

CAS CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART I EXECUTIVE EDUCATION ON GLOBAL CULTURE

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CONNECTING SPACES



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Executive Education in Global Culture

Executive Education in Global Culture is a new format of the Advanced Studies Programmes initiated by the office of Further Education at Zurich University of the Arts. It is dedicated to new and internationally significant processes within the field of contemporary art. The program addresses curators, artists, journalists, cultural producers, gallery owners, collectors, researchers, and teaching faculty in the fields of Swiss and international contemporary art.

Chinese contemporary art serves as starting point for the first CAS in Global Culture. Under the direction of Michael Schindhelm and Christoph Schenker, Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl investigate the contexts and processes of development around the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) founded by Uli Sigg in 1998. As a result this reader, including essays, interviews, and network diagrams, offers new and exclusive insights in the social and artistic development of Chinese contemporary art. The CAS "Contemporary Chinese Art I" offers an attractive mixture of theory and practice. Its exclusive approach to CCAA actors will include the opportunity for professional exchange and networking within those contexts.

The CAS Contemporary Chinese Art

The Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in "Contemporary Chinese Art I" offers creative artists, cultural producers, and members of the general public exclusive insights into contemporary Chinese art, first-hand information about the art scene in China, and a wide range of contacts with relevant local and international institutions and actors.

Sessions build specialist knowledge and skills based on an approach to teaching and research developed especially for this program. The research undertaken at the Institute for Contemporary Art Research (IFCAR), together with practical case studies on the development of Chinese contemporary art since the 1980s, ensure that this further education opportunity provides a completely new approach to its subject.

The context

The research developed especially for this programme and the CAS "Contemporary Chinese Art I" are closely linked to "Connecting Spaces Hong Kong – Zurich", an initiative by Zurich University of the Arts with its two principle objectives, to explore perspectives and opportunities for cooperation between Hong Kong and Zurich and to consider the future of arts universities in the globalized twenty-first century. Connecting Spaces is a hub and an exploratory platform for collaborative projects between Zurich University of the Arts and various institutions in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia.

Starting point

The Contemporary Chinese Art Award (CCAA) looks back on a fifteen-year history. The CCAA is awarded in the following categories (the first three prizes are conferred on an alternating basis to the last one): Life's Work – Best Artist – Best Young Artist – Best Art Critic. The list of award-winners reads like a "Who is Who?" in the current contemporary scene in China. The CAS in "Contemporary Chinese Art I" offers an exclusive approach to CCAA actors, The Sigg Collection, and Hong Kong's M+ Museum (currently under construction) to explore the development of contemporary Chinese Art through this particular "case", not only close up but also with the broadest possible knowledge and experience.

Course objectives

The CAS in “Contemporary Chinese Art I” aims to:

- advance knowledge and professional practice in the field of contemporary Chinese art
- define collection strategies and their dynamics since the 1990s and for the near future
- develop criteria for the critical engagement with contemporary Chinese art
- provide insights into the establishment of an exemplary museum in Asia on the scale of the Centre Pompidou or the Tate Modern using the example of Hong Kong’s M+
- clarify strategies for the siting of art institutions in Hong Kong as an example of the emergence of a cultural landscape in Asian metropolises

The programme

The CAS offers a set of lectures, seminars, interactive workshops and a visit to the Sigg collection’s art storage in Bueron, Switzerland. The list of speakers and contributors includes (see faculty and speaker’s bios under Appendix):

Michael Schindhelm, *Course director*
Barbara Preisig, *Research associate*
Franz Kraehenbuehl, *Research associate*
Elisabeth Danuser, *Coordinator*
Christoph Schenker, *Head of Institute for Contemporary Art Research ZHdK*
Uli Sigg, *Collector and founder of the CCAA*
Lars Nittve, *Executive Director Museum M+ Hong Kong*
Pi Li, *Curator Sigg Collection, Museum M+ Hong Kong / Sigg Collection*
Anna Li Liu, *Director Contemporary Chinese Art Award*
Desmond Hui, *Non-executive director at Hong Kong Urban Renewal*
Li Zhenhua, *Curator, writer, artist*
Annette Schönholzer, *Former director of Art Basel*

The CAS will for the first time take place in Zurich between March 28–30 and May 20 – June 1 2015. It will take place a second time in Hong Kong by the end of 2015 / beginning of 2016 and a third time in Zurich as part the ZHdK Summer School in 2016.

Further CAS focusing on new global cases and topics will follow.

Prof. Elisabeth Danuser,
Head of Center Further Education,
Zurich, March 2015

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PREFACE

PREFACE

Cultural workers as a rule start a new project by researching their prospective field of inquiry. In recent years, cultural globalisation itself has become a project, for cultural researchers as well as for art collectors, writers, and filmmakers. Many descriptive accounts and diverse perspectives are needed to better fathom this field and its manifold processes. Precisely this is the aim of the lectures on global culture and the *Executive Education on Global Culture* offered at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

The current situation of artists and cultural researchers recalls that of cinema-goers watching the same film for the nth time. They know the characters, the key scenes, the outcome. Except that this film suddenly starts running faster and faster. We lose our bearings. We see familiar sequences, but also unfamiliar ones. We realise that the film is narrating something new. But we don't know what. Memory doesn't serve us. We leave the cinema – irritated or fascinated, or indeed both – and realise that the film continues beyond the screen. No one is giving directions. We must discover our own roles and develop a dramaturgy for ourselves.

Swiss art collector Uli Sigg may justifiably be seen as a pioneer of cultural globalisation. Today, the sixty-nine-year-old owns the largest and most important collection of contemporary Chinese art in the world. Over the past thirty years, Sigg has promoted Chinese artists and art like no one else, disseminating it across the world as well as in China. Thus, a Swiss collector has studied and through his collection documented the largest cultural area in the field of contemporary art in a manner both unprecedented and unrivalled to this day.

In 1979, aged 33, Sigg travelled to the Middle Kingdom as member of a business delegation of Schindler AG at the invitation of the Chinese government. In the next twelve years, he served as vice-president of the first-ever joint venture between a Western enterprise and Communist China. Sigg

brought a piece of capitalism to the Middle Kingdom. He became closely acquainted with the country, its people, its society, and its upheavals perhaps more than any other Westerner at the time. By the end of the 1980s, Sigg probably knew China better than the majority of the Chinese population. In 1995, Fabio Cotti, Switzerland's Foreign Minister at the time, appointed Sigg Swiss Ambassador to China, a post involving four exciting years in unconventional diplomacy.

At that time, Sigg also began taking an interest in modern Chinese art, probably as the only foreigner. He met artists in their informal studios and visited secret exhibitions. Gradually, he became a mentor for many artists. In 1998, he founded the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA). The CCAA became a unique instrument for making contact with artists as well as for establishing an informal *academy* of intercultural exchange, especially thanks to the top-class juries assembled by Sigg (including Harald Szeemann in the early days, and later many curators from China and many important Western museums and biennales). Over the past twenty years, the CCAA has proven to be a crucial platform for tracking developments within Chinese art as they unfolded. The award has also established criteria for guiding Sigg's activities and thinking as a collector.

What has emerged is a collection that corresponds not to its owner's and his advisors' taste but – as Sigg observes – a *document* of art history. Sigg, who lives in Castle Mauenstein near Lucerne, has always felt that one day his collection should return to China. This vision has now become a reality through his donation in June 2012 to Hong Kong's M+ Museum for Visual Culture. Following the completion of the museum, designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, in 2018, around 1600 works from The Sigg Collection will be on display in Hong Kong, making the M+ the world's centre for contemporary Chinese art.

It therefore seems feasible to consider the CCAA and its history as a case study well suited to both academic research and to the teaching of contemporary Chinese art and its evolution since the early 1980s. The distinctive feature of our CAS in Contemporary Chinese Art is its combination of research and teaching. The appointment of art historians Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl from the ZHdK Institute of Contemporary Art Research means that two specialists will spend six months studying the CCAA, its history, its laureates, jury members, and its effects. Uli Sigg and CCAA director Anna Li Liu have opened their archive for the very first time to facilitate our research.

10 Our CAS in Contemporary Chinese Art will thus benefit in a unique way from new and key insights into contemporary Chinese art. These findings will be complemented by the practical knowledge of key actors involved in the emergence of the M+, the first museum dedicated exclusively to contemporary Chinese art. Experts include the director of the M+, the curator of The Sigg Collection, one of the most important new-generation Chinese curators, a Hong Kong-based creative industry specialist, and a former Art Basel marketing expert and event director.

This reader is meant as an introduction to the field and as working material. My warm thanks go to the authors and to Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), especially Elisabeth Danuser and Christoph Schenker, for their unwavering commitment to this exciting educational venture. May the material gathered here provide readers with many new and refreshing insights into the contemporary art of the Middle Kingdom!

Michael Schindhelm,
course director CAS Chinese Contemporary Art 1,
March 2015

FOCUS: CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ART AWARD

MR. CHINA: THE MAKING OF
THE SIGG COLLECTION

THE WEST DISCOVERS CONTEMPORARY
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HISTORIES OF THE UNKNOWN
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THE CCAA CUBE –
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ONE CHINA, TWO ARTISTS:
HUANG YONG PING AND YAN XING

MR. CHINA: THE MAKING OF THE SIGG COLLECTION

In 1997, Swiss-born Uli Sigg decided to establish an art prize. Since the late 1970s, Sigg had been making regular business trips to China and from 1995 he was stationed in Beijing as the Swiss Ambassador to China. Sigg (born 1946) had acquired an in-depth knowledge of the country already while serving the Schindler Group as an Area Manager for Asia Pacific and later as a Member of the Group Executive Committee and Shareholders' Committee. In this capacity, he oversaw the first joint venture between China and a Western company in 1980. This success brought Sigg great acclaim in the West but especially in China. Prior to the deal, cooperative ventures between a Western capitalist firm and Communist China had been considered inconceivable.

CCTV at Tien'anmen Square



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A year before Tian'anmen, the post-Maoist regime had declared a "Open-door Policy." This political opening had liberalising effects on art production in China. For the first time since the Communist Revolution, a relatively autonomous art became imaginable. Before the opening, art had stood entirely in the service of political propaganda and national education. The limits of the newly gained freedom were first fathomed in 1979, when a number of artists exhibited their works publicly under the name Star Group. Already a day later, this counter-exhibition, branded as anti-socialist, was banned, sparking a protest march demanding democracy and artistic freedom. A year later, the Star Group received an invitation from the state art gallery to display its works. The authorities' strategy, that the population would reject unfamiliar art or express its disinterest in such works, backfired: the exhibition attracted almost 200,000 visitors. Some of the works, albeit the minority, explicitly criticised government policies and their representatives, leading visitors to understand the exhibition as a political statement.¹ Although the works distanced themselves strongly from the previous state doctrine on the visual arts, only very few of the artists established at the time managed to break open the prevailing style of socialist realism or to develop their own idiom in the face of Western art (→ Interview with Uli Sigg).

It was only the next generation of artists, which was granted access to the long-closed art academies, that formulated a new artistic idiom in China.² It was these artists in particular who attracted Uli Sigg's interest. He began collecting their works, which are now referred to as contemporary Chinese art, as early as the 1990s. Today, his

1 www.zeestone.com/article.php?articleID=16 (last accessed January 2015)

2 Chen, Patricia: *Uli Sigg in Conversation with Patricia Chen. Collecting Chinese Contemporary Art*, Sekel Media Asia (ed.), Hong Kong, 2014, p. 17.

collection of such art is the most important of its kind because it spans the development of Chinese art over a period of almost forty years and rescued especially many early works from destruction. Sigg refers to his collection as a “document” and regards art as key to understanding Chinese culture. In his own words, Sigg’s activities as a collector are guided not by any subjective aesthetic considerations but by his aspiration to accurately reflect art production in China. His project aims to achieve social relevance beyond personal taste.

Why did Uli Sigg establish a Chinese art prize? And why in 1997 of all years? In the 1990s, contemporary Chinese art was an underground phenomenon. Barely any museums, galleries, or other public exhibition spaces existed at the time. Nor was there any state funding for art. Art production was confined to some few art academies and to artist studios located in remote regions of the country. The dissident art movements that established themselves in the 1990s – Conceptualism, Political Pop, and Cynical Realism – were all censored. Sigg’s prize can thus be seen as a reaction to the cultural policy prevailing in those years, as a form of recognising and promoting the (government-) critical voice of art, as a means of supporting those artists receiving no support, let alone understanding, from the state or the majority of the population (→ Histories of the Unknown Chinese artist). The Chinese Contemporary Art Award, which at the time was called the Contemporary Chinese Art Award, also aimed to support the fledgling independence of contemporary Chinese art as non-state, non-commercial organisation (→ 15 Years of the CCAA – To whom does contemporary Chinese art belong?). Looking back at those years, Sigg describes the aim of the prize as giving “awards to Chinese artists and art critics who show outstanding achievement in artistic creation, and in its analysis and critique. CCAA encourages their development and enhances awareness and appreciation among a wider public for what Chinese art contributes to contemporary Chinese culture.”³

The CCAA, however, was not limited to providing young Chinese artists with financial support. It also held out new prospects for Sigg as a collector. Attracting submissions from a considerable number of artists offered a unique opportunity to provide insights into the hitherto uncharted territory of contemporary Chinese art. In particular in its early years, the prize served Sigg as a key networking tool, because the political and economic situation at the time made it virtually impossible to access the underground scene. Hence, the challenge facing the prize in those early years was to make contact with artists producing works in hiding, out of sight from the government (→ Interview with Sigg and Pi Li). Sigg tasked Pi Li and Karen Smith, among others, with encouraging potential prize-winners in and around China’s art academies to submit works to the CCAA jury.

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Art handling at the Sigg Collection storage

3 CCAA (ed.): CCAA15. 15 Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) (Exhibition catalogue for works shown at the 5/F Power Station of Art Shanghai, 25 April – 20 July 2014), Shanghai 2014, p. 3.

Sigg's interests as a patron and promoter coincided with his interests as a collector, for whom a new segment of artists and art now gradually opened up. Initiating the award helped Sigg to gain a broader knowledge of China's art scene; in turn, his knowledge considerably influenced the composition of the collection. The majority of the artists awarded the CCAA between 1998 and 2013 are represented in the Sigg Collection. Vice versa, the CCAA's selection and recognition of artists influences the collection by legitimating the artists gathered there. The academic jurying system makes an important statement about the prize: the CCAA, thus the central claim, is based on objective quality standards, not on a private collector's taste (→ The CCAA Cube – Reflection after Expansion). The CCAA jury includes the most acclaimed curators of contemporary art, whose expertise lies beyond any doubt.

The CCAA also served as a networking tool in quite a different way. Just as significant as its promotion of artists is CCAA's international promotion of contemporary Chinese art. "The CCAA has widely promoted Chinese contemporary art internationally and has built a bridge between Chinese artists and the international art world (...). Essential for the success of the CCAA are the highly profiled jury members and the CCAA directors – international and Chinese in equal number – who have then worked into their own projects much of what they saw in the jury meetings."⁴ Just how successful this strategy was from its inception becomes clear when one considers the effects of the jurying of the 1998 submissions. Less than a year later, Harald Szeemann, the first CCAA juror, presented twenty Chinese artists at the Venice Biennale (→ The West discovers Contemporary Chinese Art, and so does China, → Social Networks Around the Sigg Collection).

In spite of Sigg's assurances that his collection and the CCAA are two independent institutions, their close ties are omnipresent in China. It is not least through these ties, at whose centre stands Sigg, that the CCAA's internationalisation strategy acts back on the collection and its exhibits. National and international curators affirm through the CCAA Award the legitimacy of the artists gathered in the Sigg Collection and thus also Sigg's selection criteria. In this way, the Sigg Collection continues to determine to a considerable extent the canon of contemporary Chinese art to this day, an influence greatly indebted to the CCAA jurors' international exhibition projects. Sigg himself owes his meanwhile highly influential position within the international art scene also to the CCAA jurors and their acclaimed projects. He is, among others, a Member of the International Council at New York's MoMA and a Member of the International Advisory Council of the Tate Gallery, London.

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Donation ceremony of the Sigg Collection to West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong



Today, Sigg's collection is world-famous even though no more than 300 to 400 of the over 2000 works have been shown publicly in the West. Only a fraction of the collection has ever been exhibited in China. And yet the collection has made a considerable contribution to contemporary Chinese art establishing itself within the international art scene. This

4 CCAA (ed.): CCAA15. 15 Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) (Exhibition catalogue for works shown at the 5/F Power Station of Art Shanghai, 25 April – 20 July 2014), Shanghai 2014.

plainly reveals that Sigg, the promoter and communicator of this art, has succeeded in deploying individual works as representative of his entire collection and in staging these publicly so that they are perceived as representative of contemporary Chinese art. Hence, it is hardly astonishing that Hong Kong's M+, the museum of contemporary art in Asia that will exceed all superlatives once built, considers itself fortunate to base its collection on the works collected by Sigg over the years. The Sigg Collection has given a total of 1463 works to the M+ Museum of Visual Culture in Hong Kong. Another forty-seven works belonging to the Sigg Collection have been sold to the M+ for around 22 million Swiss francs. Approximately 600 works will remain the property of Uli and Rita Sigg.

Today, the CCAA receives financial assistance from the M+. This was one of Sigg's conditions for donating a considerable part of his collection to the museum. The M+ is more than prepared to grant this support, not least because to date it owes its historical, academic, and political legitimacy as a state-funded museum of contemporary Chinese art to a considerable extent to the Sigg Collection. With the Sigg Collection, the M+ boasts a unique selling proposition that remains historically unassailable (→ Interview with Uli Sigg, Lars Nittve, Tobias Berger, and Pauline Yao).



Construction site M+, Hong Kong

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The CCAA is pivotal, not only within the Sigg Collection but also within Sigg's mission to raise contemporary Chinese art to long-term and successful international prominence. This case study demonstrates that the CCAA is not merely about artists and their works but that the development of contemporary Chinese art is the result of maintaining social networks and relationships. The successful popularisation of contemporary Chinese art is due not only to a unique collection or an in-depth knowledge of contemporary art production in China but largely also to a broad network of key players capable of multiplying the knowledge of contemporary Chinese art across the world (→ Social Networks Around the Sigg Collection).

Detailed research on the emergence on an "internationally" oriented contemporary Chinese art casts light on several hitherto invisible connections that reach beyond the narrow field of art and raise new, still unanswered questions: How can Sigg's project be described as a joint venture within the field of art? Which parallels can be made out between China's economic opening and the internationalisation of its art? Which role does Uli Sigg play within this context? Are these developments part of Western colonisation tendencies? Which notion of art does the selection of CCAA award-winners reflect? How does Sigg position himself and his activities within the history of contemporary Chinese art and which canon of Chinese art history does he represent? Which role does he occupy within these developments?

Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl

THE WEST DISCOVERS CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART (AND SO DOES CHINA)

To this day, the Venice Biennale and its national pavilions play an important role in the national representation of contemporary art. Just as important as the pavilions, however, is the curated section of the Biennale, where curators showcase the latest currents and trends in international art production. A significant debt in this respect is owed to curator Achille Bonito Oliva, who, in 1993, enabled 14 artists from China to exhibit their works at the world's most renowned art biennale for the first time. The exhibition was appropriately named *Passage to the Orient*. "Before [the 45 Venice Biennale], Chinese art, was thought to be exotic," observes critic Ning Hui on the relationship between China and the Venice Biennale.⁵ When the "official" China received an invitation to the Biennale already in the 1980s, it decided to invoke its cultural legacy and exhibited traditional craftwork such as tapestries and paper cuttings. Under Mao, that is, before its cautious economic opening, China resembled a white spot on the world's art map. The country was sealed off from the rest of the world and inaccessible to the global presentation of art.

In 1999, at the 48th Venice Biennale, curator Harald Szeemann, stimulated by the CCAA, set a further milestone in the Western perception of contemporary Chinese art. He presented the works of twenty artists from China. One of those artists, Cai Guoqiang, was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Artist. This surprised even the seasoned mundane audience, because at the time Chinese art was still considered exotic. No one had suspected that within a few years this art would establish itself internationally and fetch the highest prices at art fairs. It was not until 2003 that the "official" China received a national pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The pavilion, however, failed to represent critical art produced in the country. The history of the Venice Biennale documents not only the comet-like ascendancy of contemporary Chinese art in the Western art scene. Closer examination also reveals that behind the various exhibition projects stand diverse vested interests in the promotion of contemporary Chinese art.

The history of the Venice Biennale shows that for a long time the Chinese government was not involved in the promotion of the country's contemporary art. On the contrary, such art was a thorn in the government's side and did not correspond to the country's official image of itself. Since the 1990s, Chinese art had been brought to international attention thanks to the efforts of individuals from the West. Uli Sigg occupies a pivotal role in this respect, along with gallery owner Urs Meile and collectors Guy Ullens and Hans von Dijk. The success of Sigg's mission manifested itself already in 1999 in Harald Szeemann's selection of artists for the Venice Biennale. Sigg, however, also pursued this objective with his own collection, resulting in 2005 in a comprehensive exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bern, "*Mahjong: Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg*," which he organised in close association with curator Bernhard Fibicher. Self-assuredly, the exhibition catalogue emphasises that the show gathers the most extensive collection of contemporary Chinese art ever seen in the West and adequately represents current Chinese art production to a Western audience (→ 15 Years of the CCAA – To whom does contemporary Chinese art belong?, → Mr. China: The Making of the Sigg Collection). Notably, the Sigg Collection consists predominantly of works whose critical stance toward Chinese society and the country's regime clashes with the image envisaged by the official China.

It took the Chinese government somewhat longer to recognise the merits of the country's contemporary art. One might even say that the government's hand had to be forced in this respect. In 2001, the China Festival and the Asia-Pacific Weeks were held in Berlin. Aware of the recent boom of contemporary Chinese art, the government of Berlin invited the official China to exhibit the works of contemporary Chinese artists. In response

⁵ www.tealeafnation.com/2013/06/chinas-complicated-relationship-with-the-venice-biennale/ (last accessed January 2015).

to the invitation, the government, which until then had taken precious little interest in contemporary art production, instead suggested an exhibition of terracotta warriors, thus highlighting that its understanding of art was deeply entrenched in tradition. After Berlin government representatives and the exhibition-makers steadfastly refused to accept this far-from-contemporary theme, in the end the emigré Chinese curator Hou Hanru was commissioned by the Chinese government to oversee the exhibition. Together with his former fellow student Fan Di'an (→ Social Networks Around the Sigg Collection), Hou Hanru curated an exhibition featuring young contemporary positions and thus introduced the representatives of the all-powerful state to "their" art, with which they were completely unfamiliar (→ Interview Uli Sigg). Contrary to the historical image of China that an exhibition of terracotta warriors would have conveyed, the exhibition text, "Living in Time: 29 Contemporary Artists in China," highlighted the fact that the works on display dealt with social change in China and explored the boundary between tradition and modernity.⁶

In the following years, the Chinese government began to regard culture more and more as an instrument for influencing the Western image of China. This altered perspective captured the function of art to convey high ideational and intellectual values. Following the longstanding image of China as a strict communist country pursuing neo-liberal economic policies, the softpower qualities of art were ideally suited to providing the West with a more multifaceted image of the Middle Kingdom. All too critical exhibitions are, however, less suited to achieving this objective than, for instance, unpolitical ink paintings.

Year	Titel	Place
2014		
2014	Is Utopia for Sale?	Maxxi Museum, Roma, I
2014	15 Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA)	Power Station of Art, Shanghai, CN
2014	Performance and Imagination. Photography from China 1911–2014	Stavanger Art Museum, Stavanger, N
2013		
2013	Shanghai/Paris. Modern Art of China	China Art Museum, Shanghai, CN
2013	Portrait of the Times. 30 Years of Chinese Contemporary Art	Power Station of Art, Shanghai, CN
2013	Chinese Realities. Documentary Visions	The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
2013	Ink Art. Past as Present in Contemporary China	The Metropolitan Museum Of Art, New York, USA
2013	28 Chinese	Rubell Family Collection / Contemporary Arts Collection, Miami, USA
2013	Duchamp and / or / in China	Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing, CN
2013	China China	The PinchukArtCentre, Kiev, UA
2012		
2012	Vision, Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition	Z-Art Center, Shanghai, CN
2012	Asian Women Artists	Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, JP
2011		
2011	Catch the Moon in the Water. Emerging Chinese Artists	James Cohan Gallery, New York, USA
2011	Out of the Box. The Threshold of Video Art in China 1984–1998	Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou, CN
2011	Museum on Paper. 12 Chinese Artists	Iberia Art Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, CN
2011	Moving Image in China 1988–2011	Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, CN

6 www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/hamburger-bahnhof/ausstellungen/ausstellung-detail/living-in-time.html (last accessed January 2015).

