

WORLD ART
COLLECTIONS
EXHIBITIONS

SAINSBURY CENTRE
for Visual Arts

CHINA
CHINA
CHINA

Contemporary Chinese art
beyond the global market
10 February – 3 May

Curators and artists

China China China !!! is curated by:

Li Zhenhua, Art Lab, Beijing
Davide Quadrio, BizArt/Arthub, Shanghai
Zhang Wei, Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou

The exhibition features

18 artists:

Wu Ershan, Shen Shaomin, Wang Yuyang, Zheng Yunhan, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, Zhao Liang, Qin Ga, Chu Yun, Pak Shueng-chuen, Kan Xuan, Duan Jianyu, Lu Chunsheng, Cao Fei, Tseng Yu-Chin, Yang Fudong, Xu Tan, Xu Zhen

Special interview project 40+4, participating artists:

Shen Fan, Zhang Enli, Shi Yong, Yu Youhan, Zhou Tiehai, Huang Yuangqing, Xu Zhen, Huang Kui, Yang Fudong, Lu Chunsheng, Liang Yue, Liu Jianhua, Li Shan, Zhang Ding, Tang Maohong, Wang Xingwei, Song Tao, Lao Jinfeng, Hu Jieming, Xiang Liqing, Yang Zhenzhong, Ding Yi, Luo Yongjin, Qu Anxiong, Xulongbao, Wang Tiande, Zhu Julan, Song Haidong, Gu Wenda, Li Xiangyang, Gong Yan, Li Lei, Liu Dahong, Wang Nanming, Yu Xiaofu, Zhang Peicheng, Qiu Deshu, Yang Hui, Pu Jie, Zang Haitian, Zhang Da, Xue Song

China China China !!! has been conceived and produced by the Centro di Cultura Contemporanea at Palazzo Strozzi, Florence

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Li Zhenhua



Davide Quadrio



Zhang Wei



The China phenomenon

China China China !!! began for the Sainsbury Centre with a relationship with curator Davide Quadrio. Davide led us to contemporary art practice in China and then to a partnership with Franziska Nori at the Centre for Contemporary Culture, Strozziina, Florence. China China China !!! was first developed for the Strozziina gallery in the summer of 2008. Adapted and updated for the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, this exhibition gives us an extraordinary insight into contemporary art practice in China today.

Like an echo, "China China China!" has been resonating for more than 10 years throughout the international art world.

Recent decades have witnessed countless events and shows dedicated to the explosive entrance of Chinese art into the global art system. In the 1990s, these exhibitions highlighted works belonging to the so-called "cynical realism" and "Political Pop" movements, while since 2000 they have focused on a vast new production whose artistic language is increasingly differentiated. Over recent years, contemporary Chinese art has been subject to aggressive financial speculation on the international market. Targeted acquisitions by (mainly Western) institutions and private parties set off a spiral of rapidly increasing prices for works by Chinese artists who had previously been virtually unknown on the international scene. Within just a few years, this increase turned into a fully fledged boom in New York and London auctions. Meanwhile, many European galleries have opened branches in China in order to position themselves in what seemed a potential new market, given the country's expanding wealth, as well as fertile ground for recruiting new talent to catapult into the international circuit.

Open for business

In the past 20 years or so, the Chinese People's Republic has joined the great industrialised nations, positioning itself in a very short time second only to the United States in economic production and GDP. Thanks to the introduction of

economic reforms implemented in the late 1970s, China has gradually opened up to international capitalist trade based on private enterprise, abandoning the Communist-style, centralised socioeconomic model. Since their introduction, these reforms have brought the Chinese population a new degree of well-being, putting an end to the dramatic conditions of poverty, especially in the rural areas. In effect, China discovered a way to make the present political system coexist with the need for international economic development, creating a mixed form that nonetheless involves direct state control of about one-third of the economy, defined as "Chinese-style socialism".

Traditionally, the two major production sectors in China were agriculture and industry, which employed and thus defined the existence of 70 per cent of the population. In recent years, however, China has rapidly shifted the focus of its production towards greater industrialisation, so that the income of those working in industry-related sectors has grown much faster than that of those working in agriculture. This situation is at the heart of one of contemporary China's most serious problems: the growing economic, social and cultural gap between the rural and urban areas.

