to your current calligraphy projects, is grassroots culture a recurring theme?

Yes, I have tried to incorporate the hopelessness of ordinary people and the bottom of society into my work, because I was born with a heroic nature that drives me to help the disadvantaged. I wish that there could be miracles.

How did you come up with the idea to plant pine trees on the exterior walls of the Guangdong Museum of Art and make artificial rain?



The idea for the 'artificial rain' project already existed before the curators of the second Guangzhou Triennial asked me to do a proposal in 2005. When I was making a sketch of the structure of the Guangdong Museum of Art where the biennale would take place a few lines appeared like a high and steep hill. After adding a few trees on top of it, a very interesting plan emerged. I immediately drew a few raindrops on the sketch. The distance between the natural landscape and the urban space almost vanished in the sketch. If all the skyscrapers on the Pearl River Delta were planted with pine trees, cities would have the beauty of the natural landscape. The Guangdong Museum of Art should set an example. In order to turn the museum into a high green hill, a pine forest should be planted on the outer walls of the Guangdong Museum of Art. Then an 'artificial rain' should be created. That would be a rational plan.

The dry ice we used had to be shot into the clouds to generate rain, so it needed to be carried in the two back seats of a helicopter. During the opening, the helicopter circled above the museum for half an hour. Many of the audience members didn't realize that it was an art project, because I hired a police patrol helicopter. When it was circling above the museum, the audience thought that the police had come to intervene into the lively opening of the triennial. As a funny coincidence, most of them ran inside the museum to see the show instead.

Many people associate your work with 'popular trends and consumption.' Am I right to say that the backbone of your practice is more a methodology than any specific subject?

Consumption in our era of the market economy is a subject, yes. In my childhood I was confronted with a lot of commodity trafficking between Mainland China and Hong Kong. My father and his brothers were into shipping illegally Seiko watches, Shuangqiang buckles, bell-bottom trousers, and stupid things like telescopic umbrellas; all kinds of



curiosities and excitements from the outside world. What attracted me the most were radios and TV sets. Until then, the feeling that 'consumption is the ideal and that consumption can better vent one's hatred' arose naturally.

I see the methodology as the 'spiritual' basis for making artworks: artworks with souls won't look like an empty shell. My favorite method is to hit the target by aiming at something else and to draw on transformation and replacement. I prefer to invent some very personal theories: "everything can be a hypothesis."

Many revolutionary movements in the early 20th century were initiated in Guangdong province. Many of the revolutionary leaders of that period all came from Guangdong as well. Both your work and your speech are also full of revolutionary passion, such as your appropriations of Communist rhetoric. Is there a relation?

I have realized in the meantime that I was born as someone with a deviant political view; I like to battle as the oppositional party. Besides that, when you are in Yangjiang, you are doomed to be a pioneer. So unconsciously I became the anti-revolutionary. There is not a bit of hope, even though there are very nice policies on the top. Yangjiang is so remote and distant from central control that even a fruit would turn bad by the time it's delivered. It's the same with that city on the contemporary art map. It is far away from the Chinese and western artistic centers. I can only fight my way out as far as I can, no matter whether it's revolutionary or anti-revolutionary.

What is your next project?

My next project will be centered on the concept of the 'psychological space' and has its predecessor in the group show *This is a Solo Exhibition*. For this show I created a dark



Xu Bing

...
 He is a dedicated producer of all kinds of awards. There's little more to be said.

His works appear simple. Are they meant to? For example, the color seems like children toys. He says that he looks for things which would appeal to children, students and old men. Really does his work intend to satisfy such popular favor?

The simplicity is not worse, and it is gratifying too. It can hide many complex elements within, and confront audiences of all kinds. This is a typical avant-garde concept. But concepts of today are more poignant. They hint at new art methodology, but not simple pleasures for the common people. Xu Bing's appropriation of elements of Chinese culture has been an ongoing approach, and it aims at the western world, but has no any immediate relationship with present cultural situation in China. More like a traditional Chinese scholar, Xu Bing's mind is quiet and frail. He is accumulating his last breath, but it has been said that it will fizzle out anyway. The problem is that he cannot be affectedly bashful, whether blowing the last breath to China, or continue puffing at the western world. It is very hard to flatter both sides.

...

Zheng Guogu

...
 A young man called Zheng Guogu planted a goose in a leveled building site in Yangjiang. This action is significant, and leads my attention to Yangjiang, a fringe zone of contemporary art. With his growth as an artist, Yangjiang became a noticeable scene for contemporary art, and an exclave beyond the modern art system. Now he is concerned more about the correspondence between the common life in Yangjiang and situation of creating art works. One might suggest that the interest in this exclave has been excessively powerful, which is problematic as it is too much of an allure in the daily life of Yangjiang. Following his powerful interventions, the phantom remains and leaves a lasting and pleasant impression.

Will there still be youths of Yangjiang in the future? It is an interesting call, but what about the human condition?

...

Zheng Guogu's Comments

...
 Who can be said to be a versatile person in contemporary art?

It has been said that Qiu Zhijie is a versatile person in the circle of artists. I am shocked by such suggestions. Can no one see that I am the only one who can be actually called as a versatile person in the circle of artists? There are some bedlamites in Beijing, and in Shanghai, and it goes without saying in Guangzhou. In Yangjiang alone, if we speak of bedlamites, they shall be crazy. These are not the issues I am concerned about. I mind that not only should an artist be crazy, but that he can also be clear-headed when he is drunk. I became an owner of properties early on. When everybody else pursued only money, I changed my money into properties. Who can drive his car to the speed of two hundreds and fifty yards per hour completely drunk? It seems like that I am the only one in

The screenshot shows a website gallery with several art pieces and their descriptions in Chinese. The top image shows a dark space with a line of small white figures. Below it is a stylized black and white graphic. The next image shows a room with a wooden floor and a chair. The bottom section features three more images: a group of people on a stage, a couple in a close embrace, and a person working at a table outdoors. Each image is accompanied by a title and a short paragraph of text.