2011	Spectrum. Chinese Independent Animation	Contemporary Arts Center, ChengDu, CN
2011	Video from the New China	Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2011	Shanshui – Poetry Without Sound? Landscape in Chinese Contemporary Art	Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, CH
2010		
2010	Beijing Voice. Annual Project	Pace Beijing, Beijing, CN
2010	Thirty Years of Chinese Contemporary Art	Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, CN
2010	CHINA POWER STATION. Contemporary Chinese Art from the Astrub Fearnley Collection	Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin, I
2010	Reshaping History. Chinart from 2000–2009	China National Convention Center, Beijing, CN
2010	Roundtrip. Beijing-New York Now – Selections from the Domus Collection	UCCA, Beijing, CN
2010	Zeitgenössische chinesische Fotografie	Oldenburger Kunstverein, Oldenburg, D
2009		
2009	Stolen treasures from modern China	ShanghART Beijing, Beijing, CN
2009	Collision. Experimental Cases of Contemporary Chinese Art	CAFA Art Museum, Beijing, CN
2009	First Annual Conference of Collectors of Chinese Contemporary Art	Hejingyuan Art Museum, Beijing, CN
2009	Mahjong. Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection	Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass, USA
2009	Une Chine peut en cache une autre	Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Paris, F
2009	Reversed Images. representations of Shanghai and Its Contemporary Material Culture	MoCP Museum of Contemporary Photography, Shanghai, CN
2009	Chinese Art Generation. Breaking Forecast. 8 key Figures of China's New Generation Artists	Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing, CN
2009	Breaking Forecast. 8 Key Figures of China's New Generation Artists	UCCA, Beijing, CN
2009	State of Things. Exhibition of the Contemporary Art Exchange between China and Belgium	BOZAR Center for the Arts, Brussels, BE
2009	The Big World. Recent Art from China	Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, USA
2008		
2008	Asking For It. Everyday Neurosis in Chinese Contemporary Art	Mackintosh Gallery, Glasgow, UK
2008	Five Years of Duolun. Chinese Contemporary Art Retrospective Exhibition	Duolun Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, CN
2008	Chinese Freedom	T SPACE, Beijing, CN
2008	Hypallage. The Post-Modern Mode of Chinese Contemporary Art	Hua Art Museum, Shenzhen, Guangdong, CN
2008	China New Vision. The Contemporary Collection of Shanghai Art Museum	Centro Arte Moderna e Contemporanea della Spezia, I
2008	Half-Life of a Dream. Contemporary Chinese Art from the Logan Collection	San Francisco, USA
2008	Mahjong. Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection	The University of California, Berkeley, USA
2008	China. The City exp(l)osed	Cité d'Architecture & du Patrimoine, Paris, F
2008	Delirious Beijing	PKM Gallery, Beijing, CN
2008	RED Aside. Chinese Contemporary Art of the Sigg Collection	Fundacio Joan Miro, Barcelona, E
2008	Dior and Chinese Artists	Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, CN
2008	New World Order. Chinese Contemporary Art Device, Photography Exhibition	Groningen Museum, Groningen, NL

2008	China Power Station. Part III	Mudam Luxembourg, LUX
2008	The Real Thing. Contemporary Art from China	Institut Valencia d'Art Modern (IVAM), Valencia, E
2007		
2007	China Onward	The Estella Collection, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, DK
2007	China Power Station. Part II	Astrup Fearley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, N
2007	Moving Targets. Business As Usual/ New Video from China/ Cao Fei and Yang Fudong	Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ, USA
2007	EI – Entity Identity – Beijing Series. Western Concepts – Chinese Drafts	Stedelijk Museum, NL
2007	Inspired by China. Contemporary Furnituremakers Explore Chinese Traditions	Museum of Fort Lauderdale, Fort Lauderdale, USA
2007	CHINA NOW. Cobra Museum	Amstelveen, NL
2007	Chinese Video. Chord Chances in the Megalopolis	Morono Kiang Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
2007	Mahjong. Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg	Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, A
2007	Metamorphosis. The Generation of Transformation in Chinese Contemporary Art	Tampere Art Museum, Tampere, FIN
2007	Art from China. Collection Uli Sigg	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, BR
2007	China Welcomes You... Desires, Struggles, New Identities	Kunsthau Graz, Graz, A
2007	The Year of the Golden Pig. Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection,	Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork University College, Cork, IRL
2007	New Directions from China	[Plug.in], Basel, CH
2007	Art in Motion. Chinese Contemporary Art Meets The BMW Art Car	Long March Space, Beijing, CN
2007	The Real Thing. Contemporary Art from China	Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, UK
2006		
2006	Contemporary Chinese Art	Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, D
2006	Contemporary China	PKM Gallery, Seoul, ROK
2006	Totalstadt. Beijing Case	ZKM/Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, D
2006	People, Land, State	The Israeli Center for Digital Art, Holon, IL
2006	Guangzhou. Cantonese Artists in the Sigg Collection	Kunstmuseum Bern, CH
2006	AllLookSame?	Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, I
2006	Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China	Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, D
2006	The Thirteen. Chinese Video Now	PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, USA
2006	Beijing Case. Culture of the High Speed Urbanism	The Center for Art and Median (ZKM), Karlsruhe, D
2006	Never Go Out Without My DV cam. Video Art from China	Museo Colecciones ICO, Madrid, E
2006	Art in Motion. Chinese Contemporary Art meets BMW Art Cars	Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, Shanghai, CN
2006	Detours. Tactical Approaches to Urbanization in China	Eric Arthur Gallery, Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design, University of Toronto, Toronto, CDN
2006	CHINA NOW	Sammlung Essl, Kunst der Gegenwart, Klosterneuburg / Vienna, A
2006	Mahjong. Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg	Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, D

2006	MoCA Envisage. Entry Gate: Chinese Aesthetics of Heterogeneity	Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, Shanghai, CN
2006	City Limits. Shanghai / Los Angeles	University Art Museum, Long Beach, USA
2006	China Power Station I	Serpentine Gallery, London, UK
2006	Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China	Nasher Museum of Art at Duke, USA
2006	Cityscapes 'Beijing Welcomes You'. Ein Stadtmodell von Lu Hao sowie Fotografien von Ai WeiWei	Kunsthau Hamburg, Hamburg, D
2006	Inspired by China. Contemporary Furnituremakers Explore Chinese Traditions	Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, USA
2006	China Power Station I	Serpentine Gallery, London, UK
2006	Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China	Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, USA
2006	Microcosm. Chinese Contemporary Art	Macao Museum of Art (Macao Culture Centre), Macao
2006	Inspired by China. Contemporary Furnituremakers Explore Chinese Traditions	Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, USA
2006	China Contemporary. Architecture, Art and Visual Culture	Netherlands Architecture Institute, Rotterdam, NL
2006	China zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China	Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, D
2006	Regeneration. Contemporary Chinese Art from China and the US	Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, USA
2005		
2005	Born in China	Goedhuis Contemporary, London, UK
2005	On the Edge. Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West	Stanford University, USA
2005	China. Contemporary Painting	Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio, Bologna, I
2005	Zooming into Focus. Chinese Contemporary Photography from the Haudenschild Collection	NAMOC National Art Museum Of China, Beijing, CN
2005	Follow Me! Contemporary Chinese Art at the Threshold of the Millennium	Mori Museum, Tokyo, JP
2005	Borders in Asia	World Social Forum, Porte Alegre, BR
2005	Regeneration. Contemporary Chinese Art from China and the US	Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, USA
2005	Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China	Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
2005	A Strange Heaven. Contemporary Chinese Photography	Tennis Palace Art Museum, Helsinki, FIN
2005	Mahjong. Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg	Kunstmuseum Bern, Berne, CH
2005	1st Montpellier Biennial of Chinese Contemporary Art	Montpellier, F
2005	Cina. Prospettive d'Arte Contemporanea / China. As Seen by Contemporary Chinese Artists	Provincia di Milano, Spazio Oberdan, Milan, I
2005	Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China	Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, USA
2005	Regeneration. Contemporary Chinese Art from China and the US	University Art Gallery, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, USA
2004		
2004	Rogue Nations. Cuban & Chinese Artists	MACLA (Movimiento de Arte Cultura Latino Americana), San Jose, CA, USA.

2004	Zooming into Focus. Contemporary Chinese Photography and Video from the Haudenschild Collection	Shanghai Art Museum, CN
2004	Past in Reverse. Contemporary Art of East Asia	San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, CA, USA
2004	Die Chinesen. Contemporary Photography and Video in China	Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, D
2004	China Moon	Watermill Center, Watermill, New York, USA
2004	A l'Est du Sud de l'Ouest	Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Villa Arson Nice, F
2004	Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video From China	ICP and Asia Society, New York, USA
2004	China Now. Gramercy Theatre	Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
2004	Chine. Generation Video	Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, F
2004	Silknet. Emerging Chinese Artists	Galerie Urs Meile, Lucerne, CH
2004	Le Printemps de Chine	CRAC ALSAC, Altkirch, F
2004	Regeneration. Contemporary Chinese Art from China and the US	David Winton Bell Gallery, List Art, Brown University, USA
2004	Regeneration. Contemporary Chinese Art from China and the US	Samek Art Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, USA; John Paul Slusser Gallery, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA
2004	On the Edge. Contemporary Chinese Photography & Video	Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York, USA
2004	Chinese Eyes. Contemporary Photography from China	Goedhuis Contemporary, New York, USA
2004	Chinese Object. Dreams & Obsessions	Salvatore Ferragamo Gallery, New York, USA
2004	Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China	Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, USA
2003		
2003	Fabricated Paradises. Chinese Contemporary Art	Le Parvis centre d'art contemporain, Pau, F
2003	Paris-Peking	Espace Cardin, Paris, F
2003	From China with Art. The exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Painting	Indonesian National Gallery, RI
2003	Zooming into Focus. Chinese Contemporary Photography from the Haudenschild Collection	San Diego State University & San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, CA, USA
2003	Alors la Chine?	Centre Pompidou, Paris, F
2003	New Zone. Chinese Art	Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, PL
2003	A Strange Heaven. Contemporary Chinese Photography	Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, CZ
2003	Junction. Chinese Contemporary Architecture of Art	Lianyang Architecture Art Museum, Shanghai, CN
2002		
2002	Korean and Chinese painting. 2002 New Expression	Seoul Arts Center, ROK
2002	Paris-Pekin. Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition	Espace Pierre Cardin, Paris, F
2002	Reinterpretation. A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art – The 1st Guangzhou Triennale	Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, CN
2002	Everyday Attitude. An Exhibition of Chinese Photo-Based Arts	Pingyao, CN
2002	Making China	Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York, USA
2002	China. Tradition und Moderne	Museum Ludwig Galerie Oberhausen, Oberhausen, D

2002	Synthetic Reality. Video & image works show of Chinese Artist	East Modern Art Center, Beijing, CN
2001		
2001	Living in Time. 29 Contemporary Artists from China	Hamburger Bahnhof Contemporary Art Museum, Berlin, D
2001	Take Part	Galerie Urs Meile, Luzern, CH
2001	TU MU. Young Chinese Architecture	Aedes Galerie, Berlin, D
2000		
2000	Chinese Landscape	Concept Photography Exhibition, Beijing, CN
2000	Our Chinese Friends	ACC Galerie and Galerie der Bauhaus-Universität (in collaboration with Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne), Weimar, D
1999		
1999	Beijing in London	Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK
1999	Modern China Art Foundation Collection	Caermersklooster – Provinciaal Centrum voor Kunst en Cultuur, Gent, BE
1999	Unveiled Reality. Contemporary photography of China	Art Beatus Gallery, Vancouver, CDN
1998		
1998	Double Kitsch. Painters from China	Max Protetch, New York, USA
1998	Inside Out. New Chinese Art, Exhibition of Art from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong	PS1, New York; SFMoMA / Asian Art Galleries, San Francisco, USA
1998	Inside Out. New Chinese Art, Exhibition of Art from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong	Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, CN
1998	Inside Out. New Chinese Art, Exhibition of Art from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong	Tacoma Art Museum and the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA, USA
1998	Inside Out. New Chinese Art, Exhibition of Art from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong	Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Monterrey, MX
1998	China!	Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, D
1998	Jiangnan. Modern and Contemporary Art form South of the Yangzi River	Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, CDN
1997		
1997	Another Long March. Chinese Conceptual Art in the 1990'	Chasse Kazerne, Fundament Foundation, Breda, NL
1997	Immutability and Fashion. Chinese Contemporary Art in the Midst of Changing Surroundings	Kirin Art Space Harajuku, Tokyo, JP
1997	A Point of Contact. Korean, Chinese, Japanese Contemporary Art	Daegu Art & Culture Hall, Daegu, ROK
1996		
1996	In the Name of Art. Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition	Liu Haisu Art Museum, Shanghai, CN
1996	Reckoning With The Past. Contemporary Chinese Painting	The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
1996	Pop Art China. Pop Art America	Galerie Wild, Frankfurt, D
1996	China. Aktuelles aus 15 Ateliers	Munich, D
1996	Begegnung mit China	Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, D
1996	Change-Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition	Goteborg Museum, Goteborg, S
1995		
1995	Des Pais del Centre. Avantguardes Artistiques Xineses	Santa Monica Art Centre, Barcelona, E
1995	Der Abschied von der Ideologie. Neue Kunst Aus China	KulturBehorde, Hamburg, D

1994		
1994	New Art From China	Marlborough Gallery, London, UK
1993		
1993	Mao Goes Pop	Melbourne, AUS
1993	China's New Art. Post-1989	Hong Kong Arts Festival, UK
1993	China Avant-garde	Brandts Klaederfabrik, Odense, DK
1993	China Avant-garde	Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK
1993	China Avant-garde	Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, D
1993	Chinese Contemporary Art. The Stars 15 Years	Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, JP
1989		
1989	China. Avant-Garde Art Exhibition	National Art Museum of China, Beijing, CN
1987		
1987	The Star at Harvard. Chinese Dissident Art	Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA
1987	Beyond the Open Door. Contemporary Paintings from the People's Republic of China	Asia Pacific Art Museum, Pasadena, California, USA
1986		
1986	China's New Expression	Municipal Gallery, New York, USA
1986	Avant-Garde Chinese Art	Albany University Art Museum, New York, USA

From 2004, a massive increase in the number of art exhibitions dedicated to Chinese art can be observed. In the same year, the Chinese government launched the China Year in France. The Lyon Biennale and Paris's Centre Pompidou hosted several cultural events devoted to China. Among these was "Alors la Chine," curated by Fan Di'an. Collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens de Schooten, who were committed to promoting contemporary Chinese art, made a substantial contribution to the Lyon Biennale while Sigg loaned works to the exhibitions in Paris. In the following years, the Chinese Ministry of Culture organised several exhibitions dedicated to contemporary Chinese art and once again commissioned Fan Di'an (→ Social Networks Around the Sigg Collection) to strengthen the official perspective on Chinese art in the West. His remit also included appointing a curator for the Chinese pavilion at the Venice Biennale or indeed to curate the pavilion himself. Contrary to the CCAA, the official China has barely entered into cooperations with foreign curators and has thus hardly promoted international networking. The unofficial presentation of China's contemporary art, as represented by the Sigg Collection, also toured several cities. For instance, the "Mahjong" exhibition travelled from Bern to Hamburg, and from there in an adapted form to Salzburg (Museum der Moderne) in 2007, the Museum of Art in Berkeley (2008), and the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts (2009). From 2005, several renowned museums in Europe, the United States, Japan, and Brazil began collecting and exhibiting Chinese art as negotiable and locatable on its own terms and on national ones.

In parallel to the exhibition scene, the art market has also discovered the contemporary Chinese art (→ Interview with David Tung). Sigg thus fell victim to his own marketing success. The prices of established artists (whose early works Sigg owns) have soared in the last ten years. To do justice to his aspiration to representatively mirror China's art production, Sigg must now forgo bidding for works in the uppermost segments of the market and instead focus on collecting the works of young artists. Contemporary Chinese art has meanwhile become firmly established within the international art scene. It has made an essential contribution to the image of an open-minded and aspiring China. Crucial, in this respect, has been the state's decision to largely withdraw from actively promoting Chinese art since 2008 while, however, deciding to host the Summer Olympics (Beijing) and the World Fair (Shanghai). Today, China presents itself as an open-minded host nation and no longer seems to rely on art to cultivate its image in the West. Within China, however, the government continues to rigorously assert its concept of Chinese art and seeks to strengthen its power of definition. So perhaps it is hardly accidental that

the arrest of Ai WeiWei coincided with the opening of the refurbished National Museum on Beijing's Tiananmen Square and that an apolitical stance has become increasingly evident in recent contemporary Chinese art.

Further questions:

Which China does the Sigg Collection represent in national, cultural, and political terms? How do the self-image and the external image of China manifest themselves in official and unofficial exhibitions? How are dual mandates, that is, government-critical versus affirmative collaboration, possible in China?

Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl

HISTORIES OF THE UNKNOWN CHINESE ARTIST

In the early years of the CCAA, government repression meant that contemporary Chinese art was an underground phenomenon, for which no public, no market, and no promotion instruments existed (→ Mr. China: The Making of the Sigg Collection). Since the establishment of the award, its organisers and initiators have been wondering how they can reach out to artists in China to make them known internationally.

The figure of the “unknown artist” pervades the history of the CCAA. It reflects both the conceptual and ideological orientation of the award. Which artist profile serves the CCAA and which instruments have been developed to find this artist? Which target group has the CCAA been focused, in the past and now? At which stage in its development should an artist’s career be promoted? Although the CCAA’s “Mission and Vision” are not documented in writing, the figure of the “unknown Chinese artist” helps to trace the history of the award. Over the past fifteen years, CCAA organisers have needed to adapt their vision in a constant dialogue with wider developments in the art scene, the art market, art policies, and a new generation of Chinese artists.

The “unknown Chinese artist” represents two of the CCAA’s main objectives: first, its aim to discover a hitherto undiscovered genius and thus to nurture excellence; second, its aim to formulate a democratic or egalitarian ambition to render evident the artistic potential of “the little man in the street” and thus to capture the diversity of China’s art production. In the past fifteen years, these two objectives have collided time and again.

The CCAA’s democratic or egalitarian ambition is mirrored, for instance, in endowing the prize with \$ 3000. This sum, which was put up as the prize money from the beginning, was meant to contribute to securing an artist’s livelihood, which is an essential prerequisite for the production of art in the first place (→ Interview with Anna Li Liu). Whereas initially the prize money was substantial, today it is at best modest compared to other art prizes, such as the Hugo Boss Prize, and also because living costs have soared. Today, the prize is endowed with \$ 10,000 to reflect these developments. In the beginning, the competition announcement was posted in and around the most important art academies (→ Mr. China: The Making of The Sigg Collection). In the years 1998–2002, artists submitted physical documentations of their work. The entry form, which could be photocopied and sent in by posted, reveals that the artists had barely any experience of presenting their work, let alone submitting their works by post. Accordingly, the form contains highly detailed instructions for packaging one’s submission for postal dispatch or states that the numerals beneath the reproduced works had to correspond to the respective image captions.

The CCAA offered artists a completely new form of competitive promotion, which, however, was far from easy to establish. To this day, moreover, the possibility of not winning the competition means a significant loss of face, not only for well-known but also for unknown Chinese artists (→ Interview with Uli Sigg, Anna Li Liu). Ever since its establishment, the CCAA has hence struggled not only to find the “unknown Chinese artist” but also to motivate such artists to enter the competition. For this reason, a nomination system was later introduced to relieve the “unknown Chinese artist” from the burden of application.

Just as crucial as securing a livelihood in the short-term is the long-term promotion of the “unknown Chinese artist” in the West. Since the establishment of the CCAA, an artist’s international success is also seen as an indicator of the award’s success. Jury members, of which half are international star curators, are meant to serve as gatekeepers (→ Social Networks Around the Sigg Collection, → Interview Uli Sigg). Critics fear that the objective will prevent the “unknown Chinese artist” from being reached at all, or that he or she will not be sought after in earnest by the CCAA (→ Interview Li Zhenhua). Because jurors and nominators are highly reputed individuals, critics argue further, only established artists will be selected, thereby simply reaffirming their success. This criticism has proven true in some cases, for instance, in 2011 when Jan Xing was named “Best Young Artist.” Already at the time,



Jan Xing boasted an international exhibition portfolio and was represented by the Galerie Urs Meile (→ One China, two Artists: Huang Yong Ping and Yan Xing). What needs to be clarified in this respect is how one measures fame. Thus, Yan Xing achieved certain recognition in the international art scene while remaining unknown in mainland China. Likewise, Uli Sigg, who remains the sole funder of the CCAA (aside from UBS and M+ sponsoring), also faces the accusation of leveraging the award to enhance the international value of the (meanwhile no longer quite so “unknown”) artists in his collection. Sigg distances himself from this reproach with the almost altruistic argument that the CCAA widens the knowledge, both nationally and internationally, of the art produced in China (→ Mr. China: The Making of The Sigg Collection).

Maintaining a history that narrates the search for the unknown artist (who may never have been discovered without the collector) is in Sigg’s interest, and the CCAA’s, but may conflict, yet again, with the aim to promote excellence. Or rather the CCAA strives to be perceived differently in the international arena than among artists in China. The international art market and exhibition centres are concerned less with promoting young Chinese artists or supporting art on a broad basis in China than with pushing a few outstanding and hence marketable stars. This view stands opposed to a grassroots perspective on contemporary Chinese art.

Over the years, the profile of the unknown artist has undergone enormous changes in parallel to the popularisation of art and the development of the art market, as evidenced, for instance, by the content and design of CCAA application forms. The concept of what the CCAA-winning artist stands for today is also shifting. Whereas geographically was long confined to mainland China, later the prize was also awarded to artists resident in Hong Kong. Since 2014, not even Chinese citizenship is required anymore for CCAA participation. The concept of the unknown artist is thus adapting more and more to the global tendencies within the exhibition scene. This opening is related largely to the donation made by the Sigg Collection to Hong Kong’s M+ Museum. Since the donation, the CCAA and the museum have forged close ideational, personal, and financial ties (→ Mr. China: The Making of The Sigg Collection).

The idea of the unknown Chinese artist has survived all these years, but has changed considerably in parallel to the developments seized hold of China and its contemporary art. Which boundaries – cultural or geographical, political or art-economic – will the CCAA reflect in future? How does the CCAA need to adapt its funding policy to discover tomorrow’s “unknown Chinese artist”?

Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl

THE CCAA CUBE – REFLECTION AFTER EXPANSION

The CCAA Cube is the formal centre of the CCAA. Located in a two-storey house immediately next to Anna Li Liu's private address on the northeastern periphery of Beijing. The centre consists of an office with two workspaces and a library. A great debt is owed to acting director Anna Li Liu (appointed in 2011) that the CCAA now has a fixed address and (literally) a roof over its head. The establishment of a "multi-purpose centre" in Beijing has contributed significantly to the renewal of the award in recent years. Thanks to its presence in Beijing, the CCAA is now interpreted in its geographical, cultural, historical, and political context. It is located in China's political centre and among the circles of an art scene heavily shaped by large galleries, one of the country's most important arts universities (CAFA), and artists renowned for their monumental works. Correspondingly, Beijing boasts a considerable number of large-scale studios, which are still affordable compared to other cities.

The main reason for headquartering the CCAA in a permanent physical location concerns the need expressed by artists and the media to be able to reach the CCAA by telephone and in person (→ Interview with Anna Li Liu). Previously, a P.O. Box was the sole reference to an institution styling itself as nothing less than "The Chinese Contemporary Art Award." The Cube was opened on the occasion of the CCAA's 15th anniversary (→ 15 Years of the CCAA – To whom does contemporary Chinese art belong?). Adhering to values like stability and consistency, the Cube aims to strengthen the visibility of the award within China and to promote its establishment and institutionalisation. But it also serves as a physical location for jury meetings and administration. Moreover, there are plans to use the Cube increasingly for events in future. Do these events mark the end of an exploratory phase or a new beginning? Will the establishment of the Cube initiate a process of self-historicisation? (→ 15 Years of the CCAA – To whom does contemporary Chinese art belong?). How important is Beijing as a location in this respect? What does the reconceptualisation of the award mean and what does it tell us about the current situation in China's art scene?

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Entrance to the CCAA Cube,
street view

To begin with, our preliminary research and subsequent research stay in China convey a different impression of the award. Noteworthy are its constantly changing programmatic orientation and awarding policy, which reflect little consistency and prove to be relatively impenetrable. In the past fifteen years, new award categories were introduced with almost

every new competition announcement. The competition procedure has also changed several times. Thus, in the early years especially informal communication channels were used to encourage artists to enter the competition (→ Interview with Pi Li, → Mr. China: The Making of The Sigg Collection). In 2002, nominators, responsible for making preselection for the jury, were used for the first time. Since 2014, announcements have been published in various media in China and are intended to complement nominator selections. Since its establishment, the award has been constantly expanded. Thus, the categories “Best Young Artist” (since 2002) and “Life Time Achievement” (since 2004) were added to the two original categories, “Best Artist” and “Honorable Mention.” Since 2007, the “Art Critic Prize” has also been awarded. The much-criticised constant changes to and adaptation of the CCAA awarding policy are the result of changing prize directors, with each director setting new priorities. The CCAA owes its great flexibility and informal organisation, which can readily adapt to changes in the art field, to its private ownership (→ Interview with Tobias Berger).

In this light, the accusations levelled at the CCAA, among others by Han Miaodi, who was nominated for (but never received) the Art Critic Prize, are hardly surprising. Han Miaodi lamented the CCAA’s lack of criteria, Sigg’s Western perspective, the lacking localisation of the award in China, and the overrepresentation of the CAFA (→ Interview with Zhenhua).

CCAA Award 1998–2014

Jury Members, Awarded Artists and Directors of the CCAA

CCAA Artist Award 2014

Best Artist: Kan Xuan

Best Young Artist: Ni Youyu

Lifetime Contribution Award: Song Dong

Jury: Doryun Chong, Chris Dercon, Gong Yan, Jia Fangzhou, Ruth Noack,

Uli Sigg, Yin Shuangxi

Director: Anna Li Liu

CCAA Art Critic Award 2013

Critic Award: Dong Bingfeng

Special Mention: Cui Cancan

Jury: Chen Danqing, Gao Shiming, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Kevin McGarry, Uli Sigg

Director: Anna Li Liu

CCAA Artist Award 2012

Best Artist: Pak Sheung Chuen

Best Young Artist: Yan Xing

Lifetime Contribution Award: Geng Jianyi

Jury: Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Chris Dercon, Feng Boyi, Huang Zhuan,

Li Zhenhua, Lars Nittve, Uli Sigg

Director: Anna Li Liu

CCAA Critic Award 2011

Best Art Critic: Zhu Zhu

Art Critic Runner Up Award: Venus Lau Sau Yee

Jury: Wang Huangsheng, Lars Nittve, Philip Tinari, Gong Yan, Uli Sigg

Director: Anna Li Liu

CCAA Artist Award 2010

Best Artist: Duan Jianyu

Best Young Artist: Sun Xun

Lifetime Achievement Award: Zhang Peili

Jury: Uli Sigg, Hou Hanru, Chris Dercon, Ruth Noack, Huang Du, Zhang Qing, Zhang Ga

Director: Kim Sunhee

CCAA Critic Award 2009

Best Art Critic: Wang Chunchen

Jury: Xu Bing, Qiu Zhijie, Richard Vine, Uli Sigg

Director: Kim Sunhee

CCAA Artist Award 2008

Best Artist: Liu Wei

Best Young Artist: Tseng Yu-Chin

Lifetime Achievement Award: Ai Weiwei

Jury: Hou Hanru, Ken Lum, Gu Zhenqing, Chris Dercon, Ruth Noack, Huang Du, Pi Li

Director: Pi Li

CCAA Critic Award 2007

Best Art Critic: Pauline J. Yao

Jury: Xu Jiang, Joerg Heiser, Georg Schoellhammer, Yi Ying

Director: Pi Li

CCAA Artist Award 2006

Best Artist: Zheng Guogu

Best Young Artist: Cao Fei

Lifetime Achievement Award : Huang Yongping

Honorable Mention: Chen Shaoxiong, Gong Jian, Hong Hao, Kan Xuan, Li Dafang,

Liu Wei, Qin Ga, Qiu Anxiong, Zhou Xiaohu

Jury: Ai WeiWei, Fan Dian, Chris Dercon, Ruth Noack, Uli Sigg

Director: Pi Li

CCAA Artist Award 2004

Best Artist: Xu Zhen

Best Young Artist: Song Tao

Lifetime Achievement Award: Gu Dexin

Honorable Mention: Li Songsong, Wang Xinwei, Wang Yin, Yang Fudong, Zhang Qing

Jury: Harald Szeemann, Uli Sigg, Ai WeiWei, Hou Hanru, Alanna Heiss, Gu Zhenqing

Director: Gu Zhenqing

CCAA Artist Award 2002

Best artist: Yan Lei

Best Young Artists: Peng Yu and Sun Yuan

Honorable Mention: Chen Lingyang, He Yunchang, Liang Shaoji, Lu Hao, Yang Maoyuan,

Yang Zhenzhong, Yang Zhichao, Zhou Xiaohu

Jury: Harald Szeemann, Alanna Heiss, Li Xianting, Hou Hanru, Pi Li

Director: Pi Li

CCAA Artist Award 2000

Best Artist: Xiao Yu

Honorable Mention: Chen Shaoxiong, Hai Bo, Hong Hao, Jiang Zhi, Lin Yilin, Xie Nanxing,

Yang Shaobin, Yin Xiuzhen, Zheng Guogu

Jury: Harald Szeemann, Hou Hanru, Uli Sigg, Li Xianting, Ai WeiWei

Director: Karen Smith

CCAA Artist Award 1998

Best Artist: Zhou Tiehai

Honorable Mention: Yang Mian, Xie Nanxing

Jury: Harald Szeemann, Uli Sigg, Yi Ying, Ai WeiWei

Director: Karen Smith

We visited the CCAA Cube to view the archive and found premises that little resembled an institution. The sparse office is located in a village-like settlement, which has meanwhile been reached by Beijing's urban sprawl. Depending on traffic, it takes up to two hours to get here from the city centre. The peripheral location raises doubts whether the Beijing art audience will ever attend events out here in great numbers. Also, the archive barely deserves its name. Its holdings are limited to a small collection of monographic catalogues of associated galleries and the application portfolios of the first three years. Most CCAA documents are stored digitally on a server. There are significant gaps in the documentation. Not all CCAA directors took the same care to document, secure, and archive their work. CCAA staff member Ling Meng told us that archiving has received greater attention only in recent years. Tools usually taken for granted to document one's work, such as meeting minutes, are unknown at the CCAA. Even more astonishingly, the CCAA has neither a clear self-definition or mission statement nor formulated jurying criteria or inclusion and exclusion criteria specifying which artists are eligible for participation. Whereas the CCAA award aims to provide insight into the current state of contemporary Chinese art and to archive such art as a contemporary document, it seems even more surprising that an institution firmly established over the years has largely neglected to document its own history and activities. What remains of the aspiration to document a particular field of art in terms of a geographical region and over a longer period is no more than the names of the prize winners.