It is not only the previously existing cities that are mushrooming uncontrollably; at the beginning of this century, the Chinese minister of public affairs declared as a strategic

objective the construction of 400 new cities by the year 2020, each designed for millions of inhabitants. This massive, rapid migration from the countryside into old and new urban centres creates gigantic social, infrastructural and urban planning problems, not to mention horrific ecological ones, which for the moment seem to have faded into the background, overshadowed by the general positivist climate and the strong desire for progress and individual well-being.

The shock of the new

All these changes are occurring in an extraordinarily brief time frame and in a country with many different ethnic, religious and cultural identities – a wide range of life experiences in completely distinct environmental contexts. Today's China is shot through with countless discrepancies – the generational one, for example, which means that the old generations are often rooted in the world of tradition, while the new ones, children of the reform era, experience progress as a chance to achieve individual well-being. It is a young generation, oriented towards international fashion and trends, which in the search for its own identity is seeking a response to the demands and possibilities of modern life, balancing personal ambition and social limitations, economic needs and constant innovation. Another contrast is the glaring discrepancy between the situations of the rural and urban populations. Millions of migrant workers leave the countryside and their families to work as low-cost labour in the many

factories, producing the goods that have conquered international markets. Others work in the mega-cities, in the construction sites of the building boom, yet still remain on the fringe of a rapidly rising and increasingly cosmopolitan society. This leads to the economic discrepancy between those with access to education and information, who manage to find their role within the logic of global production, and those who do not have such opportunities.

But it is not only China that is changing. This reawakening of the ancient empire is sending shock waves around the world, and we have yet fully to grasp the ecological and geopolitical dimensions of its consequences. China's hunger for raw materials, the engine of its economic growth, has generated unexpected international coalitions and relations that are capable of changing the previous global balance of power quite quickly. One need merely observe the present economic policy, with Chinese oil companies present en masse in Sudan and economic agreements signed with Venezuela, Iran and Uzbekistan.

Accelerated change

In fact, China is evolving from a fundamentally rural society to an industrial one, as all the Western nations did in the past; the difference is that this transformation is not progressing gradually over a century or two as happened in Europe and the United States, but is happening in a mere few decades and with

the help of all the most advanced technologies in communications, manufacture and scientific research. But what effect do all these radical changes and opportunities have on the individual? How are men and women actually experiencing this multi-faceted, complicated reality? How can they redefine their own identity between tradition and modernity?

These are the questions that concerned us as we began developing the China China China !!! project.

Rather than calling on Western curators, individual collectors or galleries operating in China, as is often done by other institutions setting up exhibitions on China, we chose to invite three representatives of the new generation of cultural operators, all of whom live and work in China, are not associated with government institutions and have worked independently for years – and at times paid the price in the form of censorship. Thus, the China China China !!! exhibition is divided into three distinct areas, expressing the personal visions of Li Zhenhua, Davide Quadrio and Zhang Wei, and giving us the chance to confront and explore three completely different approaches and viewpoints, which as a total experience nevertheless allow a critical reflection on the “China phenomenon”, on current cultural production and on the impact it is having on the international art system.

Franziska Nori
Project Director
Centre for Contemporary
Culture Strozziina, Florence

China is waiting: the 2008 downturn

After the recent mania for Chinese contemporary art, the financial downturn is affecting the art market. In only three months, the fall in the market for Chinese contemporary art has been so severe that many new galleries, including those without vision or a strong commitment to Chinese practice, are closing, or reducing their activities and investments. The time of easy money is over.

In the last five years – the ‘golden wave’ of Chinese contemporary art – we watched with distress the huge increase in investment in Chinese art, which was seen as a high-return product. The speculative market in China was created largely by western collectors, not the local market. Asian collectors were a small minority (even though some were extremely important) from Beijing and Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

In the ‘40+4, Art is not enough, not enough’ project, artist Zhu Julian described the situation in 2007:

I think art itself is luxury. Of course luxury can exist in either the material dimension or spiritual dimension. What I am talking about is more on the spiritual dimension. If you have the ability to enjoy art, it means your life is very luxurious. It requires a lot of knowledge, artistic accomplishment and emotional investment.

From another angle, art has its commercial value. It is very expensive, so we call it luxury.

Of course there are lots of good art works which truly are luxury items. They are very expensive things. But we still have to distinguish between the two. That is, even if I have no money, I can still enjoy art; but even if I have money, I may not necessarily be able to enjoy art.