The institutional history of the CCAA can be understood only if one considers the tremendous speed at which the Chinese art scene has developed over the past fifteen years. China looks back at a phase of development in which the preservation and storage of culture have occupied a subordinate role. (Many works of Ai Weiwei explore the lacking awareness of historical events and artefacts in China.) Since the opening up of the country, which made a “free” art scene and the emergence of institutions like the CCAA at all possible, China has been undergoing intense economic and geostrategic expansion. Contemporary art (and industry) could not invoke traditional values, but has instead aspired in particular to growth and establishing connections with the world. The country’s tremendous economic growth, which has also contributed to the boom of contemporary Chinese art on the art market, tells the success story of this forward-looking strategy. Expansion has led to the emergence of a large number of internationally oriented institutions and art prizes. These include The Luo Zhongli Scholarship, The Focus on Talents Finalist Exhibition, The Audi and Design Award, and The Chinese New Painting Award.

Given these eventful developments, the lacking consistency of the CCAA is understandable. In the past fifteen years, its organisers have time and again faced the question of how it is possible to keep pace with the rapid and dynamic development of contemporary Chinese art while maintaining institutional credibility and integrity. The field of art in China has completely changed in recent years. The CCAA, it is fair to say, has adapted to this change.

Based on these considerations, in the beginning the CCAA emphasised mobility and adaptability, as illustrated by its application process. In the early years, the prize was promoted by word of mouth and applications forms were designed to facilitate easy reproduction (and circulation). Physically, the CCAA for a long existed only as a postal address, established to receive applications. Behind the address stood Pi Li, as an address owner and administrator. Pi Li helped Uli Sigg to launch the award and served as a go-between between Sigg and the artists and as an informal nominator (→ Mr. China: The Making of The Sigg Collection). Soon, this postal address became unnecessary. Paper-based application portfolios were replaced with digital submissions via e-mail. Whereas this move made the CCAA, whose principal aim was to discover young talented artists and make these known internationally, dynamic and universally accessible, at least in theory, it also meant that the prize became even less visible. But it addressed through its access more likely digitally connected, broad-minded artists.

The fact that the CCAA has received a (physical) roof over its head precisely at this point in time, which coincides with a change its earlier programmatic orientation, has to do with China’s economic and cultural development. Following the phase of expansion and opening, China, as one of the world’s foremost economic powers, is now increasingly concerned with questions of ecology, sustainability, and cultural legacy, notably with greater self-assurance. This fundamental shift requires enough time and

space to assess its current situation. The developments within contemporary Chinese art have paralleled the country's larger economic and geographic developments. Today, Sigg may rightly consider his self-imposed mission to establish contemporary Chinese art internationally to be fulfilled. Hence, the CCAA now focuses on the situation of art in China itself. Today, the CCAA considers its primary task as raising greater awareness of contemporary Chinese artists among the Chinese population. The CCAA now appears in public as an institution seeking to ensure critical reflection on contemporary art production and to establish a counterposition to the overheated art market.

The call for stronger institutional support for contemporary art is becoming louder throughout the Chinese cultural sector. Not least the government is supporting this institutionalisation through new museum projects, of which the M+ is but one example. Today, institutionalisation is widely seen as a possibility for professionalisation and as a mark of quality. Establishing values such as consistency, stability, and transparency enables Chinese institutions to see eye to eye with internationally oriented Western institutions and to set themselves apart from competing projects in China. Part of this canon of values is also the emphasis on high academic standards. In the current discourse on art, the term "academic" epitomises quality. On the one hand, it draws a clear boundary between its adherents and the dominance of the market, whereas on the other it indicates that academic training is far from self-evident in the field of contemporary art. The CCAA thus strives to achieve this academic standard with its high-calibre jury members, who have engaged in a professional discourse on contemporary Chinese art every year for the past fifteen years.

Contrary to our first impression, the hallmarks of the CCAA today are precisely its consistency and its comparatively high degree of institutionalisation. Thus, the names of jurors and nominators are mentioned in press releases. However, jurying criteria are communicated just as little as government censorship regulations (→ 15 Years of the CCAA – To whom does contemporary Chinese art belong?). Sigg's institutionalisation of the award has successfully stood up against the weaknesses of China's cultural landscape. Barely any institution has so far managed to withstand the turbulent developments holding the country in its clutches. Numerous projects are discontinued after a short period (→ Interview Pi Li, Tobias Berger). The CCAA thus also offers future prospects for comparable institutions. Last but not least, institutionalisation has positively impacted Sigg's collection by affording it historical credibility. In this way, the CCAA receives an institutional history and thereby legitimates Sigg's project of creating a historical document whose historical significance is meant to reach beyond any particular individual (→ Mr. China: The Making of The Sigg Collection). The physical location and anchoring of the CCAA in Beijing in the shape of a physical headquarters can be understood equally as a clever response to the criticism levelled at the prize as being Sigg's prize and as unfairly appropriating the designation "Chinese" to suit its purposes. Institutionalisation has had the same legitimating effect on the initial collections of the M+ Museum since the donation received from the Sigg Collection. Thus, the Cube is part of the self-historicising of Sigg's projects, which he now considers largely completed. The Cube may well contribute to the CCAA's continued existence after Sigg's death, provided the necessary financial mean can be secured.

Further questions:

How important are values like independence, consistency, and transparency compared directly to other art prizes in China? How does the Chinese notion of professionalism differ from a Western perspective? Which publics is the CCAA aware of and how does the award, and the institution behind it, communicate with those publics?

Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl

15 YEARS OF THE CCAA – TO WHOM DOES CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART BELONG?

"1998–2013. CCAA 15" is the somewhat cryptic title of the jubilee catalogue published on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the CCAA. Choosing such a brief title had nothing to do with any design or advertising considerations, but was the result of direct government censorship. The catalogue accompanied the exhibition of the same name at Shanghai's Power Station of Art (PSA) in 2013, which presented the works of all CCAA prize winners since its inception. Established in 2012, the PSA is the first state museum for contemporary art in mainland China. It is also home to the Shanghai Biennale. Curated and organised by Li Zhenhua, Li Xianting, Anna Li Liu, and Lars Nittve, the exhibition showed the past and current works of CCAA winners and honorable mentions owned by the Sigg Collection, by the artists themselves and their galleries, and by other collections.

Announcement 15 years CCAA exhibition



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Only a few minutes after the opening of the exhibition, government representatives intervened and ordered the organisers to paint over Ai Weiwei's name, which featured on a chart together with all other CCAA jurors over the past fifteen years. Moreover, his works had to be removed from the exhibition. The government also objected to the exhibition title, "Fifteen Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award." The government did not accept the use of the word "Chinese" in this context, claiming it was a protected brand. Not even the fact that the name had been used for almost fifteen years for an art award changed the government's view. Government censorship thus led to the exhibition's abbreviated title, "1998–2013. CCAA 15." The addendum "Fifteen Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award" was nevertheless printed as a subtitle. The English subtitle was printed without government approval, but attracted no further intervention. It is unclear whether government representatives did not notice the addition, could not translate it, or simply tolerated it.



Chinese censorship. Erasure of Ai Weiwei's name and replacement by Uli Sigg.

The events surrounding the PSA exhibition exemplify China's censorship policy, which is not aimed directly at searching for government-critical contents, but at preventing such materials from becoming too visible in public. Thus, the official China pursues a strategy of extinction, intent on rendering invisible and nonexistent what does not fit the country's official image of itself (→ The West discovers Contemporary Chinese Art (and so does China)). The strategy forms part of a strategy striving to rewrite history.

The censoring of the CCAA exhibition title raises a further crucial question: Who can lay claim to contemporary Chinese art? Who conveys, promotes, and represents this art? The PSA exhibition was the first time that the CCAA, which has consistently sought to promote critical contemporary art, fell victim to censorship. A mere glance at the persons involved in the CCAA reveals that its conceptual orientation was barely reconcilable with the government's conception of art. After all, Ai Weiwei received a CCAA Life Time Achievement Award and was a member of the CCAA jury. The CCAA hence proudly claims to be independent, because it has promoted art beyond state control and funding, and for a long time assumed the government's task, at least partly. At the same time, the CCAA and its organisation operated largely autonomously and unchecked for over fifteen years within a field under relatively rigorous government control. Yet the notion of "independence" differs significantly from the Western use of the term. It would be worth examining how far the different political systems, the differentiated relationship between citizen and state, and the unequal accumulation of power by private-sector interests in China influence the interpretation of autonomy.

With respect to culture, government funding is associated with neutral support, in particular in Europe. Ideally, "neutral" means free of religious, political, and social ideology and based on qualitative criteria. Government funding is understood as relatively impartial and as essentially distinct from private or economic interests. By contrast, Western societies consider the freedom of art to be jeopardised if individuals or private enterprises use art for private or commercial interests. In China, these roles are distributed quite differently. The state functions as a power controlling art production and thus as a moral and aesthetic authority. This control is ubiquitous. Many Chinese stakeholders regard commercial appropriation in the field of art as a danger and hence affirm the undermining and instrumentalisation of art by private interests. Compared to the possibility of personal freedom, independence, and economic success, which capitalism is seen as representing, the majority of Chinese stakeholders consider this danger to be less relevant (→ Interview with Vivian Ting, Jingpeng Mu).

The claim that the CCAA is an independent prize must hence be considered with great scepticism from a Western perspective. Even more so since that the prize is not called the Uli Sigg Prize, analogously, for instance, to the Hugo Boss Prize, but the Chinese Contemporary Art Award. Thus, the CCAA claims, quite immodestly, to be not just anyone's prize, but the official art prize of China. When launching the prize, the organisers

aligned the CCAA quite explicitly with the Turner Prize, Great Britain's most acclaimed art prize. During the history of the prize, Sigg has always endeavoured to remain in the background. He avoided presenting himself as its representative. Nevertheless, he acts as a juror every year. Nor should his influence on the other jurors be underestimated (→ Interview Li Zhenhua, Pi Li, Lars Nittve).

The fact that a private individual, let alone a Swiss, could launch a national art prize in China so successfully was possible only because the Chinese government long failed to recognise the contemporary art emerging in its midst in the 1980s and to promote such art with state funding (→ The West discovers Contemporary Chinese Art (and so does China)). Noteworthy in this context is that Sigg's claim to exclusivity was not always formulated so very clearly. In the early years, CCAA stood for "Contemporary Chinese Art Award," thereby emphasising less the national orientation of the prize than a style of art still comparatively young and unknown at the time. "Contemporary" has quite a different meaning in Chinese art history than in the West, where contemporary art could develop as a free profession since modernity. In essence, the term here emphasises its clear distinction from a modernist and traditional conception of art as well as the liberation of art from its instrumentalisation by the state. Accordingly, the name of the CCAA initially stood for a certain notion of avant-garde. The prize wanted to promote something innovative, critical, indeed even radical in Chinese art.

Exhibition view of «15 Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award CCAA», Powerstation, Shanghai, 2013.



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The orientation of the CCAA became less important once contemporary art became an established tendency in China; also, the label "Contemporary" referred less rigidly to a certain style (→ Interview with Pi Li, Vivian Ting). As the name "Chinese Contemporary Art Award" suggests, today the CCAA looks to present-day art production in China. The institution is thus competing increasingly with the Chinese state, which has discovered contemporary art with some delay as a figurehead (→ The West discovers Contemporary Chinese Art (and so does China)). The fact that the CCAA's focus on "China" is now widening and is no longer confined to mainland Chinese artists but includes artists from Hong Kong and in future presumably also Chinese artists no longer living in China, or those who have lived in the country for a long time, can also be understood as pointing to the increasing presence of the Chinese state in the international sphere.

Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl

ONE CHINA, TWO ARTISTS: HUANG YONG PING AND YAN XING

China's "open doors" policy, which was launched in the 1970s, changed not only art but to an enormous extent also the life of Chinese artists. The history of the CCAA comprises the biographies of two generations of artists. Among many others, these include Huang Yong Ping, born in 1954 (and awarded a CCAA Life Time Achievement in 2006) and Yan Xing, who is thirty-two years younger (and was awarded the 2012 CCAA Best Young Artist Award). Both artists enjoy great success in the international art scene and are represented by powerful galleries. Their biographies and lifestyles, however, could not be more different. Their works and biographies reveal just how much China has changed in recent decades, including its relationship with the West.

In 1987, Huang Yong Ping took two art history books, put them in a washing machine, and ran a two-minute washing cycle. He then took the resulting lump of paper and placed it in on a wooden box that he used as a plinth. This work, entitled "A History of Chinese Painting and A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes," is now one of the iconic works of 1980s Chinese avant-garde art, which explicitly opposed the prevailing, state-controlled social realism of the time and sought a dialogue with Western art history. Huang Yong Ping is considered an important representative of that movement. He grew up in Xiamen in Fujian Province, where he began studying oil painting at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now the China Academy of Art, CAA) in 1977. He belonged to the first generation of artists to study art after the Cultural Revolution. After completing his training, he began organising experimental art events, including the exhibitions "Five Persons" (1983) and "Xiamen Dada" (1986) where artists publicly burned their works. In the meanwhile canonical "China/Avant-Garde Exhibition" (1989), Huang exhibited the above-mentioned "A History of Chinese Painting and A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes."

Huang Yong Ping, A History of Chinese Painting and A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes, 1987.

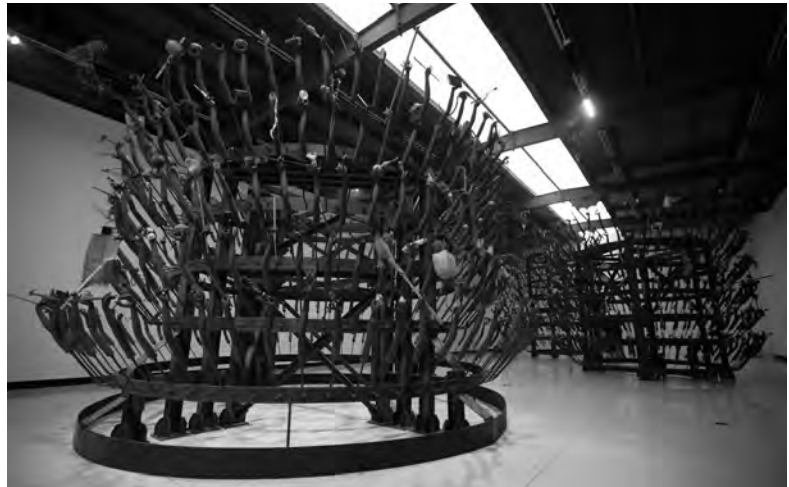


This work reveals the artistic struggle with Western influences, which were so important for this generation. The laundered books were Wang Bomin's History of Chinese Painting and Herbert Read's A Concise History of Modern Painting. Read's book was one of the few introductions to modern Western art to be translated into Chinese and exercised a tremendous influence on the Chinese avant-garde. Huang's work emerged at a time when artists began gaining access to information and books on Western art history for the first time. His artistic approach was influenced by Western philosophers, which he began reading at the time. To this day, Huang has endeavoured to establish a dialogue in his artworks between Western thinkers like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, Martin

Heidegger, and Roland Barthes on the one hand, and Zen and Taoist philosophies on the other hand. At the heart of Huang's thinking and his peers' stands the question: How does contemporary Chinese art find a dialectical juncture between its traditional culture and Western culture? They saw the appropriation of Western forms of art as exciting to conflict-ridden, not merely because it was subject to state censorship. Which parts of Western culture should China accept, and which parts of Chinese culture should it reject? Huang's "A History of Chinese Painting and A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes" is his answer to these questions. The reciprocal influence between two cultures follows neither any method nor logic, but springs from a moment in which things get mixed up, are laundered, and left spinning to the point of pulverisation. Hence, it is not a matter of replacing one tradition with another. Traditions, instead, collide in a state of chaos that eludes our influence.

In 1989, Huang received an invitation to show his works at "Magiciens de la Terre," an exhibition shown at Paris's Centre Pompidou. He subsequently moved to Paris, where he still lives. His works are almost all sculptures, characterised by their strong symbolism and in particular their space-exploding dimensions. Living outside China, however, has not changed his artistic interests. To this day, his works bring together Chinese teachings dealing with Western avant-garde ideas. Thus, "Thousand Hand Guan-yin" can also be seen as a synthesis between a Buddhist deity and Duchamp's "Bottle Rack," a readymade from 1914.

Huang Yong Ping, *Thousand Hand Guan-Yin*, 2008.



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Yan Xing, *Two Videos, Three Photographs, Several Related Masterpieces And American Art*, photography, No. 6, 2013.



Yan Xing, born in 1986, negotiates the meaning of cultural exchange quite differently in his works. Born in Chongqing, he was raised and educated entirely in neoliberal China. After studying oil painting at Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, he moved to Beijing. Yan Xing and his works stand for a young and liberal China, which combines seamlessly with the

lifestyle of today's international jet set. Unlike Huang Yong Ping, who is committed to the classical media of painting and sculpture, Xing spans different media by appropriating, imitating, reproducing, and reconstructing references and materials from different contexts. His art is a method consisting of effortlessly combining everything and, corresponding to a conception of a globalised world, one that negates cultural differences.

In 2010, Yan Xing sent shockwaves through the Beijing art scene with his performance "Daddy." Facing a white wall, he held a very personal soliloquy about the absence of a father figure and about the abuse he had suffered in his childhood. In a culture in which talking about personal matters is frowned upon, "Daddy" amounted to breaking a strong taboo. Yan Xing admits and celebrates his homosexuality in explicit photographs and postings on his Twitter and WeChat platforms, which is highly provocative even for the most progressive circles in China.

In Xing's work, cultural identity is no longer part of a struggle for social values, but highly fluid, mobile, and adaptable. The physical separation between cultures, places, and time zones seems to be revoked in his videos, photographs, and blogs just as much as the separation between the artist and his work is nullified. Thus Xing explains in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist (on the plane between London, Beijing, and Los Angeles) that while he has never travelled abroad, the sources and models for his work come exclusively from the West. His mother, a fashion designer, had introduced him to Western influences. He recently moved from Beijing to Los Angeles, not to evade state censorship, but because he had fallen in love, as he readily admits.

No matter how different the life and work of these two artists are, both nevertheless embody present-day neoliberal China, albeit in different ways. In Huang's work, this is evident in a highly material guise. His sculptures exemplify the monumentalism of many younger contemporary Chinese artists. Such large-scale works seem to be indicative of a generation for which material need was a harsh reality during Communism and whose colossal works, which fill entire exhibition halls, virtually symbolise the material excess of China as a young industrial power and overcompensate for the penury suffered in the past. There are, however, also tangible reasons for the works of Beijing artists assuming such enormous dimensions. Many of today's successful artists can afford to produce works in China that would be unaffordable elsewhere. Other artists, such as Zeng Fanghai, readily use the labour cheaply available in China and employ up to thirty permanent staff. China is representative of cheap production also in the field of art. Thus, artists working within China are also adopting the principle of outsourcing.

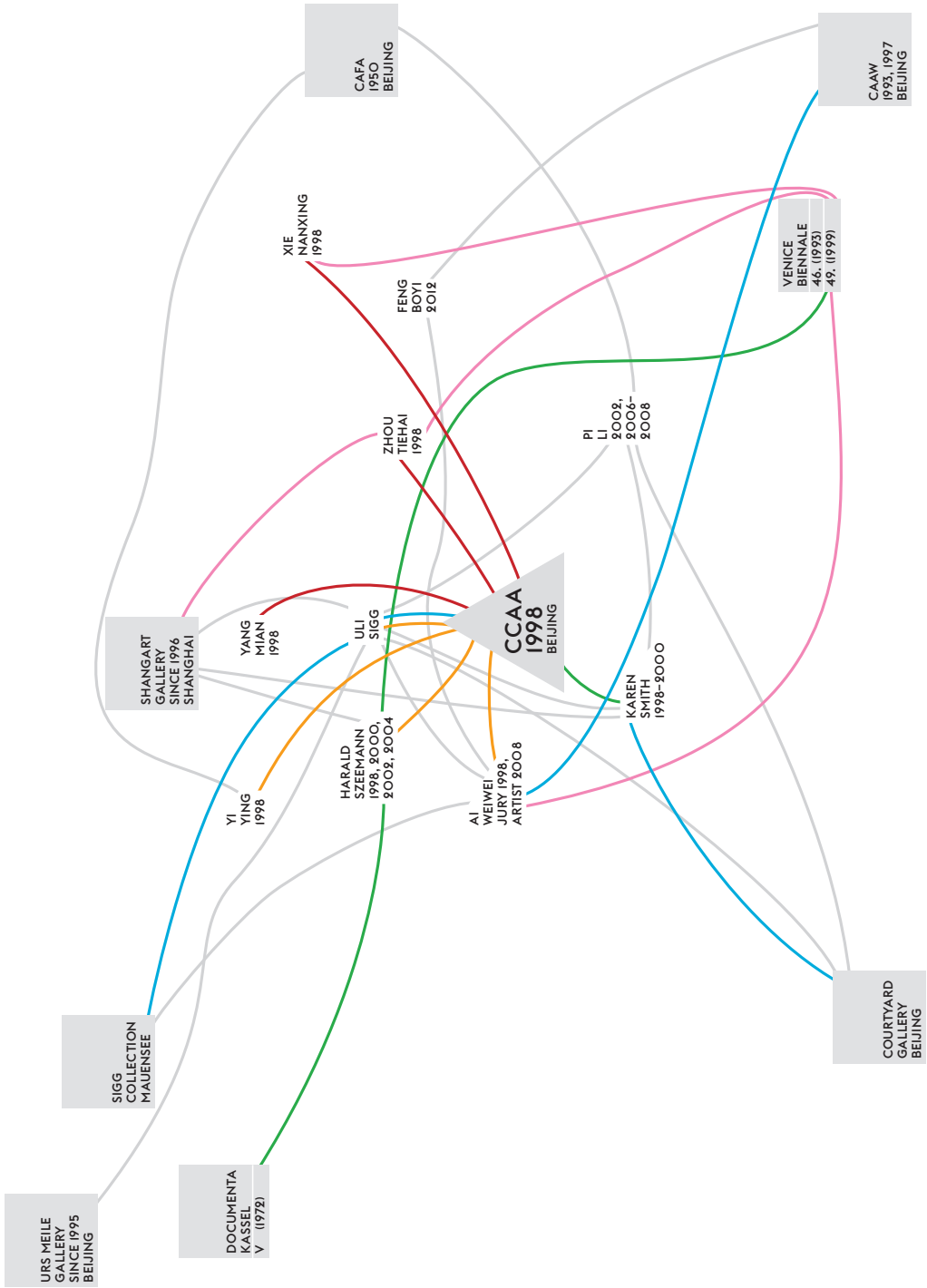
Xing's overexaggerated business sense as an artist reflects his neoliberal stance, which is far less material than Huang's. In 2008, Xing founded a movement under the name "COMPANY" that had no political agenda at all. The movement emerged from the financial crisis in 2009, which almost brought the Chinese art market to a standstill. Yan Xing, who refers to artists as a "self-organised unit," observes: "If you just waited around for opportunities to come to you, you would never have an exhibition. So, I got together with my friends Chen Zhou (*1987) and Li Ming (*1986), as well as Li Ran (*1986), my classmate for four years and started a "group" to make our own plans and create opportunities. It was our 'COMPANY.'" The "firm's" actual contents have remained as unarticulated to this day as the seriousness of its underlying commercial intentions. Not only does Xing unmask the ideals of China's market affinity, but he exhausts to the point where only their shell is left.

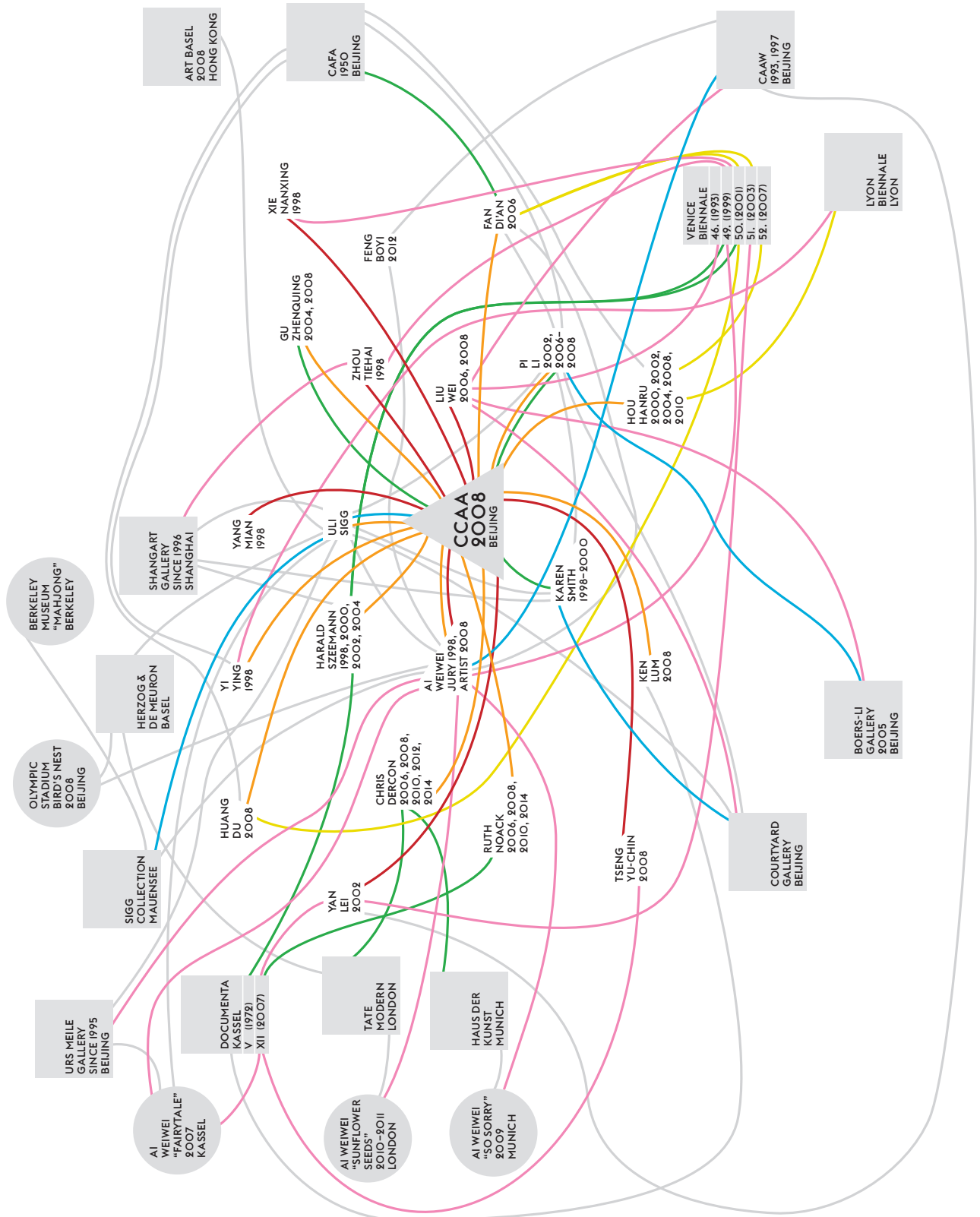
Barbara Preisig and Franz Kraehenbuehl

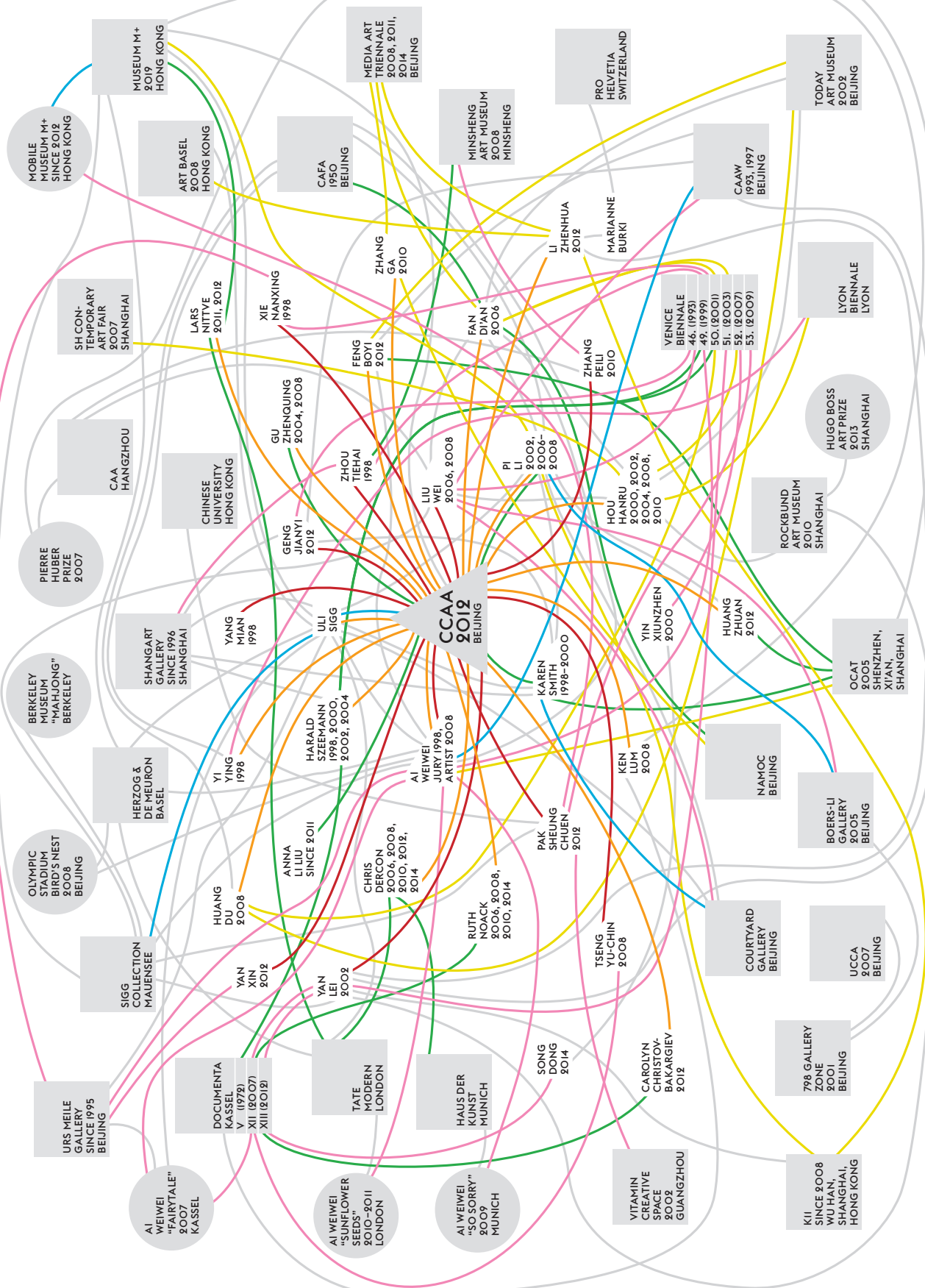
SOCIAL NETWORKS AROUND THE SIGG COLLECTION

DIAGRAMS CCAA 1998/2008/2012

ACTOR'S INDEX












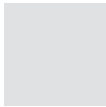



Legend

The date below the name indicates the year of award winning and/or member of jury of the CCAA.

-  Jury Member
-  Founder
-  Awarded Artist
-  Artist Participated
-  Curator
-  Director
-  Collaboration

The information in the grey fields refers to the founding date of the institution or the date of an event, and its location.

-  Institution
-  Event

ACTOR'S INDEX

FENG
BOYI

*1960, Beijing, CN; curator and critic; director at He-Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen; studied art history at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing; curated 2004 "Works of 2001–2004", Li Songsong's Solo Exhibition at CAAW, Beijing; 2011 "I Have a Dream – Mao Tongqiang's Works" at CAAW, Beijing; 2012 CCAA Jury Member; curated and published widely on Contemporary Chinese Art, wrote and edited many books by Ai Weiwei; curated several shows in the Today Art Museum.

MARIANNE
BURKI

*1962; director of Fine Arts Deptment at Pro Helvetia; 2011 opened a branch of Pro Helvetia in Shanghai; married to Li Zhenhua.

CAROLYN
CHRISTOV-
BAKARGIEV

*1957, New Jersey, US; curator and art historian; 2008–2012 director of the Museo di Arte Contemporanea di Torino at Castello di Rivoli in Turin; 2012 artistic director of Documenta 13 where she presented Yan Lei and Song Dong; 2012 CCAA Jury Member; 2015 Director of the 14th Istanbul Biennial.

CHRIS
DERCON

*1958, Lier, Belgium; curator; since 2011 director of the Tate Gallery of Modern Art, London; 1996–2003 director Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, NL; 2003–2011 director of Haus der Kunst, Munich; curated 2009 solo shows by Ai Weiwei "So Sorry" at Haus der Kunst München, and 2010–2011 "Sunflower Seeds" at Tate Modern; 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 CCAA Jury Member.

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FAN
DI'AN

*1955, Fujian, CN; curator, writer and art historian; since 2005 Director National Art Museum of China, NAMOC; professor and vice-director at China Academy of Art where he was a teacher of Pi Li; member of Academic Board of Today Art Museum; 2003 curator of "Alors la chine" at Centre Pompidou, Paris; 2006 CCAA Jury Member; 2008 and 2010 curator of Chinese Pavilions at 50th and 51st Venice Biennial; curated with Luc Tuymans and Ai Weiwei a China Exhibition in Brussels; curator of the Media Art Triennale 2008/2011; after 2008 commissioner by the Chinese Government to represent China contemporary art abroad; Neighbor of Anna Li Liu.

SONG
DONG

*1966, Beijing, CN; artist; studied at Capital Normal University in Beijing; 2012 participated at Documenta 13; 2014 CCAA Outstanding Achievement Award; married with Yin Xiunzhen;

HUANG
DU

*1965, Lintong, CN; art historian, curator und critic; chief curator at Today Art Museum; 1998 graduated from CAFA; 2002 curated "Manufacturing in China" in New York; 2004 curated Chinese Pavilion at 26th Sao Paulo Biennale; 2008 CCAA Jury Member; 2008 co-curated CN Pavillon of 50th Biennial Venice.

ZHANG GA	*CN; curator; curator of Media Arts at NAMOC; 2010 CCAA Jury Member; 2004–2006 co-curated the First, Second and Third Beijing International New Media Art Exhibitions and Symposiums; co-curated Media Art Triennale with Fan Di'an and Li Zhenhua.
HOU HANRU	*1963, Guangzhou, CN; curator und critic; director of San Fransisco Art Institute; artistic director of MAXXI Rom; former class mate of Fan Ti'an at CAFA; 1997 curator of "Cities on the Move" together with Hans-Ulrich Obrist at the Wiener Sezession; 1999 curator of French Pavillon Venice Biennial; 2000 curator of Shanghai Biennial; 2007 curator of Chinese Pavillon at Venice Biennial; 2000, 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2010 CCAA Jury Member; member of the Academic Board of Today Art Museum.
GENG JIANZI	*1962, Hangzhou, CN; artist; represented by ShanghART Gallery; took part at 45th Venice Biennial 1993; 2012 CCAA Life Time Achievement Award; important historic position; Karen Smith, his former partner, has written a lot about his work.
YAN LEI	*1965, Hebei, CN; artist; studied at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts; 2002 CCAA Best Artist Award; 2003 part of Venice Biennial; 2005 part of Guangzhou Triennial; 2007 Istanbul Biennial; 2007 Documenta 12; 2008 solo exhibition at Aspen Art Museum; 2009–2010 Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; 2011 Kunstmuseum Luzern, 2012 Documenta 13 and group show at Rockbound Museum.
PI LI	*1974, Wuhan, CN; curator, writer, art historian; senior curator Sigg Collection, Museum M+, HK; head of the Art Management Departement at CAFA; co-founder of Boers-Li Gallery; graduated 1996 at CAFA in art history; 2000 master in art history at CAFA; 1997 assistant of Karen Smith at Courtyard Gallery, Beijing; 2002, 2006–2008 Director CCAA; assistant Curator of Sao Paulo Biennial and Shanghai Biennial in 2002 and 2003 at "Allôrs la Chine" at Georges Pompidou Centre, France; assistant to Uli Sigg.
ANNA LI LIU	CN; since 2011 director CCAA; graduated with an MBA from University of Wales College; collector of Chinese classical art.
KEN LUM	*1956, Vanouwer, CA; artist, critic and curator, living in Canada; teaching at University of British Columbia and École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Paris; 1998–2002 in the Committee of the Annie Wong Art Foundation, HK; worked 2002 on the exhibition catalogue of the Documenta XI; wrote a paper about Contemporary Art vs. Visual Culture for the Museum M+; 2008 CCAA jury member.
YANG MIAN	*1970, Sichuan, CN; artist; 1997 graduated from Oil Painting Department, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute; 1998 CCAA Hororable Mention; since 1997 teaches at Chengdu South-West Jiaotong University, Fine Art Department.
XIE NANXING	*1970, Chngqing, Sichuan, CN; artist; 1998 CCAA Honorable Mention.

LARS NITTVE	*1953 in Sweden; curator and art historian; since 2011 executive director of Museum M+, Hong Kong; 1998–2001 founding director of Tate Modern; 2001–2010 director of Moderna Museet; 2011 and 2012 CCAA jury member.	
RUTH NOACK	*1964 Heidelberg, D; art historian and curator, 2007 curator of Documenta 12; 2006, 2008, 2010, 2014 CCAA jury member.	
ZHANG PEILI	*1957, Hangzhou, CN; artist; 1984 graduated from CAA; 1993 participated at 45th Venice Biennial; shows at Minsheng Art Museum curated by Zhou Tiehai; 2010 CCAA Lifetime Achievement Award.	
PAK SHEUNG CHUEN	*1977, Fujian, CN; artist; 1984 immigrated to Hong Kong; 2002 graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2009 represented Hong Kong at 53rd Venice Biennial; 2012 Best Artist Award CCAA; exhibited 2012 at Mobile M+, Hong Kong and 2013 at Saatchi Gallery, London; represented by Vitamine Creative Space in Guangzhou.	
ULI SIGG	*1946, Luzern, CH; art collector, rower, patron, founder of CCAA; serves at board of several global companies; studied law at Zurich University and then worked as journalist and editor for various Swiss newspapers and magazines; 1977–1990 entrepreneur for Schindler elevators in China; 1995–1998 ambassador for Switzerland in Beijing.	
KAREN SMITH	* Hertfordshire, UK; curator and critic; since 2013 director at OCAT Xi'an; former director of Courtyard Gallery, Beijing; 1998–2000 director of the CCAA 1998; commissioned 1998 by Sigg to search for artist for the CCAA.	47
HARALD SZEEMANN	1933 Bern–2005 Tegna, CH; curator; 1972 curator of Documenta 5; 1997 curator of Lyon Biennial; 1999/2001 curator of Venice Biennial; collaborated with Shangart Gallery; 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004 CCAA Jury Member.	
ZHOU TIEHAI	*1966, Shanghai, CN; artist; 1989 absolvent of Shanghai University in Fine Arts; 1998 Best Artist CCAA; represented by and good friends with Shangart Gallery.	
LIU WEI	*1972, Beijing, CN; 1996 graduated from the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou; 1993 at the 45th Venice Biennial; 2003 invited by Hou Hanru to participate in the Fifth Shenzhen International Public Art Exhibition; 2005 Chinese Pavillon Venice Biennial curated by Fan Di'an; 2006 CCAA Honorable Mention; 2008 CCAA Best Artist Award; until 2006 represented by the Courtyard Gallery; 2008 and 2009 solo show at BoersLi Gallery; today represented by White Cube Gallery London, Almine Rech Gallery Paris, Lehmann Maupin Gallery New York, Long March Space Beijing.	

AI
WEIWEI

*1957, Beijing, CN; architect, artist, curator; co-funder of CAAW; 1998 CCAA jury member; 2008 CCAA Lifetime Achievement Award; several solo shows at Tate Modern, London, and Haus der Kunst, München etc.; 2000 co-curates with Feng Boyi “Fuck Off” at Eastlink Gallery, Shanghai; 2007 supported by Sigg and Urs Meile Gallery with a substantial amount for the Documenta 12 exhibition; Represented by Urs Meile Gallery; curator at OCAT, close friend of Uli Sigg.

YAN
XIN

*1986, Chongqing, CN; artist; studied Oil Painting at Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing; since 2011 represented by Urs Meile Gallery Beijing, 2012 Best Young Artist CCAA.

YIN
XIUNZHEN

*1963, Beijing, CN; artist; 2000 CCAA Honorable Mention Award; 2007 represented China at 52nd Venice Biennial (together with Shen Yuan, Kan Xuan, Cao Fei) curated by Hou Hanru, 2012 solo show at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; represented by Pace Gallery, Beijing.

YI
YING

*1953, Zhijiang Dong, CN; art historian; 1985 graduated at CAFA, now professor and master instructor at CAFA; 1998 CCAA jury member.

TSENG
YU-CHIN

*1978, Taipei, TW; artist; 2007 participated at Documenta 12, 2008 CCAA Best Young Artist, several residencies and exhibitions, mainly in Asia.

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GU
ZHENQING

*1964, Shanghai, CN; artist, curator und critic; 2004 and 2008 CCAA jury member; editor of many exhibition catalogues.

LI
ZHENHUA

*1975, Beijing, CN; writer, curator, producer and artist living in Beijing/Shanghai and Zurich; since 2013 film curator of Art Basel Hong Kong; 2008 working partner with Yan Lei for a group show at K11, together with Fan Ti'an curator for the Media Art Triennale; 2012 CCAA jury member; editor of an Yan Lei publication, married to Marianne Burki.

HUANG
ZHUAN

*1958, Hunan Province, CN; curator, writer and art historian; teaches art history at the Guangzhou Art Academy, curated and published widely on contemporary Chinese art; 1992 curated the first Guangzhou Biennial; 2012 CCAA Jury Member; curator at OCAT and close friend to father of Pi Li.

FURTHER PEOPLE RELATED TO THE NETWORK

HANS
VAN DIJK

1946 Deventer, NL–2002; Dutch-born, Beijing-based curator, scholar, and art dealer; had foundational influence on contemporary art in China; 1993 curated exhibition “China Avant-Garde” the first major show of Chinese contemporary art in Europe; co-founded the New Amsterdam Art Consultancy (NAAC), which connected Chinese artists with collectors and curators abroad and the China Art Archives and Warehouse (CAAW), an experimental gallery and exhibition space.

**ALEXANDRA
MUNROE**

Since 2006 senior curator Asian Art at Guggenheim Museum NY, advisory board UCCA Beijing, Rockbund Museum Shanghai, Asia Art Archive Hong Kong.

**PHILIP
TINARI**

*1979, Philadelphia, US; curator; director at UCCA, China representative for Art Basel; lecturer at CAFA; has written lots about Ai Weiwei; 2011 CCAA jury member.

**GUY ULLENS
DE SCHOOTEN**

*1935, San Francisco, US; Belgian entrepreneur, patron and early collector of contemporary Chinese art; 2007 together with his wife Myriam founder of the UCCA in Beijing; 2007 sold his comprehensive collection of contemporary Chinese Art.

INSTITUTIONS

**BERKELEY
MUSEUM**

Public Art Museum in California USA.
www.bampfa.berkeley.edu.

**BIRD'S
NEST**

Chinese National Stadium in Beijing planned by Herzog & de Meuron and Ai Weiwei on the occasion of the Olympic Summer Games 2008. Construction costs € 325 Millions.

**BOERS-LI
GALLERY**

Founded 2005 from the Universal Studios by Walling Boers and Pi Li at 798, the gallery zone in Beijing.
www.boersligallery.com.

CAA

China Academy of Art in Hangzhou founded originally 1928 and since 1993 exists under this name. <http://eng.caa.edu.cn>.

CAAW

China Art Archives & Warehouse (CAAW), a non-profit space dedicated to contemporary art. Officially it was founded 1998 by Frank Uytterhaegen with Ai Weiwei and the art historian Hans Van Dijk. Prior to this incarnation, Van Dijk operated under the name New Amsterdam Art Consultancy (NAAC). NAAC was active between 1994 and 1998. Projects initiated with collaborators as Luc Tuymans, Urs Meile and collector Uli Sigg. Artists such as Ai Weiwei, Zhou Tiehai, Yan Lei still have their studio there. www.archivesandwarehouse.com.

CAFA

Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) was founded 1950 in Beijing and is one of the major Art Academies in China. Offers classes in fine arts, art history, curatorial studies. Hosts also the CAFA Museum. www.cafa.edu.cn.

CCAA

Chinese Contemporary Art Award, founded 1998 by Uli Sigg, www.ccaachina.org.

**CHINESE
UNIVERSITY**

University in Hong Kong founded 1963.
www.cuhk.edu.hk.

**COURTYARD
GALLERY**

Founded 1996 by Meg Maggio and directed by Karen Smith. One of the oldest galleries in Beijing – expanded to South Florida.
www.courtyard-gallery.com.

**HAMBURGER
KUNSTHALLE**

Public Art Museum in Hamburg where 2006 the exhibition “Mahjong. Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg” was shown. This was the first presentation of the Sigg collection outside Switzerland.

**HAUS DER
KUNST**

Public Art Museum of contemporary art in Munich. Houses no collection. www.hausderkunst.de.

**HERZOG &
DE MEURON**

1978 the Architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron founded in Basel the headquarters. In the meantime the company has branches in Hamburg, London, Madrid, New York and Hong Kong. 1998–2000 they realized the rebuilding of the Tate Modern in London, 2002 they were deicated to build the National Stadium for the Olympic Games 2008. The “Bird’s nest” was designed together with Ai Weiwei. This collaboration was initiated Sigg. Herzog & de Meuron are commissioned to build the M+ in Hong Kong. www.herzogdemeuron.com.

**HONG KONG
ART FAIR**

First Edition of the Hong Kong Art Fair in 2008. Known as Art Basel Hong Kong.

KII

A brand founded 2008 by Adrian Cheng in Wu’han, focuses on the blend of Art, People and Nature. Branches built 2009 in Hong Kong and 2013 in Shanghai. In 2010 the founder established an Art Foundation and built two art villages in Wuhan that serve as “an incubating springboard to groom young emerging contemporary Chinese artist and educate the mass about art and creativity”. Pi Li curated the opening show in Wu’han.

**KUNSTMUSEUM
BERN**

Public Art Museum in Bern where 2005 the “Mahjong. Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg” exhibition first took place. This exhibition was organized and curated by Bernhard Fibicher.

**KUNSTMUSEUM
LUZERN**

Public Art Museum Luzern where 2011 “Shanshui. Poesie ohne Worte? Landschaft in der chinesischen Gegenwartskunst” took place. An exhibition with works from the Sigg Collection on landscape in China curated by Ai Weiwei, Peter Fischer and Uli Sigg.

**LYON
BIENNALE**

Biennial for contemporary art alternating with contemporary dance in Lyon, Frankreich. Founded 1991. www.labiennaledelyon.com.

**MEDIA ART
TRIENNALE**

International Triennial dedicated to Media Art in Beijing at NAMOC. Founded 2008 with the first exhibition “Synthetic Times” by Zhang Ga, Fan Di’an and Li Zhenhua.

**MINSHENG ART
MUSEUM**

Contemporary Art Museum founded 2008 and located in Shanghai. It is sponsored and funded by the China Minsheng Banking Corporation. The founder and first Director is Zhou Tiehai. He curated a show with Geng Jianyi. www.minshengart.com.

**MOBILE
MUSEUM M+**

Exhibition Series by the M+ in the public sphere – ongoing since 2012.

MUSEUM M+	Contemporary Art Museum to be built in West Kowloon, Hong Kong, within the newly established Cultural District. It opens 2019. Uli Sigg donated a part of his Collection to the M+, in return the museum has sponsored the CCAA with an amount of money. www.westkowloon.hk/en/home .	
NAMOC	National Art Museum of China, Self-defining: "The National Art Museum of China (NAMOC) is a national art museum of plastic arts dedicated to collection, research and exhibitions of modern and contemporary artistic works in China. Starting to be built in 1958, NAMOC, with its title board inscribed by Chairman Mao Zedong, was formally open to the public in 1963. NAMOC is a national cultural landmark after foundation of New China." www.namoc.org .	
OCAT CONTEMPORARY ART TERMINAL	The first terminal was established 2005 under the direction of art historian and critic Huang Zhuan in Shenzhen and still functions as the headquarter of the OCAT group. Mission statement: "OCAT is China's only non-profit contemporary art organization affiliated to a National Art Museum. OCAT Shenzhen has a long-term commitment to the practice and research in the field of contemporary art and theory both inside of China and in the international arena." Karen Smith is director of OCAT Xi'an. Part of the Academic Committee are people such as Huang Zhuan and Wang Guangyi. OCAT Shanghai 2014 hosts the Pierre Huber Art Prize. www.ocat.org.cn .	
PIERRE HUBER PRIZE	Pierre Huber New Media Art Creation Prize first awarded 2007 at the China Academy of Art CAA. Founded by Pierre Huber who is owner of the Gallery Art & Public in Geneva.	51
PRO HELVETIA	Swiss Art Foundation financed by the government. National and international support and networking of Swiss art production.	
ROCKBUND ART MUSEUM	2010 opened the contemporary art museum in Shanghai focusing on Chinese and International art. Hosts since 2013 the Hugo Boss Prize. Directed by Larys Frogier. Hou Hanru is in the Advisory Committee. www.rockbundartmuseum.org .	
SH CONTEMPORARY	Shanghai Contemporary Art Fair established 2007. www.shcontemporary.info .	
SHANGART GALLERY	Initiated 1996 in Shanghai. In the meantime it opened two galleries and one project space in Shanghai, one gallery in Beijing and one in Singapore. www.shanghartgallery.com .	
TATE MODERN	Public Art Museum in London opened 2000. Herzog & De Meuron were appointed to convert the former Bankside Power Station building into a gallery. www.tate.org.uk .	
TODAY ART MUSEUM	Founded by Zhang Baoquan in 2002. Their Mission is to "push Chinese contemporary art into the future." www.todayartmuseum.com .	

UCCA	Ullens Center for Contemporary Art founded by Guy and Myriam Ullens 2007. Its collection is based on the Ullens Collection. The museum statement: "UCCA aims to promote the continued development of the Chinese art scene, foster international exchange, and showcase the latest in art and culture to hundreds of thousands of visitors each year." The UCCA is located in the gallery district 798. 2004 Ullens supported the Lyon Biennial. Advisory Board Members: Hans-Ulrich Obrist. www.ucca.org.cn .
URS MEILE GALLERY	Founded by Urs Meile and expanded to Beijing in 1995, Galleries located in Luzern and Beijing. Urs Meile is friends with Sigg. Represents Ai Weiwei and Xie Nanxing. www.galerieursmeile.com .
VENICE BIENNIAL	International Biennial of contemporary art alternating with contemporary architecture in Venice, Italy since 1895. Apart of individually curated national pavilions in the Giardini there is also additionally a curated part at the Arsenale. These parts are curated by the dedicated curator. www.labiennale.org .
VITAMIN CREATIVE SPACE	Founded 2002 in Guangzhou, independent art space and commercial gallery. www.vitamincreativespace.com .
798 ART DISTRICT	Gallery district in the north-west of Beijing founded 2001. Boers-Li and UCCA are situated here.

INTERVIEWS

ULI SIGG

ANNA LI LIU

PI LI

LI ZHENHUA

WANG HUANGSHENG

LARS NITTVE

TOBIAS BERGER AND PAULINE YAO

VIVIAN TING WING YAN

ALVIN YIP

DAVID TUNG

JINGPENG MU

INTERVIEW WITH ULI SIGG

Mauensee, CH
12.11.2014, 1h 45'

Founder CCAA, art collector, entrepreneur and
former Swiss ambassador to China

Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
Our questions are structured to cover a few key themes: the collection – its inventory, development and politics, the art historical perspective, M+ and the Contemporary Chinese Art Award (CCAA), and finally we will also touch on questions of the art market and cultural transfer. Let us begin with the collection, which is the basis of our research. How is the collection documented? How accessible is it? When and how were works acquired for the collection?

Uli Sigg: Today the collection consists of three parts. One is the M+ Sigg Collection, which was a donation to the M+ museum for visual culture in Hong Kong, but for the time being remains in storage in Switzerland. The M+ Sigg Collection consists of 1500 works. A second part of the collection is the Foundation for Chinese Contemporary Art, which I founded to legally make the donation to M+ without getting into trouble with the tax office. Take inheritance tax, for example: the recipient of a donation could still be liable for inheritance tax in the event of my death within 5 years of making the donation. In this situation M+ would have to pay 25% tax on the collection's value of 150 million Swiss Francs. To avoid any such inconveniences for the museum or for myself we set up a foundation according to Swiss law and got a tax exemption, because we were able to demonstrate that it is charitable and doesn't make a profit. Because I could not simply put the 1500 works into the foundation and then donate them, leaving the foundation with no further purpose, I had to put more works in. About 200 works therefore legally remain part of the foundation. The third part is the Sigg Collection, which consists of the works that I kept in my personal possession, including everything I collected since June 2012. Although there are thus officially three parts to the collection, with different ownership arrangements, all the work physically remains in Switzerland.

BP/FK: Is there a database?

US: Yes there is. There are so many works; I couldn't manage it any other way. We created a database that was continuously updated and expanded, each work is entered with the name of the artist, the year, the medium, as well as where exactly it is located at any one time. M+ in Hong Kong was particularly scrupulous about that. They have very high requirements for detailed records and documentation. Because we have to do it for this part of the collection anyway, we do it for the rest as well. Location is particularly important, because works in the collection move around a lot, some are in storage, others in exhibitions all over the world, some in transit between these places. The database also tells us how and when these works were exhibited. Only about 80% of the works have images, however, because when I began I didn't do it as systematically. Installations for example were not always documented at the time – artists never used to document their work, everything was much more casual. Now it would be too much effort to recreate these installations just to photograph them. So about 20% of the works in the database lack images and we are slowly working to update that wherever possible, for example when we show the work in an exhibition. As a next step M+ will compile a status report for each individual work, which takes a long time of course. This will also be an opportunity for adding high-resolution images. That is the current status of the database.

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BP/FK: So this is also the M+ database?