More and more artists feel that this moment will facilitate the elimination of a certain group of speculators and ‘trendy’ artists, giving good artists the time and space they need to make work. We are now at a crossing point, where the crisis will bring perspective: it is time to go back to serious, considered curatorial work, building a healthy artistic and cultural environment.

There is a long legacy of art in China made with no commercial goal – from the revolutionary Star Group in the 1970s to the 1985 New Wave movement and the artists who in the 1990s lived together at Yuan Ming Yuan village (Old Summer Palace) to work in a community as a statement for art and freedom. The development in the art market from 2005 is a recent phenomenon – what interests us is the relationship between art, contemporary society and the legacy of the last 30 years. If ‘risk’ has been the key word in the art world, in future we need a more in-depth analysis of contemporary art in China; only with this attitude can art in China develop and be truly supported.

For us, the curators, our practice moves on. Davide Quadrio is now based in Bangkok, working with a

broader Asian network through Arthub. Li Zhenhua’s work is largely experimental and based on digital media. His international projects continue to engage with artists outside the machinations of the art market. He still works in Beijing but is now also based in Zurich. For Zhang Wei, the work of Vitamin Creative Space continues and, in Beijing, she recently opened The Shop, an experimental space that will create another platform for communication and innovation in contemporary art.

**Davide Quadrio, Zhang Wei,
Li Zhenhua**
January 2009

China China China !!!

Exhibition Events Highlights

China China China !!! Study Day

Thursday 12 February

10am – 4pm

Where: meet at Gallery
Reception

Price: £25, £20 concessions;
includes refreshments and lunch

Booking: essential, call
01603 593199

This study day is open to
everyone.

Don't miss this special opportunity to discover more about China China China !!! from the curators of the exhibition. Enjoy discussions between Davide Quadrio, Li Zhenhua and Zhang Wei about their practice, hear about the ideas behind the exhibition and learn more about their views on identity and culture in contemporary China. There will also be a chance for you to talk to the curators and take part in their discussions.

**Part of the China China China !!!
season.**

To join our mailing list email
scva@uea.ac.uk or call
01603 593199.

A large print version
of this information is
available on request

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The Gatsby Charitable Foundation

Revolutionary Chinese Cooking

Wednesday 25 March

6pm – 10pm

Drinks from 6pm

Talk at 6.30pm

Food served at 8pm

Where: Garden Restaurant

Price: £25, £22.50

concessions; includes an
arrival drink, evening talk and
two-course meal

Booking: essential by 16 March,
call 01603 593199

Join internationally known food
writer Fuchsia Dunlop for the
evening and discover her
passion for revolutionary
Chinese culture and cuisine.

Begin the night with a glass of
wine and a fascinating talk from
Fuchsia. Then enjoy a delicious
two-course meal, created by
Sainsbury Centre head chef
Stephen Wright, giving you a
chance to taste food inspired
by Fuchsia's knowledge of
Chinese cuisine.

Fuchsia Dunlop is the author
of a number critically acclaimed
cookbooks including *The
Revolutionary Chinese Cookbook*
and *Sichuan Cookery*. She
writes for publications including
Gourmet, *Saveur* and the
Financial Times, and she is
a regular guest on radio and
television, appearing on shows
including *Gordon Ramsay's The
F-Word*. She was named *Food
Journalist of the Year* by the *British
Guild of Food Writers* in 2006.

**Part of the China China China !!!
season.**

World Cinema Chinese Films

Films start 8.30pm

Where: Cinema City

Price: film – £7.50, £5.50

Cinema City members and

SCVA Friends (show

membership card at box

office), £5 concessions

(under-15s, full-time students,

claimants, senior citizens);

talk – £4.50, £3 concessions.

Booking fee for non-members

Booking: Cinema City,

0871 7042053,

www.picturehouses.co.uk

(no early-bird booking)

Still Life (PG)

Monday 30 March

Suzhou River (12A)

Monday 13 April

**Manufactured Landscapes
(U) Monday 27 April**

Introduced by Chris Rodden.

World Cinema Talk

Tuesday 7 April

8.30pm

Speaker: Chris Rodden

Despite political and cultural
restraints, since 1984 Chinese
cinema has exploded on to
the international scene. Chris
Rodden traces the influences,
political and artistic, that have
determined its path.

For further information visit
www.scva.ac.uk or pick up
a flyer at Gallery Reception.

Special workshops linked
to the China China China !!!
exhibition can be booked by
schools. For further details and
to book, email becca.smith@uea.ac.uk
or call 01603 593936.