US: Yes, and there was a lot of pressure from them to publish it. They wanted us to publish the donation as a database, to make it accessible to the public, so they took it on but didn't do much work on it. They did put it online however. I would have preferred to wait until everything was properly photographed, since the database isn't that meaningful without the images. There are particular issues related to determining the quality of Chinese art, which is related to the fact that Chinese artists often didn't have galleries. Often they simply put everything they ever produced on the market. In our

gallery system, the gallerists ideally examine the work with some expertise, telling the artists what they can sell, what they can't and what it might be better not to show at all. This kind of intervention is lacking in China. Even with famous Chinese artists, the quality of the work ranges from quite weak to excellent, because there was no selection. As a result, when you look up an artist in the database, let's take Yue Minjun for example, there are fantastic pieces alongside very weak ones. If you only read the name that tells you very little about the work, you can only assess it based on an image. Despite these issues, M+ insisted on publishing it. On the M+ website there is therefore a list of all the work in the collection as it stood in 2012, partly updated by now. It is accompanied by a text I wrote about why I collected this work.

BP/FK: We are also interested in statistical data, for example the percentages of different media, such as video art or painting, or the proportion of women artists represented in the collection.

Could you tell us anything about that? Do you have this information?

56 US: Well, things like gender are quite difficult because Chinese names aren't always clear on that. We know of course, but an outsider often cannot tell whether it is a woman or a man. This includes Chinese speakers. Phonetic spelling is a problem, for example the name Yan Xing: there might be three artists with the same name, if it is spelt phonetically, but the Chinese symbol is very different in each case. Even the Chinese name characters are not always gender specific.

FK: Has there been any interest from art history in working on the Sigg collection?

US: Yes, there are several initiatives in this direction. One is M+ itself; they have a contractual duty to fully research the collection. This is something they want to do, but they have not been able to pursue it so far. One reason is the problem of access; the work is still here not in Hong Kong, because there is not yet space there for such a large collection. They won't be able to do much research until they have a museum. But for example the first exhibition that M+ is realizing in collaboration with me is happening in Sweden at the moment, with perhaps 80 works from the collection for which we must compile a certain level of knowledge. So it happens step by step. But of course there are other approaches, for example Michael Schindhelm is working on a documentary film, which is also a form of research. There is also a woman in Singapore who has just

published a booklet in the form of an interview or a conversation, with 100 questions she asked me. That is another attempt to present and systematize the history of the collection. They also made a 20-minute short film and are planning a longer documentary, but they are still waiting for the funding to come through. There are also various publications in China. I am currently in talks with an institution called the Shanghai Art Institute. This is an official Chinese cultural worker institution, they have been pushing me for some time that I need an institution that is part of official China to work on a history of the collection from their perspective, to enable the collection to become part of an official Chinese history. So far this is not the case, which is also one of the reasons that the collection will be housed in Hong Kong, not in Mainland China. Because for several reasons, both political and logistical, there is no way of showing such a collection in China. For now, the collection is basically considered to be on the outside of official China, and so far the institution in Shanghai is the only one open to it. They really want to do this project, but I see several difficulties and I am not sure if I want to do it. Firstly it would take up a lot of my time to assist them in writing me into a legend, in the shape of films and books. It's hard work, and there are many other projects I'm involved in. More generally in China, the canon of contemporary art is as yet unwritten. It must be written, but everyone is fighting about their role within that history: who did what, who created which movement, who deserves which label, who is important and who is less so. That is all still in flux, because these developments since 1979 are still very recent. It is a short time frame, there are many egos involved, and much is not systematically documented. This is the complex environment that I navigate with the collection.

BP/FK: We get the impression that it is quite a small circle of people who comment on these issues, who can, want to and maybe even are permitted to participate in these debates about what constitutes Chinese contemporary art. It appears to us that these are a handful of people in China and a handful of foreigners living in China – when we look at these networks it seems that this is a relatively small scene and you are linked with all of these people in one way or another. Is this the wrong impression? Or why are there not more people who might have divergent interests or opinions?

Are there any opportunities for developing a free and independent critique? We imagine that you are also in a difficult position: you established something, you are at the centre of how many things operate in that scene. Is it even possible to get away from this within China? Or to put it differently: to get away from your influence?

US: Yes, there is. I wouldn't call it getting away from, but one can see my role in many different ways. Sure, I think one has to engage with me in one way or another when looking at Chinese contemporary art, but there is a huge spectrum. There are all sorts of possible approaches. By now, this scene is much larger than you describe it. There are huge art history departments in universities in China and countless papers have been written about my collection there. Remember that there is a linguistic barrier: if you as Western researchers could take into account all that has been written or published in Chinese you would find about 1000 different publications already. Then there are some people who do not mention me at all, for many different reasons from lack of knowledge to ideological conviction. For example there are some people who feel that I should not be part of this history at all, there are attempts to interpret the history of what happened in the last 30 to 35 years completely differently. They might consider me a foreign eccentric who has nothing to do with real Chinese art, or simply argue that I pushed art in the wrong direction. But of the many people who write this history, only a handful were part of it from the very beginning. I mean those that do not need to rely on any secondary research, but can base their opinions and judgments on their own experiences. It is true that these could be counted on both hands: in the very beginning the contemporary art scene was just as small as you describe it.

So there are a lot of different viewpoints, but the largest part is written in Chinese. There are limits to this research however: often there are aspects of the objects that must be omitted because they don't have the knowledge, because for example they haven't seen the type of art that was never shown in China. There are pieces in my collection of which there is no awareness that such works exist. Others may have been exhibited briefly but are not part of the discourse in China; they are simply not discussed, perhaps also because there was little or no documentation, perhaps for censorship reasons. There is thus a range of reasons why everyone in China just looks at certain aspects of the collection, though these can still be very different.

BP/FK: But we could still contend that there are many connections and overlaps, for example the people who are in a jury for the CCAA also work with M+, and also appear on various boards and committees. Of course this might be strategic: that you want to keep involving the same people because they are important mediators.

US: Yes, that was always my strategy. I have commented on it in several publications. My aim was to involve "gatekeepers" to Western art as a tool to promote Chinese art in the West and to get curators in particular to include Chinese artists in their projects. This was a twofold strategy: on the one hand to communicate outside of China through the involvement of the gatekeepers, on the other hand to stimulate discourse within China about something that was a tiny phenomenon at the time. It is now huge and perceived as such by the public, but it was peripheral at the time. Among the three or four people who claim to write the canon of Chinese contemporary art, however, all but one of them have been to the West. Some left as early as the mid 80s, others after 1989. They might have been very important to the 1980s but were then outside China for 10, 15 years, some of them didn't even return once a year. So they perceived at least the second half of the development only from a distance. And in my view that makes a big difference. They didn't experience the atmosphere, and never saw much of the work, but they nonetheless wrote canonical books on the subject. So as with almost everything in this field there are big question marks here. In the West it is perhaps more a question of different subjectivities or value judgments that determine what becomes important and what doesn't. But in China many different categories come into play.

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BP/FK: Would you say that these gatekeepers did their job? Was it successful? Did the process gain its own momentum?

US: Definitely. We might begin by mentioning Harald Szeemann who as a direct result of his participation in the jury of the CCAA showed 19 or 20 Chinese artists at the Venice Biennale.

BP/FK: And it continued beyond that, the discourse developed an independent dynamic?

US: Very much so. At documenta 12 Ruth Noack, who was in a CCAA jury, showed significantly more Chinese artists compared to those curators who were not, such as Okwui Enwezor and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who each only showed one Chinese artist.

I did invite Christov-Bakargiev to participate later, following documenta 13. So the proliferation resulting from the CCAA is visible everywhere. Other examples include Alana Heiss at PS1/Moma, who also began showing Chinese artists, or Chris Dercon who organized the large show at Haus der Kunst in Munich because he met Ai Weiwei through his role in the jury. I could mention many more examples; it really did have a huge impact.

BP: I wondered why art history is not more strongly represented in your juries, since coming from that field I would argue that there is a greater claim to independence in the field of academic art history than for curators for example.

US: On the Chinese side a few art historians are included, but on the Western side what still matters most to me is that they do important projects. Art history is not less important but it's something completely different. But what I need on behalf of the artists are exhibition makers.

BP/FK: Who selected the juries?

US: I did.

BP/FK: And did you talk about criteria in advance? I can imagine that at the first CCAA with Harald Szeemann, there was little prior knowledge. Did you provide the jury with an introduction or explanations about the art and its context?

US: In Szeemann's case we met because he wrote to me while he was preparing the Lyon Biennale. He encountered a few catalogues of Chinese artists and I had contributed a text to one of these, so he wrote to say that this was the first time in his life that he had read an intelligent text by a Swiss diplomat. So I told him to come to China and he did. This was around the time I founded the art award. He therefore had some rudimentary knowledge of Chinese art, more or less by chance, others however had none whatsoever, so it was completely new to them. Because of this we had to set up the judging process in a way that even someone who knew nothing about China could follow the proceedings and participate. Of course there was always a language problem, because we decided that half of the jury must be Chinese, with a direct connection to this environment around Chinese contemporary art, while the rest we recruited internationally. This led to two completely different points of view coming together. We had to constantly translate everything during the discussions, but also all the material and

information beforehand. This cost a lot of time and energy. It was always a big effort to get everyone to the point that they were able to take decisions. And that was one of the reasons that the discussions lasted for two days. People were able to learn other ways of thinking and different approaches from each other. As a general tendency, the international curators had the same opinion while the Chinese had theirs. But not always!

BP/FK: Could you describe the process of the award? How did you find or approach the artists?

US: There were two phases. At first we asked artists to apply by submitting a portfolio. We then presented these portfolios to the jury. I had to proceed very carefully, because at the time I didn't even know whether this was acceptable for me to do from the government's perspective, or whether the cultural ministry would immediately shut down the process if they found out. Also, I couldn't risk my job, after all I was still ambassador at the time. I couldn't put the ambassador post at risk for my personal hobby, or weaken the position of the jury. So we did it via word of mouth propaganda, at the academies and among the artists. Like I said, back then the scene was much smaller and much more connected, and still completely uncommercialized. So it was much easier to approach people informally. Many participated, some didn't.

BP/FK: What exactly do you mean by 'connected'? Could you talk some more about that?

US: Well, they all knew each other, particularly through the academies. At the time it was also a circle with, how shall I put it, less jealousy among the artists about whose work sells for a higher price, who is more famous etc. Everyone was closer to each other, because they still had to fight for their material existence, while today that's not really the case anymore. Today it's more about making sure they are better than the others, while at the time they were all in it together in a way, because contemporary art as such was still very contested. Today it is accepted; only certain individuals, practices or representations are viewed critically. Back then we had to set it all up in the underground, basically. We had to get a PO Box; I couldn't have anything sent to the embassy, even that would have caused difficulties. Pi Li who is now at M+ was then our assistant, so he registered a PO Box in his name. But we noticed during that first phase that a lot of artists didn't participate because they had to submit the portfolio themselves, no one wanted to say: "I applied by myself, but I didn't get the prize." Because of this attitude some artists who we wanted to participate didn't apply.

BP/FK: So the problem was that they didn't want to show weakness in case they didn't win?

US: In China that is very different culturally, losing face is a big issue. As a result in a second phase we changed to a system of nominations. But we didn't want just a selection of six, like the Turner Prize for example, because then we wouldn't reach our goal of the jury encountering a large number of good Chinese artists. So we instituted a 'nomination jury' or 'pre-jury' as well. We asked five or six young curators working in China to suggest ten to twelve artists each and support their nomination with a portfolio for each of them. We then had a total of 50 to 60 artists to choose from. This was a number that the jury could look at in one or two days and have a good discussion about.

BP/FK: Was this in the first few years?

US: Maybe around 2004. We are thinking of changing the system again, because there are in fact many artists now who would like to participate but don't get nominated by the pre-jury. So it might become possible for these artists to apply online. However, we will also submit these applications to the pre-jury for comment, because we don't want a serious process on the one hand and then just include anything that comes along.

BP/FK: So it is basically a two-level approach: there is a group of curators in China who does a pre-selection, and then there is the jury who chooses the award winner.

US: Yes, precisely, it is much more manageable that way.

BP/FK: How much overlap is there between the award winners and acquisitions for the Sigg collection?

US: It was always very important to me to separate the two. Particularly in China, where in the beginning everyone was saying "oh yes, that's Sigg's award," in the sense that I would collect certain artists and then make sure they received an award later. There were always these theories I had to disprove. I had to clearly demonstrate that there is an independent jury, which I am one member of, but that is my only function in the context of the award apart from the financing. And it has absolutely nothing to do with my collection. As a rule though, because I tend to collect the best young artists, most of the award winners do appear in the collection of course, and were collected by me long before they ever won the award. A few of them I may have included later, but the reason was never that they won

the award. Because the concept of my collection is to reflect a very wide range of contemporary art production, the award winners were always likely to be included and I would have encountered them sooner or later anyway.

For me personally, one of the motivations for creating the award was of course to get to see a large number of artists, to have access to many portfolios. In this sense I wasn't as selfless as other members of the jury perhaps. Back then there simply wasn't access and transparency as there is today, when you can find most of the artists online or in countless publications somewhere. In the 90s all that didn't exist. Galleries were only then slowly emerging, and they were not able to exhibit many of these artists for political reasons, while producing books was impossible for similar reasons. The only way to get an overview of artistic production was to go everywhere, or ask artists to send me their portfolios. So that was one reason, but collecting was always independent of the actual award. What mattered to me was that Western curators finally get to see and acknowledge this art. And even then the idea was not for them to propagate the winner but also other artists they may have encountered in the process. And this is exactly what happened, the winner wasn't always the one who interested them most, sometimes another artists fitted better with a project. After all, I only had one vote among six or eight to determine the winner. But what I can say is that the award winners all became very successful, we made good choices very early on. Not necessarily in terms of the market, but in relation to the art world and the relevance of these artists to curators and exhibitions.

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BP/FK: Yes, it seems obvious that the award gave a boost to their careers. Let's talk a bit about the beginnings of the award, or of the collection itself. How did you get approach the artists in the years between 1979 and 1998? It makes a lot of sense to work with local curators, how did you do it before?

US: I had to do it mainly on my own. There weren't that many curators with an overview of what was going on at the time. They were not able to travel, I could travel more easily than the Chinese. There were always different people locally who knew about the local scene. In the beginning, in the 80ies it was difficult, contrary to my expectations, because I couldn't go to the artists directly. I was always supervised and the artists were quickly forced underground. After about 1995 I could move around freely.

BP/FK: Did the Chinese government react in some way to the award?

US: They didn't really react. I was always concerned that they would make it impossible for us to continue, but they let it happen. For a long time no one in the government really paid attention to contemporary art. But because of the award and the Venice Biennale etc. they noticed there was something going on, that there was a perception of the country through art which they were not involved with. So the things we started forced them to sit up and pay attention to contemporary art, which they had actively fought to suppress in the 1980s. After they successfully forced it underground, there were practically no exhibitions, and if there were any they lasted only for a day or less. There were maybe a few hundred people in the whole of China who saw any contemporary art at the time. There was one exception in 1989, when there was an important exhibition at the China National Gallery that suddenly appeared in the public media, while before and after there was nothing. It was very different with literature and film, because books and films had more visibility. With contemporary art, they thought they had it under control, until they saw that there was all this stuff going on abroad: a movement that happened completely independently and without their participation, which to top it all involved crackpot foreigners such as me deciding what was good and what was bad contemporary art of their country.

BP/FK: Did the cultural ministry ever consult your expertise?

US: Yes they did, every two or three years. Once they had an initiative for cultural industries, which they recognized as a growing economic sector of the future, and invited me to give a presentation. But it was sporadic; they didn't seem quite sure how to deal with me. I profited from my status of course, because I had established the first joint venture between China and the West, at a time when no one wanted to invest in China. My role was essential for them, because no one else would talk to businesses all over the world about the opportunities for investment and technology transfer in China. As a result they let me get away with a lot more than other people. But at some point they got the sense that something was happening without them, and that they needed to get involved. The role of contemporary art became increasingly important, to the point that government delegations had to go and look at exhibitions of Chinese art. I am thinking for example of the German state visit in 2001, where the Chinese as usual offered to show the Terracotta Army but the Germans said no, they would prefer to see an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art. They kept praising their antiquities but

the Germans insisted, so they had to put together an exhibition. But there was no one within the government actually capable of organizing a large exhibition of contemporary art up to standard to show to the West. So they had to bring in Hou Hanru, who had actually left in 1989 and was always part of the underground, to provide the skills to create such a show. In these circumstances official Chinese government delegations actually saw their own contemporary art for the first time, so that was an important milestone. Over the years the soft power discussion gained momentum, China became more open and no longer isolated itself completely, and the question of how they wanted to be represented abroad also became more central. Official China did not really want to be represented by their contemporary art, since that would project an image of China in the West that they did not want – by art created to a paradigm of doing away with the past and of social critique rather than according to the traditional Chinese paradigm of beauty and harmony. But once they saw what was going on they realized they had to have a hand in it. Within this climate the award was quite important. In retrospect many in China would never admit this, because Chinese thinking these days is much more nationalist and emphasizes its own contribution over that of “outsiders.”

BP/FK: Because contemporary art was so peripheral, did you feel at some point that there were things you missed, that no one including yourself had been able to preserve or collect, including art work but also documents or archives? Is there any way to work on this period art historically, beyond seeing the work that was collected?

US: During the 80s and early 90s the artists never thought of preserving their work, it was produced in immediate reaction to circumstances. After the short exhibitions ended no one cared what happened to the work. Artists were quite naive, particularly when they first started going beyond painting to make installations. These were often roughly put together for an exhibition, they never considered that they might want to take them down and install them somewhere else, partly because there was no market for art. I bought many of the most important pieces from that show in '89 at the National Gallery. One artist then told his peers that this exhibition might become very important and to keep their works. But the others responded that this was easy for him to say with a bit of money in his pocket, so he ended up buying the most important 20 pieces from that show himself to ensure it was preserved. And later I bought from him. There was a small segment

of art produced in the academies that was collected by the government. But this was not the experimental work that interested us, which was only shown in ad hoc exhibitions that were seen by other artists, some people from the academies and institutions, and foreigners. But the foreigners were diplomats or professionals who were in the country temporarily, there were no foreign collectors living in China for generations and building up collections, like you might find in Latin American countries. If these people bought work they were not a priori collectors, but just happened to see something they liked, which they took away for very little money. These pieces ended up all over the world, no one knew where. So for a long time the art disappeared or dispersed in this way. After the prices started to rise astronomically I was surprised at how much crawled out of the woodwork; even I had no idea it still existed. This was after about 2005, when the market became increasingly important. We're talking about some engineer in the United States who might have bought a piece or two in the 90s, not a collector, who suddenly notices it is now worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. So there was more work still around than I originally suspected.

BP/FK: We were struck by what you said about the ephemerality of these works, that they were made in reaction to a particular moment or situation, and we wonder how much the status of these works changed as a result of the emerging market. It seems that initially these works functioned like visual statements in response to particular political issues or situations, but that the emergence of the market turned them into commodities.

US: Yes, that really was the case. In the beginning these were not commodities. Artists were idealists; they had political views that they expressed in and through visual art. Art was more political then than later. The artwork was a manifestation of their beliefs. It was only much later that the work became a commodity, but once that process kicked off it happened very quickly. Another element that comes into play, which was perhaps a reason why this art was not acknowledged by the international art world at the beginning, is that for a long time it was not very interesting to the Western eye and could not contribute much to the global art discourse. In the beginning it was too derivative: the artists expressed themselves in ways practiced in the West 50 years earlier, because they were isolated from so much information about contemporary Western art for a very long time. It was only after 1979, when

China began to open up, that there were some opportunities to find out about current Western art, but this happened randomly: Someone might have brought back a book while another may have found a magazine with an article about an artist. It wasn't possible for artists in China to engage systematically with contemporary Western art. So as a result they were all experimenting at that time, between 1980 and 1983, practicing what they had not been allowed to do before. For example abstract art was previously prohibited, so they all tried their hand at it, which of course often didn't lead to the greatest works. They also had low quality materials and lived and worked in very small spaces, resulting in tiny formats. Almost everyone painted, because no one owned a computer or even a camera in the 1980s. All these circumstances produced an art that didn't inspire people from the West who were looking for the forefront of global contemporary art. That too is a reason why this art didn't leave China for such a long time and why no one paid much attention to it. The art produced then is very important to the history of art in China, but not to the global art discourse. But slowly artists emerged who were able to achieve this and from that point it started to become interesting from a Western perspective.

BP/FK: Was visual art more political than other forms of art, such as theatre or music? Or more disputed?

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US: It was very political, but artists in general believed in political change at the time. It is comparable to what happened in Russia in the 1920s and 30s, with calls for a "new Russia." There was enthusiasm for a "new China," and artists suddenly took a stand and wanted to contribute. So they produced this art, but then no one wanted it, because it wasn't beautiful or harmonious, it didn't correspond to the received paradigm of Chinese visual art, but was critical of prevailing conditions, so they were repressed and forced underground. The political content remained central until 1989, when people became resigned.

BP/FK: What about theatre, was that political too?

US: Yes, but that was more strictly controlled. They were able to write of course, but from the moment they got on stage, in public, they were subject to immediate censorship. Nothing "questionable" was ever performed, because it was so public. Visual art was marginalized to such an extent that paradoxically much more became possible. But the other arts with a tradition in China, such as literature or theatre, were recognized as having revolutionary potential, so they were directly and heavily censored. There were a few openings, such as in 1979

and again just before 1989. In 1983 for instance there were government campaigns against “spiritual pollution,” because the party suddenly thought, “no, this is too much, all the counterrevolutionary and Western things people and particularly artists are getting up to.” So they were all put down and censorship became stricter again.

BP/FK: Would you say that the large scale of the work is characteristic of Chinese art, or of the orientation towards the market?

US: It is characteristic of Chinese art, but only after the late 90ies. Before that in general small formats prevailed, because there was no money and no space, especially outside the official art system of the academies. Although for a long time the official art of the academies excluded experimental works; the same artists had studios or teaching jobs at the academies and did their own thing in private. In the mid-90s the first independent contemporary artists began to emerge, who felt that this was too much of a compromise, because they felt too dependent in the academy environments and didn't want to be schizophrenic about their practice. But then of course they only had small spaces and therefore produced small-scale work. After the Millennium formats became larger and larger. It doesn't have much to do with the market though, because for the market that is actually more of a problem. Dealers don't want gigantic works or installations, what they want is primarily oil painting in a manageable size. If a piece is larger than 2x2 meters that already becomes problematic, because it is difficult to transport and place. But in China everything has a tendency to the big and visual art follows this cultural trend. This becomes very obvious when we compare it to Japan, where everything tends to remain consistently tiny and precise. That has to do with Japanese culture, but with rents as well, with the size of spaces that young artists in particular can afford, and beyond that with the urban environment, such as the living arrangements in Tokyo, where even apartments are tiny. Though Chinese artists had some of these constraints in the beginning, in China everything tends to size and expansion: artists must have large studios, one certainly larger than the next, it's a competition that is unfamiliar on this scale in the West. The work reflects this. Early on due to low cost of space and abundant labour they were also able to produce things that are impossible for artists in the West to even consider: since it couldn't be produced in the West no one even thinks it, while in China they were able to think it because they could produce it. There is basically no limit; there are artists with 150 permanent employees on their payroll. In the West there are very few artists able to

do that, Jeff Koons perhaps or maybe Olafur Eliasson. But they are very few, unlike in China where this is possible for many.

BP/FK: What is the status of young contemporary artists in China today?

US: Artists used to have a high status in Chinese society, but when experimental contemporary art emerged, which no one understood and no one wanted, you wouldn't get social recognition by being such type of artist. Because much of it was underground, the social status of these artists was low and their life precarious. There was no money in it. They were idealists, with miserable living spaces and no heating in winter, but then almost overnight many of these same artists became multimillionaires. Today they achieve high prices at auction even in China itself. A handful of artists are now public heroes and appear on the covers of upscale lifestyle and fashion magazines and coffee table books. They have become role models; becoming an artist is considered an attractive career with particular social and financial benefits.

BP/FK: Let's jump from China to Hong Kong, where the Sigg collection will be housed in the M+ museum at a prime location. Will the Chinese public be able to access the collection there? Will they find out about it and be able to visit it? Or is there social stratification in terms of who is able to travel there?

US: 45 million Mainland Chinese travel to Hong Kong every year. There are many tourists among them and many of them will visit when they see it, even if they have no interest in art and know nothing about it. But when they do visit contemporary exhibitions they react very strongly one way or another; they are often astounded because they can't believe that Chinese artists made these things, they never knew this existed in China. I think it will be very successful at reaching the public even if only 10% of these annual visitors were to set foot in the museum. In Hong Kong the collection can be shown highly professionally, which is not yet possible in China, where standards are very low even at the National Gallery. There is no quality control, anyone can rent space there and do a show. Going to a public museum in China other than for antiques is not enjoyable, the quality is very mixed and the spaces are old, in terrible shape, badly designed and stuffy. Exhibitions normally just consist of rows after rows of pictures. These state institutions are now coming under increasing pressure to change

and improve, but that is a very new development that has only been going on in the last few years. In Hong Kong the professionalism will be high, as is the quality of the materials, the design and the spectacular space of a 18,000 m² of exhibition space. This makes it possible to show a lot of work, and the Chinese people will respond to this presentation, seeing a part of their own history that is very different, an unfamiliar visual narrative of the 1980s and 90s that they have never seen before. Sometimes an exhibition can tell a story better than any novel, and people are often astonished how visual art can achieve this.

BP/FK: Your collection has so far never been shown in Mainland China ...

US: Single works, but exhibitions No, never – nowhere in Asia actually, perhaps partly for financial reasons. M+ is in discussions with the Power Station in Shanghai, the first state museum for contemporary art, that has expressed an interest, but it is unlikely that it will happen at this point. They want to take on the exhibition currently on show in Sweden, but to show it in Shanghai works would need to be left out, because too critical for Mainland China, which is not something M+ would support either. We did the CCAA exhibition at the Power Station in Shanghai and got into trouble with the authorities because they saw Ai Weiwei's name on the work list. With very short notice they eliminated his works from the show. Not only that: Ten minutes before the opening of the show they had his name painted over on the list of jury members and of the award winners which formed part of a wall text Not to show the work is one thing, but to negate names, to forge history – we cannot do that. That's just like during the cultural revolution, when disgraced officials were painted over or deleted from official portraits. Just imagine, this is the atmosphere in China today.

BP/FK: But the government must be aware that the archive of the CCAA houses documents that are potentially subversive. Do they just quietly tolerate it?

US: So far yes. The exhibition in Shanghai was the first time we ran into trouble. We actually had two difficulties there, Ai Weiwei and the title of the exhibition, which was "Fifteen Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award." They said this was not acceptable, that the word "Chinese" could not be used in this context since its use is restricted. We argued that the word "Chinese" in the title was clearly descriptive since this is not about fifteen years of Swiss or Russian art, but they wouldn't budge. They also refused the title "Fifteen years of Chinese Contemporary

Art" which you would consider as simply generic. In the end the title was reduced to simply "Fifteen Years". We included the full subtitle in the English version, which no one objected to, either because they didn't notice or they just didn't care because the Chinese could not read it. So this was our first and only trouble with the authorities.

BP/FK: So potentially there is a danger that you will have to move the CCAA to Hong Kong one day as well.

US: Yes that is possible. There are a number of legal issues to deal with, related to our respective status in China, Hong Kong and Switzerland.

BP/FK: To what extent would you still describe the art that you collect and support today as political, or as a political instrument? Is there still a subversive element today, either in terms of content or in the intent of the work?

US: There is still this aspect, but it is a much smaller part of the art that is produced today. It used to be dominant but has become less central to art production. State censorship isn't the only reason for its decreasing importance, it also became less important because of various forms of self-censorship. The appeal of the art market is one reason, another is that many Chinese themselves feel that political art is something the West expects them to do, and they don't want to be reduced to that. We did two exhibitions in Lucerne and Hamburg examining how Chinese artists have returned to what they consider historically central aspects of Chinese culture, such as landscape painting and calligraphy, the two pillars of Chinese tradition. 20 years ago most of these artists would not have touched these topics with a bargepole, so fascinated were they with everything Western, the traditional seemed old-fashioned and totally out of touch to them. But many of that generation have to some extent become disillusioned with Western conceptualism. There is also a certain fatigue with global mainstream art production, with the sense that the same is everywhere and differences between cultural spaces are washed away. Many artists therefore return to examine their own culture, their roots, their traditions – a trend that I understand and support in principle. It is not entirely apolitical, but politics are definitely not core.

BP/FK: It would be more a question of identity ...

US: Yes precisely, it is about discovering and reaffirming one's own culture – or after some tinkering with it turning away again.

BP/FK: This suggests a strong self-assurance, compared to the 80s and 90s.

US: That is something I see increasing exponentially every day: the Chinese become ever more self-assertive. I don't necessarily mean the artists, but the nation as a whole and particularly the government now plays the nationalist card. China lived once in total isolation; after their disagreements with the Soviet Union they wanted to go it alone. By the end of the 70s they realized this would not work, that they couldn't get out of the dire situation they were in on their own. So they started to open up, but they still insisted on their autonomy, the mantra was "don't interfere with us and we won't interfere with you." But in the past few years they have become the largest investors in Africa and in Latin America, they pushed the territorial conflicts with the Philippines, with Vietnam, with Japan ... these are new tunes and they have an effect on art as well.

FK: Hong Kong though was outside of the focus of your collection?

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BP/FK: The significance of the CCAA has strongly shifted in the last 16 years, with the introduction of the art critic's award as well. Are there other comparable awards in China? Did any Chinese institutions work in the same directions?

US: Many Chinese entities started to copy the award. There are now many awards for artists and one other prize for art criticism. But none of them has comparable prestige. The core values for us are firstly the academic standard, that we have highly qualified and acknowledged experts who judge the work based solely on academic criteria, secondly independence from the influences of the market and from political constellations and from any bias a corporate sponsor may bring with its brand. Thirdly, we don't create any obligation for the artists – unlike other awards we don't expect artists to advertise, donate a work or produce something for us. There is no other award quite like that. I was once in the jury for another prize, where we had to select from among 20 artists. But only 10 of those 20 artists were represented in the concurrent exhibition,

which made me question what we were doing there after they had already dismissed half the candidates without involving us. The set-up was very clear; they had decided on the winner beforehand. In China no one is shocked by this, it's not abnormal to handle things that way. Our model is exceptional in this context and of course people realize this.

BP/FK: Have you ever noticed that the government or other institutions for example tried to influence or instrumentalize the CCAA in one direction or another?

US: Not so far. In fact I have repeatedly said publicly and at every award ceremony, that it should not be outsiders who determine what is meaningful or less meaningful Chinese art; that the Chinese institutions themselves ought to own this award. I would be very pleased if Chinese institutions would participate directly. I only founded the award because none existed at the time, but it is not supposed to be my award and I never put my name on it. Though especially artists often tell me that from the moment an official Chinese institution is involved the award would no longer be independent.

BP/FK: Something we come across again and again in our initial research is the call for independence from the market. For us the separation of art's claims to participate in an economy of knowledge on the one hand and the art market on the other seems self-evident, but in China this separation does not seem to exist in the same way. How would you explain this?

US: First I would argue that a clear separation as you describe it doesn't really exist in the West either – though no one would ever admit it. There are countless artists, galleries, auction houses for whom this separation only exists rhetorically. It only remains real for a minority, a majority strongly considers for the market, decisions about the scale of the work or the medium are determined by the market. By now we are even accustomed to talk of "biennial artists" and "gallery artists." Only few artists can credibly say that they are not affected by any of these categories. For me this does not imply a value judgment yet, what matters is whether a work is meaningful and it can be meaningful within any of these parameters. I don't judge the intentions of the artists beyond the work. Yet in China this separation never existed in the first place, no one cares if an artist is also a businessman, and there was never a sharp segregation between art and other domains.

**BP/FK: A final question. You said
there is no longer this separation
of conceptual value and market
value in the West...**

US: ...but it is maintained ideologically, to do otherwise would be considered blasphemy.

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA LI LIU

Beijing
15.10.2014, 1h 55'

CCAA Director, Beijing

Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
What are your duties here and how
did you meet Uli Sigg?

Anna Li Liu: I'm the director here since 2011. This prize is the first contemporary art award in China and it's the most academic and international one. There was always a director since 1998, but the CCAA didn't have a permanent office in the past. A lot of artists knew this award but they had no way to contact us. So in 2010 we decided to set up an office here in Beijing. We have witnessed the development of Chinese contemporary art from a semi-underground state to one with a louder and more public voice. We thought it was important to review what we had been coming through and record this. So we set up this office here and stored all the related material.

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BP/FK: Was it always clear that
the CCAA office would be in
Beijing and not somewhere else?

AL: Beijing and Shanghai are the best two choices. Shanghai has been active with its art scene as well. I thought at first that maybe the jury meeting could be held half in Shanghai and half in Beijing. And CCAA once held its jury meeting in Switzerland in 2004. But eventually Beijing is considered a better place for a research institution. Also Uli comes to Beijing more often than to Shanghai. Last year, we had our office's opening. The thing is that we didn't want to open an exhibition place. We tend to focus on research and academic things. Also we want to use our space to create a library to show the materials we have collected in the past fifteen years.

BP/FK: What is for you the most
important aspect of the CCAA
Cube? Is it now the turning point
that the prize has settled and
institutionalized?

AL: We will be opening our archive to the public soon. Also we think it would be nice to hold some forums or seminars here when the jury is meeting in Beijing. Then we collaborate with some research institutions. We will provide material and they will generate topics from our materials. In Shanghai and Beijing, every weekend there are about four or five opening-invitations for exhibitions. We try to figure

out what kind of direction the CCAA would take within this circle and how we can support all these activities.

BP/FK: What kind of people get
in touch with you? Are these
journalists, or artists? What is your
duty as director – do you represent
the prize towards politics or are
these rather artists that take part
at the prize?

AL: Unfortunately I have to deal with the government even though I don't want to. This prize basically has nothing to do with government. We tried to register it in Switzerland and Hong Kong. And the process was really complicated – contemporary art is always a sensitive term for the government and our founder is a foreigner. Actually the only situation in which I need to deal with the government is when we need to do the exhibition or publish something, if it relates to certain sensitive people. Then the government may come and stop us and I then deal with them. CAFA half represents government and half represents art. So CAFA each year supports us a lot. We have some of our jury from CAFA and each year we hold our activities and media conference at CAFA.

BP/FK: Do you think people are
double minded working in the
government but also supporting
the arts?

AL: Yes. For example, Xu Bing is a professor and deputy of CAFA and he also does his contemporary art. He must have his personal values in art and position in government at the same time. But later our library will also open for the government to do research. As we had our exhibition in Shanghai, a Shanghai based semi-governmental organized research institution approached us and wanted to collaborate. In their perspective, we are very honestly presenting history.

BP/FK: Does the government
accept the CCAA as a prize and
institution by now?

AL: The government doesn't say no, because we didn't do anything that breaks the law and we did

not ask for any kind of governmental administrative certificate or anything like that. I guess if we asked the government they would reply with an “I don’t know.” It’s like if Uli wants to donate his collection to some of the local museums here, the most likely reaction he may get is actually non-reaction. These museums do not want to take responsibility. But when they have to show a reaction, then they do. For instance, they checked on our exhibition – starting with the title, then the list of artists, and finally the tax issue. When they figured that there would be quite a lot of pieces to be shipped from abroad, the officials said no.

BP/FK: You brought the prize to a new level. What did you change?

AL: When Uli was seriously asking me to be the director of this prize, I did some research on it. I asked my friends about their opinions on the prize. And they answered that this prize is like a mystery. They know it’s a prize with a high level but they had no idea how to contact us and they did not know who the jury was. And they were wondering why the winner was always announced to the media all of a sudden. I discussed these perceptions with Uli. Later I realized that the CCAA had actually done everything very well. They just didn’t find a proper channel to make it known to the public. So I think we need to try making things clearer and announcing ourselves to the public about what we do. That’s why we now have the nominators. We try to use the media’s power to let people know more about this prize. And sometimes we try to have these nominators visit the candidates and we record it on video.

BP/FK: In early times it seemed to cause artists shame just to be nominated and not to win the prize. Has it changed in the meantime – is it by now also an honor to be nominated?

AL: I don’t think it has changed that much. It’s part of the Chinese character and a general phenomenon in the Chinese contemporary art scene, especially for the critics. So we really try hard to protect their names. For the artist’s award, especially for the contribution award, since the candidates are considered very well known here, we still want to protect the names of the nonwinners by not publishing the list of nominees.

BP/FK: How are the critics nominated – or how does this process work?

AL: For the art critic’s award, the candidates nominate themselves. But sometimes some curators or critics who have a close relationship with us may recommend

someone, and then we might try to contact them and ask them if they want to participate.

BP/FK: How do the critics know about the prize?

AL: We have media coverage. But at the media conference we only announce the winners.

BP/FK: Would it be a problem if all the winners came only from one place? How important is it to represent different parts of China?

AL: When we select the nominators, we try to have a combination and make sure that we cover different mediums, regions, and age. We spend a long time each year selecting nominators and jury. After they are selected, we give them full freedom to select the candidates. But the jury won’t know which nominator selected each candidate.

BP/FK: So there are no predefined rules or criteria, like there has to be at least one woman winner or something like that?

AL: No. But for the young artist prize, age is something we consider. By the way, we have two female winners and one couple so far, at least.

BP/FK: You said that media coverage has become important?

AL: Contemporary art for long has not been a hot topic in the Chinese cultural scene. But now more and more professional media has appeared, as well as some other awards. Unlike them, CCAA does not celebrate a big “party.” I think we should keep this character and at the same time we should have more discussion with the media and make our selection process more transparent to the public.

BP/FK: I guess it’s still very hard for a Westerner to understand Chinese art. How do are they introduced to this art?

AL: Actually it’s really amazing that those in the jury can quickly grasp the main point of each artist’s work after a short introduction to an artist whom they may have never heard of. But most of the artists’ works are Western influenced. For those artists whose works are very deeply rooted in Chinese culture, it would be difficult for the foreign jury to understand. That’s why we need Chinese jury to be there.

BP/FK: So the Chinese jury explains the works for the foreign jury?

AL: Yes. And they get some idea from the nominator’s commentary as well.

BP/FK: Could you describe the ideal jury member?

AL: The best would be curators of the big international events like biennials and DOCUMENTA, since they know a wide range of high-level international artists and works. Also they themselves are a kind of high-level representative. So we need them. For the Chinese jury members, we would like to combine both traditional and non-traditional professionals, or academics and non-academics.

BP/FK: How can artists benefit from the prize?

AL: It should support artists financially. In ancient Chinese culture, we have this belief that artists should create things with no worry about money. When you look at the list of best artists in China, you would figure that actually many of them come from well-to-do families with great financial support. But in Western culture, it seems that artists do struggle with their living and that struggling fertilizes their works.

Moreover I think this award projects an attitude on how art should be treated. If you look at the list of winners of this prize, you would notice that all these winning artists have later achieved great success in art and became leading figures in Chinese contemporary art. That shows the value of our jury and this prize.

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BP/FK: How is the prize financed?

AL: It was fully financed by Uli Sigg in the past. Now we also have M+ and some other private sponsors. But we do not really want to develop this. If later we want to fully conduct the library and related activities, then we may consider developing this. We have a sponsor in this year's exhibition that supported us with the multimedia facilities.

BP/FK: Who decides what should be archived?

AL: First, we want to archive all the material that we gathered each year for the jury. Then our partners (some museums, galleries, and institutions) gave us catalogues of their exhibitions. Compared to AAA whose focus for archiving is covering the whole of Asia, our archive only focuses in Chinese contemporary art.

BP/FK: Will for example emails between you and Uli Sigg be archived?

AL: Before I came here, all the material was in Switzerland. Since 2011 all discussions and conversations between Uli and me, or the jury and me via email are stored. There were four directors of CCAA before me. One lost his computer and that part of the history of CCAA is lost. That's why I strongly suggested

setting up this office here. It's not just personal history or institutional history. It's the history of Chinese contemporary art.

BP/FK: Is there a big competition between the cities Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong?

AL: They are all linked but they have separate positions. Hong Kong is the market. But maybe we can say there are few known artists there, or nobody in the Mainland used to care about the few artists there. Shanghai has a very interesting art scene. It has many good artists, galleries, organizers, and art fairs. But it's not considered the center of Chinese contemporary art. Artists, no matter if they are established or not, all want to come to Beijing at some point in their career.

INTERVIEW WITH PI LI

Beijing
22.10.2014, 39'

Curator Sigg Collection, Museum M+,
Hong Kong, CCAA Director 2002
and 2006–2008

**Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
How close do you work together
with Uli Sigg?**

Pi Li: Very close. We have known each other since 1997. At that time, I was working for the gallery as an assistant and he was our client. Since then, we have built up our friendship for many years. When he donated his collection to the M+ in 2012, my title at M+ became Sigg Senior Curator, which is in honor of Uli Sigg.

**BP/FK: You were an important
figure at the early stage of the
prize. You worked with Karen
Smith looking for Chinese artists
to apply for the prize. Could you
tell us something about that?**

PL: As you know, in 1997 when I met Uli Sigg, he was a collector. I was working at a gallery and Karen Smith was my director. Basically there were not many foreign galleries here in Beijing or in China. Through Karen Smith, Uli came to us and explained that he wanted to build up the CCAA Chinese Contemporary Art Award. At that time, the main purpose of this idea was to collect as much information as possible to discover young emerging artists in China. Later we developed this idea and we were wondering if it's possible to bring an international jury here so that they could get to know more about Chinese contemporary art. And we decided to include both international and Chinese jury together in the jury meeting. It's not only about the prize itself, it's also about communication between China and the world. That's how the CCAA format was created. That was in 1999. Since then, we have held it every two years. Each time the jury is composed of Uli Sigg, one or two foreign curators, one or two Chinese curators, and one artist such as Ai Weiwei. I think for the first couple of years, the main thing about this prize was to introduce Chinese art to those key international curators.

**BP/FK: How did you collect the
information about the artists?**

PL: It was not easy. At that time, there were not many

art magazines. And contemporary art sometimes was not allowed in the universities. So we collected information mainly through recommendation. We had the application form and people who wanted to apply could copy the form. I remember that we got about 70–100 applications the first time. Our first meeting was based on these forms. After the first time, in 2001 or 2003 we got fewer applications because people figured that they had very little chance of winning. So we changed the regulation a little bit. We then decided not to have artists apply for the prize but to have nominators who work in the art circle nominate artists. This was also because we don't only want to award the artist; we want to know what is happening in the art world. That's why we had nominators help us. After nomination, we would contact artists and have them provide materials about works. Every two years we have 5 to 6 nominators. And each nominator nominates 15–20 artists. So we have about 100–120 applications every year.

**BP/FK: Then why is there an open
call again now?**

PL: Anna made this decision. And I'm no longer involved with this.

BP/FK: You wouldn't do it that way?

PL: I think the situation is very different now. At the time we began CCAA, there were not many other prizes. But now there are more and more prizes and competitions like this. Also these are two concepts – one is to make the prize more qualified and one is collect information as much as possible.

**BP/FK: To whom is this prize
dedicated?**

PL: The reward for the winner is 10,000 dollars. When we created CCAA in 1999, that was a large amount of money. But by now it's not worth that much anymore. Then in 2005, I convinced Uli to introduce the CCAA shortlist artists exhibition. So we did one at Shanghai Aurora Museum and another one at Beijing UCCA. In this way, we didn't encourage only the winning artists but also encouraged people who were on the shortlist. At that time there

were not so many exhibition opportunities. Unfortunately, this was the only shortlist exhibition. In order to encourage the winners of the Contribution Award, CCAA supports them with a publication. But the publication is a complicated process. You really need to look into the subject and do editorial work. So I hope they have enough qualified people to do this. This is the major challenge for CCAA today.

BP/FK: Do you think CCAA focuses more on supporting young artists or establishing artistic excellence?

PL: From my understanding, I think the aim of CCAA is to generate or contribute to an understanding of what's happening in China now, what's happening among young artists, and what the historical position of the established artists is. That's the major difference between CCAA and other art prizes. But of course, every director has a different idea about the prize. I totally appreciate Anna Li Liu's effort of exposing CCAA through social media, the ceremony and talks. That's what we didn't get a chance to do in the past. But still, I think it's very important for CCAA to generate more rich understanding.

BP/FK: There's a critique of the CCAA not being transparent, since its rules are changing all the time. So does it really represent the Chinese art scene?

PL: I don't think we change that much, but we are adjusting the prize and adding things to it to make the prize fit better into the art scene.

BP/FK: But the prize's categories are also changing.

PL: That's a purely Chinese thing. Chinese people are very afraid of losing face. I think now the CCAA is really approaching the young artists. After the first two or three years, we realized that it was not very fair to have the already quite established artists competing with the young artists. So we set up the Contribution Award for the established artists who apply for the CCAA prize. Also, I do not think this prize is a foreigner's prize. Why can't a foreigner make judgments on Chinese art? It's very nationalistic to say it's a foreign prize. We face such comment quite often here in Hong Kong as well. People always ask why are foreigners creating the M+ museum.

BP/FK: Why was the title of CCAA changed from Contemporary Chinese Art Award to Chinese Contemporary Art Award?

PL: We often use the word "contemporary" as a category to define a certain style of art. To put it that way also reflected our understanding about the

avant-garde at that time – we were looking for something new, critical, and radical. Well, after the Olympics and WTO, China has become more flexible. More and more forms and styles started to appear. So we are now focusing more and emphasizing the art in contemporary China.

BP/FK: When the prize was established, what was Uli Sigg's idea?

PL: He came up with the idea of the prize, then Karen, me and later people like Ai Weiwei, Gu Zhenqing all helped him figure out how to make this happen, because it was very difficult for him as a foreigner to approach the people. As Uli Sigg was at the time the only client of the gallery, Karen Smith and I decided to help him build up the prize. We also benefited from this, because from the materials that Uli collected, we were able to discover interesting artists.

BP/FK: Why does the M+ support the CCAA?

PL: I guess that is part of our donation agreement, but I wasn't there when this was agreed on. CCAA has quite a long history already and Uli has donated his collection to M+. Both CCAA and M+ need to grow. And M+ is on its way to adding more collections. So we still need to collect information with the help of CCAA. We have many advantages from this collaboration after all.

BP/FK: Li Zhenhua criticized Sigg for being too influential in the jury meetings. What do you think about that? Does it happen in Hong Kong as well?

PL: Sigg has only one vote and he doesn't speak much at the jury meeting. And he uses his one vote only when the votes are tied during the selection. So I don't think he has been too influential in the jury meetings. I think he's providing information for the foreign jury members. Some of the foreign jury does not know much about Chinese art. And Chinese jury members sometimes cannot express their thoughts very well to the foreign jury. So in some cases, the foreign jury would ask Sigg about his understanding of the works. You know there are always two kind of ideas generated by the end of the jury meeting – one from the foreign jury and one from the Chinese jury. That's also something that CCAA needs to improve.

INTERVIEW WITH LI ZHENHUA

Beijing
16.10.2014, 23'

Curator, critic, curator film Art Basel
Hong Kong, jury member CCAA 2011,
Beijing and Zurich

**Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
What role does Uli Sigg play in
the jury meetings?**

Li Zhenhua: People sometimes misunderstand his comments. For example, if he comments on someone, it doesn't necessarily mean that he wants this person to win. He just wants to add more information to it. But people may think that his comments indicate that Uli wants this person to win. I think this happens naturally. Because he is so powerful and human beings are indeed behavior-based animals. But at that time, I said to Uli that he should quit the jury because he is too powerful. His information and comments always influence the whole process.

BP/FK: What did he say to that?

LZ: He said he was just giving basic information and he could not step aside.

**BP/FK: The jury combines Western
and Chinese curators. It must be
difficulty for the foreign curators
to always understand the works
properly.**

LZ: Caroline also asked this question. She said that she doesn't have much information and understanding of Chinese art. So me and to Huang Zhuan will explain to her what would be the context and interests in these artists from china. It's nice to combine our knowledge because my knowledge focuses on the development of art starting from the middle of 90s and Huang Zhuan involved in the chinese art movement in the 80s already. From this basic information, we try to generate a debate. And Uli would add something different because his point of view is more in between – between the Western world and China as a so-called insider or outsider. Also he is a collector. When he collects, it's like giving a confirmation to a certain kind of art. So that's very interesting.

**BP/FK: Are the selection criteria
for the artists formulated so they
would fit in Uli's collection?**

LZ: Uli's collection is really wide. He selects so widely that the top artists would be collected anyway.

However, I think the question should go back to why the nominator's choices are not that surprising. Recently I have been working with CAFA with the Future Show. It focuses on young Chinese artists. We all think that it's a problem now that the suggestions we get from institutions or galleries are really nothing new to us. We see that kind of work everywhere. Then why are these artists called talented and prime? This is a problematic thing.

**BP/FK: Is there an ideal CV – do
Chinese young artists have to go
academy and study?**

LZ: Not necessarily. A lot of interesting young artists did not attend an academy. But still the body of the academic system becomes the major problem itself. They have been building up a kind of structural network during the past 20 years and people are all related to each other within it. CAFA and China Academy of Art are the two branches and they are the two major sources of Chinese art at the moment. They not only educate artists, but also curators and collectors. I think that's ok but we have to discover more and push it further. Recently I realized that there are quite a lot of young artists who studied overseas and then came back. They have a different approach to art. Also, there's this so-called socially engaged process of young people. They can be artists, creators, or anonymous. This is another trend at the moment – DIY culture, media related or socially engaged art and self-education systems. You will rarely find this kind of thing at all in the academic system.

**BP/FK: Do they (not very clear
who are they?) have the possibility
to enter the Chinese art system?**

LZ: The nominators are not related to the academy problem. They are more related to the problem of art trends. No matter where these nominators come from, they only focus on Beijing and Shanghai artists. Artists from other parts of China are completely invisible. For example, when people talk about Guangzhou they only mention one or two artists there. That's wrong because Guangzhou is huge

and it has its own academies with more relation to Hong Kong and Taiwan. That creates art of different kind. It's a pity what is not visible to the nominator system.

BP/FK: Does it need other nominators or is it difficult to find other people?

LZ: I think each prize functions in a certain way. If you want to maintain quality then you need to have qualified people. Then there would be no risk in it. But that also means that there would be no surprise either. I think this is actually the best and safest way to handle a prize. This is also a very "circle" thing and this prize is in the prime circle of this kind. So you can't be wrong. No matter who you select, they would all be the best for sure.

BP/FK: Don't you think it is contradictory that Uli first collected unknown artists and then the CCAA award went straight to the top-level artists?

LZ: He also constructed the top-level. He constructed the prize and brought it up to the top-level together with Harald Szeemann in the beginning. In a way, the whole system was invented along with the prize too.

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BP/FK: Did Uli Sigg also invent an artistic excellence/elite with the prize?

LZ: Yes, an elite system. The involvement of Harald Szeemann certainly brought up the whole thing to a certain level. And I think Uli has adapted himself to the system since the beginning. It's not that related to his collection, but artists related to his collection become famous through the prize. I do not think Uli does it because of money. His heart truly is in Chinese art and he really wants to push it to the international level to make Chinese art more visible to the world.

BP/FK: Do you think that CCAA is covering the landscape of Chinese contemporary art?

LZ: CCAA is on a high level but it is too high level. The Chinese art scene is too big and CCAA can represent only a part of it. But it has a leading role in Chinese contemporary art and it gives direction and makes things happen towards the future. It has good effects on the whole art world. CCAA could have given its prize to the so-called famous painters, but it never does.

BP/FK: Is it because the market already did?

LZ: Not really. The market came later after 2005.

BP/FK: So you think the good thing is that CCAA supports things instead of focusing on representation?

LZ: The good thing is that CCAA engages with a wider range of art. CCAA does not focus on the popular 4A (four very famous and rich painters) and it does not support the young market art scene. CCAA has its own way of judging the Chinese art scene. For example, we gave our 2012 young artist prize to Yan Xing. It wasn't because he was becoming famous but because he really has potential. He exposed his personal life and artworks all on the Internet and he made a clear statement that he is gay. But nobody really knows what is true and what is not. So he blurred the zone between reality and his artistic creation. That's why we gave the prize to him. It was quite a risky to give this prize to him. And he wasn't rich because he was not a painter. He does performance, video, photography and all sorts of things, instead of aim for the best market in such.

INTERVIEW WITH WANG HUANGSHENG

Beijing
21.10.2014, 54'

Director CAFA Art Museum, Beijing and jury
member CCAA 2011

Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
How was your experience as a jury
member for the prize?

Wang Huangsheng: In 2011, I was involved with this prize for the first time, when we selected Zhu Zhu for the Art Critic Award. I think the most meaningful experience during the selection procedure is that it provides us, as jury members, an opportunity and platform to sincerely and openly discuss art and art critics.

BP/FK: Were there many applicants?

WH: Yes, many. I can't clearly remember the number. But I think 20, or more than that.

BP/FK: How controversial was the
selection process?

WH: There were many different opinions throughout the discussions. Then we decided to interview Zhu Zhu and discuss his project with him. We needed to bring the project to a deeper level and see his possibilities to accomplish it, by really listening to his ideas and plans.

BP/FK: Was there any discussion
about the criteria of the prize in
the jury meeting?

WH: Yes. We had a discussion about that at the beginning of the meeting. But it provided a very general idea or direction instead of very precise principles or anything like that. After that, our discussions focused on the individual works.

BP/FK: Could you talk about the
new category of the prize "Art
Critic Runner Up Award", invented
in 2011?

WH: That prize was set to encourage and support very young art critics. That year the winner of that prize was from Hong Kong. We didn't know much about him/her before that. But we noticed him/her during the selection process. You know, Hong Kong's art scene is actually quite different from Mainland China's. It has its own problems and quite

unique identity. In this sense this very young art critic's perspective drew our attention to Hong Kong. That's why we set up this prize in that year.

BP/FK: Then why did this prize no
longer exist in 2013?

Ling: I think it's because of the different translation of the title of this prize. It still exists today.

BP/FK: It seems that CAFA plays a
very important role for this prize,
and the Chinese art scene in
general. Many people involved in
the CCAA attended the CAFA or
teach there.

WH: Indeed, CAFA is the top Chinese art academy in China. Well, the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou is also very important with great influence. I think the jury members of CCAA and key figures in the art scene are mainly from these two academies. But maybe because CCAA's office is in Beijing, it seems that CAFA plays a more important role in this.

BP/FK: Some people say the CCAA
prize remains mainly within a small
systemic circle. What kind of idea
would you propose to open this
circle up?

WH: I think CCAA is always developing its own system. The jury team for each year's prize is different. And I think the open call procedure, introduced this year, is very important. Also, I should say that you cannot expect this prize to show and represent everything in the Chinese art scenes, even though I do believe the CCAA is authoritative and very representative. What's important is that this prize does emphasise an academic position. And this comes from a group of important and inevitable figures in the Chinese art scene, whether you call them within the circle or not.

INTERVIEW WITH LARS NITTVÉ

Hong Kong
23.10.2014, 1h 39'

**Executive Director M+, Museum for
Visual Culture, Hong Kong, and jury member
CCAA 2011–2012**

**Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
What is the aim of Uli Sigg with
the CCAA?**

Lars Nittvé: There are two processes that are crucial for Uli Sigg. One is to save the memory of contemporary art production. There was no systematic attempt by anyone else to collect and construct the history or the narratives of what was happening from the mid 70s onwards. And the other thing is to make that story and new content known to the rest of the world. So that's a sort of double intention – one is to do something for China, and the other is to do something for the world. I think CCAA has been involved in both these aspects in a very concrete way – encouraging, pointing to important contributions and at the same time bringing in this foreign expertise and spreading information about what happens in China.

**BP/FK: How are you involved in
the CCAA?**

LN: I wasn't involved in the CCAA or anything Uli related before 2010. Some of the other members in my team, such as Pi Li, were. My story with it is this: Uli and I never met each other until August 2010. We had mutual friends and I saw his Mahjong exhibition in 2006 in Hamburg. Even when I was in my last months at Tate Modern in 2002, there was a proposal that maybe he should show his collection. I suggested it to the Tate Modern organization. But then I moved on and no one else there was interested enough to put it forward as far as I know. I actually went to see Uli in August 2010. That was a couple of months after I signed the contract for M+. I hadn't started working fully yet. But I talked to him about the possibilities of considering M+ as the future home for his collection, because he said many times in interviews that the collection should come back to China. So I was kind of reminding him that Hong Kong is part of China, but it's also different. Something that is challenging in China may be less challenging here. It was just an idea at that time. But after a year and half, he started to think seriously about giving his collection to us. We also started talking about CCAA. In 2011, I was directly

involved in the CCAA art critic's award for the first time. We agreed that for a four-year period, M+ would support CCAA. So we basically became a partner or sponsor and we contribute some money each year to CCAA.

**BP/FK: We have seen a press
release and as I remember, this
agreement ends in 2014?**

LN: Yes. This is the last financial year. We have discussed it and I think our board has indicated that if we were to continue to support it, we would have a slightly different role in CCAA. We haven't really taken it forward. Uli has mentioned maybe to set the CCAA up as a foundation and establish it more in Hong Kong. But right now we just financially support it. So it's quite unresolved at the moment.

**BP/FK: There's this critique about
not supporting unknown local
artists. The critique is being
mentioned in regard to both CCAA
and the M+.**

LN: I can't prove anyone wrong because we don't know who the unknown artists are. So I don't know who's not collected. So this becomes a philosophical question. But I know a little bit about where this critique comes from and I think there are two sides to it. One, there's a lack of knowledge about to what extent we support local artists. There are some thoughts that M+ doesn't collect local artists or young local artists. Primarily I think it's wrong. Of course it looks like that when the first things that came to our collection were 1523 works by Chinese contemporary artists, two of which were from Hong Kong while the rest were from Mainland China. We could therefore appear to be a Mainland Chinese museum. But if one looks at our acquisitions since then, we have acquired about 600–800 works by Hong Kong artists. That's quite substantial. The museum is still in the early stages of building the collection. We've been collecting for two years. And we have probably another four to five years until we open. There's still a long way to go. That's one side of it – people do not know what we have collected

and what we haven't collected – even though they can find out on our website. Another aspect is that there's some division of labor between the museums in Hong Kong. We are not established as the museum of Hong Kong art. There's actually the Hong Kong Museum of Art, which has the remit of collecting Hong Kong art and that is their focus. We on the other hand are a global museum, looking at the world from a Hong Kong perspective. So while the core of our collection would be Hong Kong artists, we will collect these artists in an international perspective. We select differently than the Hong Kong Museum of Art. It's a little bit like the difference between Tate Modern and Tate Britain. Hong Kong Museum of Art is more like Tate Britain – they collect more historically, also it's the museum for British art. We are a museum that is rooted in Hong Kong, but in terms of comparing what we collect and what Hong Kong Museum of Art collects, we are more selective. Also, the third thing I would emphasize is that the ambition of M+ is to be a world-class museum. It's going to be the leading museum in Hong Kong or in region. We are probably a little bit like MoMA, Tate Modern, or Centre Pompidou.

BP/FK: How are the discussions in the CCAA jury? I think Harald Szeemann did not have much of a clue about Chinese art before being in the jury. How can Western curators talk about Chinese art today?

LN: I didn't end up here in Hong Kong because I was an expert in Chinese contemporary art. Basically I came because I had some track record in creating museums. I am much more Western, or even American in my expertise, though I am Swedish.. But from the moment I decided to do this, I started to learn and see a lot. As soon as I arrived here, I traveled to a lot of places in China. Concerning Chinese artists being discussed, I think I am familiar with half of them. I know what they do and what kind of works they have. So sometimes I'm very active, but in some other situations I have to listen to my Chinese colleagues. They present and talk about the work and then I make my judgment through this learning process. I think in the beginning, the Chinese jury members had more influences than they have now. Now it's probably a more balanced debate. But still the Chinese members may have a stronger influence. As Westerners, we need to be humble when facing something we don't really know, while the Chinese members have been living in and witnessing that culture for so long.

BP/FK: Do you think Uli Sigg's presence is dominant in the selection process?

LN: I can see that argument. It's a little bit like the Turner Prize, for which Nicolas Serota was (probably still is) the chairman for the jury for a long time. But actually he doesn't say anything. He just acts as chairman. I think you are right that Uli is quite active. But he is still a very restrained person. He wouldn't be the person to speak first. He is not the one who is the loudest. But he is a very trained negotiator. That has basically been his profession over many years, right? So he is good at saying the right thing at the right time in order to move things in a certain direction. At the same time, he is extremely knowledgeable. There are actually very few people even in China who really look into Chinese contemporary art and think about it so hard. Uli is an incredible source of information and it would be a waste not to have him in the jury meetings. I think you can argue in both directions. Usually in any jury team, you may have one or two people who have more status or power that they may or may not use. In a society that is more hierarchical, you may respect his voice a little bit more than you should. I personally respect it more based on the value of the argument. I won't be polite to Uli in that sense and I don't think he wants people to be so. And if you want to improve the prize, to increase its status and longevity, I think not focusing on his own status might be a smart thing.

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BP/FK: Is this Sigg's prize, even though it's named Chinese Contemporary Art Award?

LN: I don't think so. I don't know what it was like in the beginning, but I doubt he has been the one to determine the prize. If you look at the people who have been on the jury you will know that they are self-opinioned and powerful people. So I would say that I think it is the Chinese Contemporary Art Award and I think it's the jury's prize. But of course everyone is aware of the fact that the initiative and in principle the funding come from Uli. I think he is in many ways trying to distance it. The prize is not named after him and he is not it's director. And the directors have been changing over years. However, it's hard to imagine how this is viewed in China, because his position historically in China is so special. I believe the decisions have really been driven by the intellectual discussion among quite sophisticated jury members.

BP/FK: How much is the Sigg-topic discussed regarding the M+?

LN: It depends on which time frame you look at. Our collection at the present is I think somewhere around 3500 objects. In terms of the number of these objects, the majority of the collection does not come from the Sigg collection. That means

when we open, it will be a quarter of the collection that comes from his collection. We have agreed that in the first three years there will be five thousand square meters dedicated to present the Sigg collection in one or two sections. But then it becomes part of the whole collection in terms of the presentation. The development of Chinese contemporary art from the end of the Cultural Revolution to 2005 or 2006 would always be an essential part of our story. And thanks to Uli Sigg, we will always be the museum that can tell this story best in the world. It remains to be seen how important this story is, but I think it will retain its importance in this period in art history. Sigg's presence is very strong because he is one of the fundamental individuals to give us the strength we have, which we continue to build on. But after all we are not only an art museum. We also collect design, architecture and cinema, and so on and so forth. So his presence is important but very far from overwhelming.

BP/FK: Where is your collection housed now?

LN: The Sigg collection is in Switzerland. We took over the lease of the storage he was renting before. Some are travelling for shows all over the world. And we have storage here in Hong Kong, and in Beijing and Shanghai. Simply it's a question of costs. Switzerland is super cheap compared to Hong Kong. It's five times as expensive to store things in Hong Kong than in Switzerland.

BP/FK: What's the percentage of Western art in the collection of M+?

LN: Western art is a very small percentage. So here we have (draws a diagram of circles): Hong Kong in the center, then China in the next circle, two layers of Asia (closer ones and further ones), then at the end the West. Every global and international museum collects like that: the core of the collection is usually what is close to it. We are trying to build up a story or a documentary on what's happening during the period. So if we go further to collect works, these works need to make some sort of sense in relation to that core story. One example is Andreas Gursky's photographs of Hong Kong – that's typically something we would like to collect because they are iconic images in his oeuvre of the place we are in. Another example is Andy Warhol's works from the 60s in relation to the Chinese collection, because Chinese artists were very influenced by him and were trying to use his art as a tool to express what they wanted to say. Such examples make up a small percentage of our collection and they are usually very expensive. The money to acquire them is a big portion, but the number of works is small by comparison.

BP/FK: What about exhibitions with young artists?

LN: We have collected many young artists who are under 30. If you are a very young artist with very little exhibition track record and very unknown, then the likelihood of being collected by this institution is very small. You have to prove yourself first. With the Mobile M+ we have done seven exhibitions so far and there are many young artists from Hong Kong in them. The largest number was definitely below forty at least. Among all the artists, we present what we think are the greatest. The task of the museum is not to support artists primarily, but to present what we think are the most important relevant artists to the public and to create a meeting place. We have to choose. We have double responsibilities – responsibility to the public and responsibility to the art world. We try to be as fair and as transparent as we can be. But there's always a kind of personal judgment involved. Ultimately, what museums or institutions do is to create a platform for the meeting between two parties – the artists and the public. Exhibitions are slightly different but it's not a totally different game. There's permanence in the collection.

BP/FK: What perspective do you, as a HK museum, represent? What is your vision for the museum?

LN: I think our vision is to create a museum that globally tells the story of what has been happening during the last sixty or seventy years in visual culture and the world from a unique Asian perspective. Hong Kong is probably the only place you can achieve this at this stage – it's in between places, and it has a more international outlook; it doesn't have censorship. Singapore and Korea have censorship. Japan doesn't, but it has a very inward looking culture. What we are doing is to give this story being told an alternative perspective and to make it as solid, comprehensive and convincing as possible. That's a huge task. It's extremely intellectually complex, also because we operate it as what we call "visual culture." In Asia you have a lot of fluidity between these different categories. These categories are Western constructs and not Asian concepts. That means they are never as firmly established as they are in the West. So we have some very interesting and important Hong Kong artists, who are at the same time very interesting and important graphic designers or architects or something else. And they are fully respected in each field, which is basically impossible in Europe.

BP/FK: How many people are working at M+ now?

LN: The curatorial team has 21 people now. And we have a growing team of people who look after the

collection – registrars, conservators, database managers, etc. So we have 45 people so far plus human resources, finance, legal and communication people. Half of the team is from Hong Kong, twenty five percent is from other parts of Asia, and the rest are from other parts of the world. The staff from Hong Kong are more junior, while the more senior and experienced expertise is from some other part of the world.

BP/FK: How independent is the M+ regarding censorship?

LN: That's a very relevant question. Clearly things in China have gone from bad to worse in terms of censorship and interference. It's been a downhill journey since the Olympics. What has happened around the CCAA exhibition is stunning to everybody. That was a shock even to Uli. I think it was more extreme than he had expected. I have been involved and doing this here at the M+ for four years. So far, I can't say that in anything we've done, or in any decision we've made, it has been any different from doing it in Sweden or the UK. There's no interference, nor any indication to imply that maybe we should be careful. So we have been working like a Western, free institution. I must say that we are a little bit worried about the political sensitivity that is triggered by the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China as a result of the Occupying Central Civil Disobedience Movement and the pressure from the two sides. We are not a government museum directly, but indirectly we are. The chairman of our board is the chief secretary of Hong Kong, who is the second ranking minister and also leads the negotiation and development towards universal suffrage. So there are potential sensitivities. Today there's an article in the South China Morning Post about collecting a design object (maybe you can call it a piece of street art) that was made in connection with the street occupation and as part of that. Should we collect them and save them? It's easy to answer no. But one day, when this is over or something happens, there might be some offer or proposal for these objects. In Stockholm or somewhere else, I would not get involved as an institution while the movement is still functioning in its regional context. I actually think more about it than I would have in Stockholm. We live in a very different landscape. Even though there hasn't been any pressure, the landscape in terms of freedom of expression is something that is not a given fact here. It's written in our mini-constitution, but it must be defended. Politics are real here. If you have elections in most European countries, you can agree or disagree and there will be some changes. Here major changes can happen if you are unfortunate. The basic defense for the core values of Hong Kong is that we

have freedom of expression and all those sorts of freedoms. The big guarantee is that if they are under threat, people will be out in the street.

BP/FK: Could you explain in more detail why you thought about collecting the umbrella movement art?

LN: We all have boards. And the board members we have here in Hong Kong are definitely loyal to the government and that government is loyal to Beijing. They all respect that Hong Kong is different from China and that we have different set ups. We have collected works by Hong Kong artists that are very political and critical towards the government. That's kind of straightforward. But these sorts of objects have been used as part of a demonstration, which is illegal, and which has an indirect confrontation with the government. So it's not only about what the work communicates, it's the context that it functions in and stands for. Then I wonder how the board members would view this, because basically we are collecting things that directly criticize their standpoint. So this is more challenging. If they say no then it's a breach of freedom of expression.

BP/FK: Is there a written law about freedom of speech in art?

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LN: It shouldn't be needed. The basic law in Hong Kong guarantees that. I think the only thing that Hong Kong doesn't have compared to European countries is full democracy. So the leader of Hong Kong is not elected in a genuine democratic process but in a relatively undemocratic process. And our legislative council is basically fifty percent elected in an undemocratic process. The portion of democracy is constantly growing. That's something the British didn't start pushing early enough: there was basically no democracy during the British period. That makes Hong Kong probably unique in the world, because normally if you don't have democracy then you don't have freedom of expression. But we have so many kinds of freedom although we have no democracy. So far I have not felt any kind of threat. I think we would never end up in the situation of China. And if Uli wants to move his archive, it would be a totally different game here for sure. For example, Uli's donation is full of works by Ai Weiwei and it is approved by the board at the highest level.

INTERVIEW WITH TOBIAS BERGER

Hong Kong
23.10.2014, 1h 30'

Curator M+, Museum for Visual Culture,
Hong Kong

AND PAULINE J. YAO

Curator M+, Museum for Visual Culture,
Hong Kong, and winner of the CCAA Art Critic
Award in 2007

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Tobias Berger: The CCAA has managed to establish a counterpublic. Often labelled “Institutional Critique,” this alternative view evidently presupposes the existence of institutions. As the examples of China and Hong Kong demonstrate, it is important to establish strong and independent institutions, be they museums, biennials, art awards, or magazines functioning as voices beyond the mainstream. Seen thus, an art award like the CCAA that has existed for several years is immensely valuable.

BP/FK: Is a diversity of voices emerging in China? The CCAA award, after all, has attracted rather little attention in the Chinese press.

TB: Is there an educated mass media in China? I think we have to see what kind of press we are talking about? Compared to Hong Kong, which I am fairly familiar with, there is hardly any free press to speak of China. The existing press is problematic because it is informed by powerful interests. An independent scene is only now beginning to establish itself in China.

BP/FK: Did the CCAA attract any attention in Hong Kong?

TB: Sure, even though people usually don't talk about awards that much. I think for such prizes it is important to have a long-term effect. If you take ten prize winners, for instance, and look at those still being discussed a few years later, then that's what a prize amounts to. If a prize isn't endowed with a large sum of money, it must prove itself in the course of history, like the Kaiserring in Germany or now-days the Hogo Boss prize. The key questions are: who is chosen, who sits on the jury, and who puts the jury together? These questions are interesting

also from an academic perspective, precisely because they are largely neglected. In this case, however, they are perhaps less interesting because it's clearly Uli Sigg's prize and, as far as I know, he also puts up the prize money.

BP/FK: Siggs original intention of the prize was to mirror the current art scene. Isn't it somewhat surprising to use a prize to do that?

TB: What alternatives does a collector have? You can buy, but that attracts hardly any public attention. You can establish and build up a museum, which needs a lot of money and administrative resources. The CCAA is well suited to making a statement against auction prices and inferior art criticism. Sigg has always considered how he can position himself against the mechanisms of market appropriation. As an individual, he is always able to change the orientation of his prize. That's the huge advantage available to an individual.

BP/FK: What meaning does the Sigg collection have for the Museum M+?

TB: It was immensely important for the M+ to get the collection, also symbolically. It has functioned like a fast-forward button, catapulting us from a start-up to an international enterprise, the most important museum for contemporary Chinese art.

BP/FK: Wasn't this also a political decision?

TB: Certainly, but as a decidedly Hong Kong museum, in the two years after we received this amazing donation we had to emphasize the Hong Kong perspective to regain credibility among the local

population. It would, however, be dubious not to accept such a donation. We would probably have managed without it, but not as swiftly and not on this level. The world is waiting for an internationally oriented world-class museum in Asia. This mere fact has attracted a certain attention in itself. Measuring 60'000 in total with over 16,000 m², exhibition space, almost twice the floorspace of the MoMA, that goal has been achieved beyond doubt. The Sigg Collection is irreplaceable because its works are simply no longer available on the market.

BP/FK: How does the M+ cope with being a museum for the whole of Asia, with a strong international outreach, while nevertheless being rooted locally?

TB: The most important aspect has been putting together a team, which has been a highly successful process. Our team is very international on the one hand and full of local, young, ambitious, and talented professionals on the other. Running a museum is a people business and the team has been chosen accordingly: Team members have local roots but boast an international network. Which is how Hong Kong works: a small community plugged in very well internationally. Everything will change within the next ten years, when there will be many such international museums, just like the Centre Pompidou has been all these years. We aren't inventing anything new with the M+, but are shifting the perspective to Asia and the twenty-first century.

BP/FK: Pauline, you won the Art Critic Prize in 2007, maybe you can tell us something about the whole procedure because we really have little information about this – not many things were recorded for the CCAA archive.

Pauline J. Yao: So the way that the art critic prize works is that it functions a lot more like a grant than like a prize. It isn't awarded to writers for work that has already been completed; instead it is actually based on a proposal or project that you would like to research or something you would like to write. So the award essentially funds writers to carry out the research they need to do and then to write it, and then to publish it. CCAA translates it and publishes it as a bilingual publication. So in my case as in all others, I proposed a topic, and after I was notified that I was awarded and later after the writing was completed, they took care of the book, publishing and everything else related.

BP/FK: Were you invited to apply for the award? How did you know about it?

PJY: I think the director of the prize at that time was Pi Li and we knew each other already. He encouraged me and other writers he knew to apply. It was the first year the CCAA awarded an art critic prize. At that time not so many people knew about it.

BP/FK: Were there any further benefits of gaining the prize, besides having the opportunity to publish your text or getting some money for your research?

PJY: There is certainly positive recognition for the prize inside and outside of China. I had people contact me especially about it. There was professor from Austria who contacted me and told me that my book had been a very important resource for his student's research project.

TB: Sigg was never an investment collector. That made it so much easier for the prize to become established. Because all they want to do is to find new artists, not to promote certain people and record history. That gave it more credibility.

BP/FK: Talking about credibility, is the CCAA a Westerner's prize? Or even more Sigg's prize because he can always change it?

PJY: I don't know much about this. But I think it's actually amazing in China that someone can keep doing such a prize for so many years with a strong level of consistency. This is incredibly unusual in China. If you look at some of the other prizes that exist, they often last for a year or two at most – either because the lead organizers have some sort of financial difficulty to keep it going; or from the organizational perspective there are challenges. It is a lot of work to manage.

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BP/FK: How big is the chance of being selected when applying to the open call compared with being suggested by a nominator?

TB: I know for sure that the chance for an individual artist to be selected must be very small, but what is important to this particular art prize is that it makes a statement to involve a large number and wide range of artists. It moves the attention away somewhat from the typical actual works to the more critical, more conceptual direction. So it's not about the person who gets the prize. It's more like a statement, especially in a place like China at the moment.

BP/FK: You are a nominator for this year's prize. Did you receive any kind of selection criteria from the CCAA staff?

PJY: I did receive a letter outlining the criteria and age was mentioned in it but generally it was very

open in terms of how China was defined. I have been in the jury for many other prizes in Asia and things tend to be quite narrow, limiting candidates by nationality or age or medium. I think it's important that there are one or two awards like CCAA that really try to have a bigger picture. For the first couple of years CCAA was exclusively focused on Chinese artists. Then after it established a name for itself, I think they found it beneficial to open up. As more people know the prize and its standing, specific criteria are less necessary.

TB: The mission statement always has two sides. On the one hand it gives you a certain direction but on the other hand it limits you a lot. I think the great thing about this prize is that it developed and changed with time. It's not a prize that was once set, and then just stays there. It has remained dynamic.

INTERVIEW WITH VIVIAN TING WING YAN

Hong Kong
24.10.2014, 1h 53'

**Assistant Professor, Material Culture,
Museum Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University,
Academy of Visual Arts**

Vivian Ting: Is the CCAA well known here?

Barbara Preisig / Franz Kraehenbuehl: Yes, it's very well known here. But if you go over the list of the winners, you would probably find that Hong Kong art critics have a lesser chance to get into this competition.

BP/FK: What makes a Hong Kong artist?

VT: I think that artists, to a certain extent, are feeling the effects of modernization. We are all talking about Chinese contemporary art. So what is the position of Hong Kong art? Has Hong Kong art any kind of distinctive characteristics or does it have its own system to set it apart from so called Chinese contemporary art? It isn't quite so. I think as we are talking about Hong Kong art, it has a big messy soul. Who can be considered as Hong Kong artist? Pak Sheung Chuen was born in Fujian Province and then moved to Hong Kong for primary school. He studied at Chinese University of Hong Kong and became quite famous for his performances. He joined the 53rd Venice Biennale. He won the CCAA Award 2012 and the Frieze London Best Stand Prize in the same year for his way of dealing with history and memories. Is this distinctively Hong Kong? No. It's just his approach and it is quite international. Neither does Lee Kit, who has just been to Venice Biennale again, deal with particularly Hong Kong issues. So what is Hong Kong art? We can't say Hong Kong art is art that is made in Hong Kong. There are obviously artists educated in Hong Kong who then moved to Canada or America and make works that are related to issues in Hong Kong. Again, are they Hong Kong artists? If we write about Hong Kong history, how do we position someone like Sandra Walters? She is a daughter of a U.S. consul who became interested in art in the late 70s and made friends with those artists who studied abroad and then came back. Now she is working as an art consultant and is a very important figure in professional organizations of the local art scene. She started an art business in the early 70s but she has been in Hong Kong since the 60s.

There was an important avant-garde show in 1986/87 known as "Out of Context" that was organized by her and Christina Lok. Among the participating artists were Oscar Ho and Choi Yan-chi. These very important Hong Kong contemporary artists studied overseas, in the UK, the USA or France. Before that, the local art scene had been rather conventional or could be referred to as modernist. So Hong Kong art history does have a very interesting dynamic here.

BP/FK: Are people involved in the contemporary arts in Hong Kong?

VT: A colleague of mine – also an art historian – made a very precise observation about what contemporary art means to China and Hong Kong. She states that people working in the contemporary art field somehow felt that contemporary art could change society. Therefore they are ready to work with a wide range of cooperations such as commercial galleries or business corporations for they can launch a larger scale of project. In Hong Kong, of course we do believe that art can change the world. But we are witnessing that art being kidnapped by the government or business corporations. Art becomes decoration rather than something provocative. For example we have K11, an art shopping mall that organizes exhibitions. But art malls are selling a notion of living with art – life-styles, consumerism. Art entangles with entertainment and leisure. Of course going to an exhibition is a leisure activity, but it is rather an intellectual one. It invites people to be engaged intellectually and emotionally. If we are thinking about going to a shopping mall, looking at some art, and buying stuff, it seems that we rape the provocative element of art and make art spectacular – and nothing more. We are very concerned about how art is being used. It seems that art can be abused or manipulated by people and corporations.

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BP/FK: What is the reason for the Museum M+ in Hong Kong?

VT: After the return of Hong Kong to China, the state of Hong Kong is no longer international. The government

tries to re-boost the economy here. They are using tourism and building museums such as the M+ to rebuild a cosmopolitan city. So talking about collecting, it's not just Hong Kong art but also the art of Asia and the world. I'm concerned whether there's a focus, and how this associates with the local culture. Do these collections help us to understand something related to us? I think in a way, Hong Kong is lost. For a long time, we were not considering ourselves Chinese, because we were westernized but definitely not British. So who are we? We are not quite Asian even though we always had interactions with those countries; our education has shaped us as culturally different. I think that's more and more a cultural crisis to Hong Kong people. We are Chinese of course but we are also Hong Kong. We have a very distinctive identity. Before 1997, we were quite good at functioning in this ambiguity between China and the world. Now China is open to the world, and we lost our position. So now I think the Museum M+ is embodying, magnifying, or realizing this kind of embarrassment. You can see this from the collecting policy. It doesn't know what to collect.

BP/FK: For a European this is a very strange project – opening a museum without a building or a collection.

VT: The management of the Museum M+ always comforts us by saying that it is at a starting point. But I suppose considering the financial support of the M+, the museum doesn't have a big amount of money to buy relevant and important pieces. The museum is more likely to grab something when the opportunity arises. Concerning the Sigg collection, I'm not entirely sure if it actually addresses Hong Kong people. The collection has its focus in Chinese contemporary art in the 80s and 90s, with lots of gaps to be filled. It's a good start, I agree, but how does Hong Kong fit in this map? So far, I don't think they have given any sort of answer that satisfies us. How can we use our art as an agent for social change and to show differences? When collecting Chinese contemporary art works, people tend to think about artists from Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Wuhan. Hong Kong is a part of China but so different and therefore hard to fit in this map. Hong Kong artists are more skeptical towards ethical issues, corporate financing of art, and social aspects than Mainland Chinese.

BP/FK: Parallels between CCAA and M+: both projects deal on a global level. Does the notion of the global make it difficult to reach local culture? And what does this mean in HK?

VT: The museum M+ says that they want to associate with local culture and collaborate with local people, but I don't really think that they want to embrace this. The Chinese on their website and in their published materials is bad. They don't have a proper translation team to do the Chinese translation. Compared to the English translation the Chinese translation is less than readable. There are a lot of theoretical contexts that are not translated into Chinese or Hong Kong's context. For the museum M+ I doubt to what extent they really want to work with the locals. It's not about sacrificing the global but about positioning yourself. The museum M+ embodies the uneasy trap somewhere between the global and the local. You may see the same issue at the CCAA. They are international and work with certain groups of Chinese artists. Their English might not be excellent, but they do understand the theoretical terms of the global art discourse. So they talk in a certain way that is not fully comprehensible in a wider context. That makes Chinese contemporary art, especially the one associated with CCAA, very elitist. The Jury members are also highly professional but elitist. It makes it difficult for them to talk to the public.

BP/FK: The word contemporary means something very different here than in the western world. Here it seems to be a strategic label. The prize was called Contemporary Chinese Art Award in the first year; then it changed into Chinese Contemporary Art Award.

VT: The "Out of Context" exhibition in 1986/87 was very important because according to its participants, it was probably the first contemporary art exhibition in Hong Kong. Those artists who were educated overseas and then came back had different degrees of context with the contemporary art scene in the countries where they were educated. They brought new ideas of art making. Then there's another group of artists, we call them modernists. They did modernist art in the 60s, 70s and 80s, which is very outdated. But they somehow established a system and became well received by the museums and governments. Then we have the traditionalists who want to preserve Chinese culture. In the 90s, there were some so called contemporary artists like Li Kit. They studied at Chinese university and became a very close group. The modernist group considered themselves very contemporary but they were actually not. So they referred to themselves as Modernist. Modernism was an important topic in the 50s and 60s in Hong Kong. At that time Hong Kong became a modern society, which of course was very different from the modern ideas of Europe. In this perspective, contemporary means

modernistic. It's almost like interchangeable in this view. The traditionalists want to consider themselves as timeless. In the 80s and 90s they were well received by the museums and government. But now we have a changing paradigm. Some of the contemporary artists get recognition from museums and commercial galleries. It's still unknown whether the government welcomes it or not. When the museum M+ was proposed, there was a lot of debate and discussions from the government officials. A very high-ranking official refused to collect contemporary Hong Kong works, which he accused of being local rubbish. He proposed collecting European art, like Monet: a typical proposal for those politicians who know very little about art. Their idea about contemporary art or art in general relates to the modernist discourse. So there's still this tension between the traditionalists and up to date thinking people. I think the power of the word "contemporaneity" seems to be less immanent than in the 80s and 90s. The same thing happened in Mainland China. They have the system within which certain artists work for the government and produce art for the government. These so-called academic artists share the modernist training. It is institutionalized. If an artist has a high rank in the institution or receives some kind of national prize, then no matter how bad his works look they will sell excellently at the auction house. People buy them not for their looks, but for their names.

Then after the Cultural Revolution people started to go to school again. Because of the new economic reform, things from the West came. Even though students in the academy were trained in modernist styles, they started to get the idea of what contemporary art is. And they were pretty much amazed by the wide range of contemporary theories and cultural production. After the 90s, people started studying abroad. Contemporary art in China somehow means something anti-institutionalized, especially in the late 80s. 1989 was an extremely important milestone for the Chinese art scene. Then from 1989 to the 90s, "contemporary" meant a way to work against institutional constraints. Starting from 2000 till now, a lot of Chinese contemporary artists have been recognized overseas.

BP/FK: Why is the government in Mainland China investing in contemporary art?

VT: I think they are trying to dominate the discourse of art. Government wants to show that they know what contemporary art is. It's all about cultural capital.

BP/FK: How do you consider the art market?

VT: It seems that the contemporary art market is doing well in Hong Kong or outside China. As far as

I know, not many Chinese collect contemporary Chinese art pieces. Of course there are some but they are not big business. People would rather invest in something traditional or antiques. It's a lot safer. People think conservatively about investing in contemporary Chinese work.

BP/FK: Are you free from censorship?

VT: If I publish things in English, I'm definitely free. If I want to publish something in Chinese then I work with a Hong Kong publisher. If I really want to publish something in Mainland China, then I need to explore the implications.

INTERVIEW WITH ALVIN YIP

Hong Kong
24.10.2014, 1h 51'

**Director, Jockey Club Design Institute for
Social Innovation, The Hong Kong Polytechnic
University**

**Franz Kraehenbuehl: What do you
think of M+?**

84 Alvin Yip: I would say that the M+ is doing half of its job. I'm sure that Michael (Lynch) and Lars (Nittve) will make it a museum of international standard. But I hope the job is not simply importing art works and take it as a tourism project. We started this conversation talking about Chinese contemporary art. Then where is the role, history and knowledge of Hong Kong in this? M+ did have a big sum of money at the beginning and they were all public money and public resources. I feel that M+ cannot avoid its mission on Hong Kong culture. Also, even though Lars mentioned that education is so important in this project, I don't really see it now in M+. If you go onto the street and ask people about M+, ninety-nine percent of the people may have no idea what M+ is. If you go to the art circle and ask artists about it, I guess probably seventy to eighty percent of them may have heard about it but they have no clue of what's going on in there. I have to say that: first of all it's the problem of the board itself; secondly, the local politicians – I know at the beginning Michael and Lars have tried to open it more, but there were quite a few immature criticisms there, and I think they already gave up. We need someone who is passionate and missionary in the culture of Hong Kong, he or she may have more patience to reach out a little bit further and deeper.

**FK: Lars Nittve mentioned that
they wanted to make this museum
local, regional, and international.**

AY: I think that's good. Of course this museum is not only for Hong Kong people, and it should be international in some ways. But that's only half the job. I think the M+ is only working on its collection. As a museum, it is far behind in research, education, and conservation in relation to Hong Kong. Do you think you can just put up a building and put nice things in it and call it a museum? From my understanding, a museum goes beyond that. It's important for the M+ to address some cultural inquiry that most of the Hong Kong people are concerned about. I was involved at the early stage of this project and I remember that

we had many proposals including an academy and library. But then all these ideas disappeared without any explanation. I know for Michael and Lars there's too much hassle dealing with Hong Kong politics. Right now, they don't want to work more than they were given.

FK: For whom is this museum?

AY: I think this is a very interesting question that they should answer. Maybe it's becoming another spot for tourists to spend some time, like Disneyland or Ocean Park. If that's the case then I think it's a wrong investment.

**FK: Then it could bring in some
money.**

AY: Well, first of all Hong Kong does not lack money. Hong Kong lacks some kind of consolidating efforts in culture. And we need knowledge, particularly knowledge to understand ourselves. We need intelligent and experienced people to help us to understand more.

**FK: My feeling is that everything
seems to move forward so fast
here and in Beijing. People are
forgetting the past instantly. Is it
then necessary to know the past?
What else could be done?**

AY: If West Kowloon could set up its own academy that would be so exciting. We had so much hope about it and in fact, many of us have contributed to it a lot. Hong Kong is a special region and I call West Kowloon a double special region. West Kowloon has been a golden opportunity, telling people how a city could be "designed". Essentially, it's almost like a small city governed by its own authority, quite independent, with a lot of money, and with beautiful landscape. That gave it an even bigger chance. So if they could establish an academy or university, that would definitely shake up the art / architecture / design education in Hong Kong.

FK: The Museum is a government project.

AY: Yes. It is given great autonomy. There are only two places in Hong Kong with such authority: one is the airport, and they have done a great job with the airport. The second is West Kowloon – and it should become the new city centre.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID TUNG

Beijing
17.10.2014, 29'

Director Long March Space, Beijing

Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
How would you describe the
current situation of the contempo-
rary art scene in China?

David Tung: When the CCAA started in 1998 not many galleries existed in China. But this has changed very rapidly recently. Artists are now represented by galleries. There's a much bigger variety of platforms for them to show. Also there is more institutional support and private collectors are opening their own museums. So I feel that it's now moving into this contemporary mainstream value and it's getting much more variety. This is the very quick analysis of the past sixteen years.

BP/FK: What does it mean for an
artist today to win a prize?

86 DT: There still remains much work to be done in establishing art institutions in China. Basically the official institutions, for example the National Museum doesn't have large collections of contemporary art. So for the artists, either the market becomes a value judgment or entering collections outside of China becomes a way for them to prove artistic merit. Within China, there is still much debate and development in how art institutions should operate. There is no standard or valid model, they are all in progress. Because the CCAA was established by a collector, at the beginning, it had to respond to questions about its objectivity. Is the award public, or does it serve the interest of a collector? With several years of existence, I think it is validated by history. CCAA has done a lot in bringing in different jury members or creating a transparent basis for the presentation. I think that's what they should continue being debated and developed.

BP/FK: How do your collectors
inform themselves about art?

DT: This is actually something that's happening very quickly. We are moving into a very different age, social media has become a vital platform. People are looking at their phones all the time because that's where a lot of the information comes from. Then there is the accessibility of the exhibitions. Art fairs like Hong Kong Art Basel have been instrumental, opening up more opportunities and allowing mainland

collectors to engage directly with works from outside of China and really giving confidence to lots of international galleries to look further at Chinese market.

BP/FK: But who sets the standards
for good art in China?

DT: Everybody is looking for this kind of standard. Currently in China, there are few institutions with permanent collection of contemporary art. Collections like M+ are still developing and changing, and they have their own strategies. Many people are interested collecting, but their question is, who decides the price. This is not only for investment purposes, but due diligence to understand they are paying fair value. For many people inside the art-world it feels very concrete. You see the galleries, the artists, and when some artists are established you notice the auction record rising. So you can take a fairly good guess. For people outside the art scene this can be very difficult. Online information is available across borders (relatively speaking) China is probably at the same level or beyond Western countries. A lot of interaction is driven by online platforms leading to a different mentality about how people understand values and artworks.

BP/FK: Where do your collectors
come from geographically? Are
they equally from China, Asia, or
the West?

DT: It started mainly in the West, probably 90%. That was around 2005. That has shifted quite dramatically in recent years. And every year it's different. In terms of the number of people, it's probably more international. But in terms of the overall volume, it's definitely China, because it's culturally, geographically and financially easier for them than the international collectors to purchase a larger amount of works. But we are always trying to keep the balance between them. For a healthy market and promotion of artist, you need to be focused but also diverse. You see that happening after 2008/2009; for a lot of galleries it was very difficult period because the market outside China was very poor, but of course in China there was a very strong market, so they were able to balance out.

There are still more Western collectors collecting from China than Chinese collectors that collect from outside. Basel makes strong efforts to bring in collectors from China. They always had a representative in Asia, or in China for more than ten years now. Frieze has one for first time this year. It's also good for the galleries outside of China because it brings in a new collector base.

BP/FK: What kind of fairs do you do?

DT: We do Basel Hong Kong and Miami Beach, then Frieze New York, then ART021 Shanghai.

BP/FK: Why didn't you open branches in Hong Kong and Shanghai?

DT: Beijing is the political economic cultural center of China and artists are mainly in Beijing, so there's a very large art scene. To open in Hong Kong makes a lot of sense because business and transaction are so easy. Shanghai also makes a lot of sense because it's a good place to do transactions within China, but you still need to consider the issue of content. Long March Space is primarily an artist driven program. We represent 17 artists. If we open multiple spaces then it's going to be hard to fill the programming with quality exhibitions.

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BP/FK: How is it to be at 798 today?

DT: It's good. Obviously there're problems, like many little fashion store and restaurants are driving the energy from the area. But it is still where the art scene of Beijing is happening at the moment.

BP/FK: Is making big artworks a Chinese thing?

DT: There are many galleries in Beijing with large spaces, when the focus is on exhibitions, this tends to lead to larger scale works. This is not always the case throughout China. For example, in Shanghai you will see different forms and shapes of works. And if you go to Guangzhou or Hong Kong, you will also get a very different picture.

INTERVIEW WITH JINGPENG MU

Beijing
17.10.2014, 1h 05'

Director Yang Gallery, Beijing

**Barbara Preisig/Franz Kraehenbuehl:
Please tell us a bit about your
gallery history and philosophy.**

Jingpeng Mu: Our gallery is quite young and the artists we represent are also young. Our gallery has been established for four years and we focus on young Chinese artists who were born after 1980. We present all kinds of artworks including painting, installation, video, and performance. We also welcome photography, however, we have not found any photographs that interest us much to work with so far. We have attended Hong Kong Art Basel twice.

**BP/FK: What do you mean by
typical Chinese?**

88 JM: As you can see, this (indicating an artist) is a very typical Chinese artist. He used some ideas that are quite global but the material he used is Chinese. By saying typical Chinese, I especially mean the cultural aspect in the works. We especially encourage artists who may or may not have adopted the Western way or system, but at the same time are independent from it and have their own thoughts in Chinese culture.

**BP/FK: Is Beijing a good city to
have a gallery today?**

JM: I think Hong Kong is more commercial. Hong Kong has many good collectors but it's not a good place for art to happen. Shanghai feels a bit rushed these days. In a half year, there were six art-fairs happening there. That's crazy. But this could be a good thing as well, because it brings up problems and questions for us and we can figure out ways to improve our thinking. Beijing had a rush in 2006 or 2007 but now it's slowing down. It gives collectors and artists a buffering period to consider what they should really put their attention on. And that is good.

**BP/FK: Many young galleries at
Art Basel Hong Kong are from
Shanghai.**

JM: Yes. Many famous galleries and young galleries are based there. But I think the Chinese economy has been developing too fast. Some Westerners say that now Chinese people only care about money. I think it's all right. You know, if a European doesn't

have any money, you can still survive with government help. Here in China, we do not have things like that, so a poor person has to find a way of getting money to not die.

**BP/FK: How do you feel about the
huge Western galleries opening
their branches in Beijing?**

JM: It's good. It brings professional standards to China and we learn how to manage our galleries from them. You can't really stop the way the economy is run, but you can always find a way in it to support your artists and support the values you believe in.

**BP/FK: Is largeness a typical
attribute to Chinese art?**

JM: In Chinese history, Chinese people always want and try to build the biggest thing to show how strong we are. That is rooted in our blood. From the market's perspective, we also need large things to earn more money. From the artists' perspective, they make their own choices.

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CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART / INTRODUCTORY LITERATURE

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The Mahjong Exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bern in 2005 was the first comprehensive presentation of Uli Sigg's collection of contemporary Chinese art. The 360-page exhibition catalogue offers a detailed overview of The Sigg Collection, ranging from 1970s socialist icons, which followed strictly indoctrinated schemes, to contemporary works. The richly illustrated catalogue is arranged first along chronological and then thematic lines. Contributions from various artists and curators like Ai Weiwei, Hou Hanru, Li Xianting, and Pi Li provide a good survey of Chinese art and its history, as well as its reception at home and in Western society. Feng Boyi's extensive and detailed chronology brings together the outcomes of contemporary Chinese art in the period 1979–2004. The catalogue serves as a good introduction to the history of contemporary Chinese art until 2005. Even though the catalogue has been prepared from the perspective of The Sigg Collection, it is nevertheless highly relevant to understanding the field.

Following its success in Bern (2005), the Mahjong Exhibition was shown under the same title but in a different form at various other museums: Hamburger Kunsthalle (2006), Salzburg Museum of Modern Art (2007), Berkeley Art Museum, University of California (2008), and Peabody Essex Museum, Boston (2008).

Boers, Waling/Li, Pi/Tinari, Philip: *Touching the Stones. China Art Now*, ed. Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft, Köln: Walther König, 2007. English, 288 pages.

The Dutch gallery owner Waling Boers, who opened the BoersLi-Gallery with curator Pi Li in Beijing, has compiled a richly illustrated volume including the most important names in contemporary Chinese art. Illustrations are accompanied by short essays on Chinese art, its boom, and its market by Chinese and Western artists and curators. The book also contains interviews on current and more historical positions such as the Big Tail Elephant Group.

Xu Tan: *Dictionary of Keywords, Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou: Vitamin Creative Space, 2008. English/Mandarin, 290 pages.*

Drawing on interviews with various Chinese artists like Feng Mengbo, Hu Wei, Xie Nanxing, and Ai Weiwei, Xu Tan extrapolates and categorizes the keywords of Chinese art based on how frequently these terms occur in interviews, how relevant they are to contemporary art discourse, and how highly charged they are in daily life in China. Sample sentences are also taken from the interviews. Changes in the shape of the pharynx when pronouncing these keywords are illustrated schematically as well as their frequency in Western (Google) and Chinese (Baidu) search engines. The witty language guide, although its everyday use is limited, reveals the complexity and the formative influences of culture on language.

Hopfener, Birgit/Koch, Franziska/Lee-Kalisch, Jeonghee/Noth, Juliane: *Negotiating Difference: Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context*, Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften 2012.

This collection of essays considers contemporary Chinese art within a global context. Adopting a stringent methodological focus, contributions discuss how artistic processes within and beyond China since the Cultural Revolution can be described, contextualized, and theorized. Contributions explore the transcultural entanglements of "internationally" oriented and self-declared contemporary Chinese art and experiment with multidimensional and interdisciplinary approaches to do justice to the existing complexity of this field.

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Boyi, Feng: *China Now: Fascination of a Changing World*, Essel: Sammlung Kunst der Gegenwart (ed.) 2006.

Breitenstein, Andreas: "China ist keine Kopie unserer Welt", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 139, 19.06.2010, p. 69.

Chienhui, Kao/Peng, Lu/Zhu, Zhu: *Reshaping History: Chinart from 2000 to 2009 – A Spectacle of the Ordinary*, Sichuan Meishu Chubanshe, Sichuan Meishu Chubanshe (ed.) 2010.

Debevoise, Jane: *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, ed. Shen, Kuiyi/Flores, Patrick D., Brill 2014.

Decrop, Jean Marc/Erickson, Britta/Li, Zhang/Smith, Karen: *China: Contemporary Art*, Fundacao Armando Alvares Penteado – FAAP, Fundacao Armando Alvares Penteado – FAAP (ed.) 2002.

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Jiehong, Jiang Joshua: *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, ed. Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong University Press 2007.

Lemonnier, Anne: *Alors, la Chine?*, ed. Centre Pompidou, Centre Pompidou 2003.

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Backroom Conversations: Reinvesting in Contemporary Chinese Art, 2009.

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Piëch, Xenia: "In der chinesischen Kapitale schiessen Galerien wie Pilze aus dem Boden", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 95, 24.04.2008, p. 62.

CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ART AWARD (CCAA)

CCAA (ed.): *CCAA15. 15 Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) (Exhibition catalogue for works shown at the 5/F Power Station of Art Shanghai, 25 April – 20 July 2014)*, Shanghai 2014. English/Mandarin.

This book appeared on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the CCAA. It is the first-ever history of the award and serves as a useful work of reference. The texts by Uli Sigg and Anna Li Liu offer insights into the idea and history of the CCAA, which was first awarded in 1998. The volume contains the names of all CCAA jury members and directors and includes photographic portraits and brief statements. Also included are the works of all laureates accompanied by illustrations and short texts. There is a helpful tabular list of everyone involved in the award by year. The publication forms a solid basis for exploring the CCAA.

Li, Pi: *Twelve. 2006 Chinese Contemporary Art Award (Catalogue of the exhibition of the same name at Shanghai Zenda Museum of Modern Art 2006)*, Shanghai: CCAA, 2006. English/Mandarin, 94 pages.

The works of CCAA laureates and artists receiving honorable mentions were first shown at the 2006 award ceremony. The accompanying catalogue contains the award-winners, statements of jury members, the names of the entire jury, and the nominees.

Chinese Artists, Texts and Interviews. Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) 1998–2002, Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2002. English/Mandarin, 180 pages.

The publication includes CCAA laureates from the period 1998–2002. Illustrations are accompanied by artist interviews.

Moore, Christopher: "15 Years of CCAA: Interview with Uli Sigg", in: *Radian*, 26.04.2014, <http://ocula.com/magazine/art-news/2014/04/15-years-of-ccaa-an-interview-with-uli-sigg/article/> Zugriff: Jan. 2015.

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the CCAA, journalist Christopher Moore conducted an in-depth interview with Uli Sigg on the award, his collection, and the works he has given to the M+ Museum. The opening question, "What makes contemporary art and what makes contemporary art Chinese?" guides the discussion toward the relationship between the global art system and local and national conditions. Sigg recounts the strategic considerations behind establishing the award and talks about the involvement of Harald Szeemann and later Alanna Heiss, Chris Dercon, and Ruth Noack, who all contributed to making Chinese art known in the West. He also discusses the composition of the jury. The interview provides insight into Sigg's strategic approach, whose principal objective is to establish a knowledge of Chinese art in the West.

Yao, Pauline: *In Production Mode. Contemporary Art in China*, Hong Kong: timezone 8, 2008. English/Mandarin, 160 pages.

Curator and critic Pauline Yao received the CCAA Critic Award in 2007. The award enabled her to research and write about art production, art practice, and serial production. Based on current examples of contemporary Chinese art, Yao divides changing art practices into four main topics (and book chapters): Process over Product; Authority, Authorship and Appropriation; Medium and Material; Scale; Site and Spectacle. Due to its independent perspective, this volume also met with great interest outside China at the time.

Chinese Contemporary Art Award 2008 (Catalogue of the exhibition of the same name at The Creative Center of Bund18, Shanghai, 2008; Ullens Center of Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2008), Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008. English/Mandarin, 116 pages.

Published on the occasion of the 2008 CCAA Award, this volume appeared together with a book about the Best Critic Award 2007. Illustrations of the works of the three laureates Liu Wei, Tseng Yu-Chin, and Ai Weiwei are accompanied by short articles written by jury members Ken Lum, Ruth Noack, and Chris Dercon.

Chinese Artists. Texts and Interviews. Chinese Contemporary Art Awards 2004, Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2005. English/Mandarin, 184 pages.

The judging of the 2004 CCAA Award took place at Castle Mauensee (near Lucerne). The volume includes brief contributions by jury members Harald Szeemann, Alanna Heiss, Hou Hanru, CCAA founder Uli Sigg, and award director Gu Zhenqing. Interviews with laureates contextualize the many illustrations.

Weblinks:

CAFA Art Info: <http://en.cafa.com.cn/chinese-contemporary-art-award-announces-its-15th-anniversary-exhibition-opening-april-26.html>.

Chen, Patricia: *Uli Sigg in Conversation with Patricia Chen. Collecting Chinese Contemporary Art*, Sekel Media Asia (ed.), Hong Kong, 2014. English.

Petricia Chen discusses Uli Sigg's passion as a collector. The interview considers his particular view of China, his understanding of critical contemporary art, as well as questions surrounding the Chinese language, the art market, and the consumption of art. The short and succinct questions and answers provide a quick and easily accessible introduction to Uli Sigg as a collector and person.

Idle, Helen et. al.: *Right is wrong. Four Decades of Chinese Art from the M+ Sigg Collection* (Catalogue of the exhibition of the same name at the Bildmuseet, Umea, Sweden), Umea: Bildmuseet, 2014. English, 160 pages.

Surveying four decades of The Sigg Collection, this exhibition was hosted in association with the M+ Museum and the Bildmuseet in Umea, Sweden. Compared to the Mahjong catalogue (see above), this volume contains a further decade of the history of collecting Chinese art. Partly containing the same works and authors as the Mahjong catalogue makes this recent publication seem like a summary, especially because it is about half as comprehensive as its predecessor. Works are listed only chronologically by decade.

Strittmatter, Kai: "Hüter des Schatzes. Wie wurde China zu dem, was es heute ist? Die Kunst, die Uli Sigg sammelt, liefert die Antwort. Porträt eines hungrigen Mäzens", in: *Das Magazin*, no. 23, 2004. <http://blog.dasmagazin.ch/2014/06/06/hueter-des-schatzes/> last accessed: Jan. 2015, German.

Published in a weekend edition of the Tages Anzeiger, this article portrays Uli Sigg and explores his reasons for returning his collection to China and for choosing the M+ Museum to house the collection.

Big Draft – Shanghai. Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg (Catalogue of the exhibition of the same name, Kunstmuseum Bern, 2011), Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 2010. German/English, 110 pages.

The World Fair was held in Shanghai in 2010. The event moved the city into the international spotlight, similar to Beijing during the Olympic Games. Art historian Biljana Ciric describes how Shanghai, located south of the Chinese capital, has always had its own cultural influences and how the local art scene developed there. Whereas political art barely established itself in Shanghai, experimental and performative art became much more important. The author describes how key institutions and strategic alliances with curators were crucial to developing a local scene. The exhibition included works from The Sigg Collection and cast light on the specific perspective of Shanghai.

Further reading:

Herzog, Samuel: "Coca-Cola aus der Han-Dynastie. "Mahjong" – eine grosse Ausstellung chinesischer Gegenwartskunst in Bern", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 138, 16.06.2005, p. 43.

Herzog, Samuel: "Es war ein einmaliges Abenteuer", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 135, 13.06.2012, p. 53.

Mack, Gerhard: "Die Pranke des Drachen. Rita und Uli Sigg haben die grösste Sammlung chinesischer Gegenwartskunst zusammengetragen. Das Kunstmuseum Bern gibt erstmals einen Überblick", *NZZ am Sonntag*, no. 27, 03.07.2005, p. 54.

M+ More than a Museum, West Kowloon Cultural District (ed.), 2014. English/Mandarin 40 pages.

This thin unpublished hardcover volume very briefly describes which vision and mission the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority hopes the M+ Museum project to satisfy. The museum's profile and target audience are summarized in terms of four key categories (local, national, suprarregional, international). The architectural renderings of the as-yet-unbuilt museum offer a sense of its dimensions.

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Bartsch, Bernhard: "Neue Gründerzeit", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 14, 07.04.2013, p. 81.

Fibicher, Bernhard: "Rückerstattung von Weltkulturerbe", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 135, 13.06.2012, p. 52.

Herzog, Samuel: "Sammlung Sigg geht nach Hongkong", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 13.06.2012, p. 1.

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Zhang, Wei: "Blumen diesseits und jenseits der Mauer", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 211, 11.09.2012, p. 46.

"THE GLOBAL" AND "THE CONTEMPORARY"

Questionnaire on "The Contemporary", October, Issue 130, Fall 2009, pp. 3–124. shifter-magazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Questionnaire-on-the-Contemporary.pdf.

Field Notes. The And. An Expanded Questionnaire on the Contemporary. Issue 1, Asia Art Archive, 2012. http://www.aaa.org.hk/FieldNotes/Issue?Issue_num=1 English or Mandarin, 136 pages.

This comprehensive collection of essays, published in the online journal of the Asia Art Archive, is aligned with the "Questionnaire on the Contemporary" (October). 70 critics, artists, and curators were asked about their notion of the "contemporary" from a non-Western perspective. A previous October survey of the precarious and ambivalent notion of the "contemporary" among American and European art world actors revealed the strong Western influences on this concept. The AAA collection of discursive texts hence provides a valuable contribution to this (ongoing) debate and highlights just how strongly the notion of the contemporary varies with cultural and geographical aspects.

Juneija, Monica/Koch, Franziska (ed.): *Multi-Centred Modernisms. Reconfiguring Asian Art of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Theme Issue, Transcultural Studies, 2010–11.

Belting, Hans/Birken, Jakob/Buddensieg, Andrea (ed.), *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2011.

Juneja, Monica/Bruhn, Matthias / Werner, Elke (ed.): *Die Universalität der Kunstgeschichte*, Theme Issue Kritische Berichte. Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften, Heft 2, 2012 (forthcoming).

Each of these three publications seeks to rekindle the debate on artistic and visual practices rooted in manifold geographical contexts. In addition to exemplary cases featuring selected artists and scenes, the volumes pursue different approaches to regional artistic practices, exhibitions, and "contemporary" ideologies. Contributions thus respond to the increasingly global processes involved in the production, transmission, marketing, and distribution of art from the perspective of art history.

Further links:

Art Basel: www.artbasel.com.

Asia Art Archive: <http://www.aaa.org.hk/>.

Asia Art Archives (ed.): Field Notes 03. Mapping Asia, Asia Art Archives.

Peking, Boers-Li-Gallery
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94 **M+ Acquisition Policy**
(<http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/mplus/collection-strategy>).

APPENDIX

COLLECTED TEXTS

BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS

ULI SIGG: WHY M+

For many years I have been consistently doing three things:

- 1) Assembling a collection - I call it a document - which will allow the viewer to understand and appreciate Chinese contemporary art from its beginnings in 1979 to today, in order to bring this document back to China where such a document simply does not exist.
- 2) Presenting parts of this document at many exhibitions outside China, to assist Chinese contemporary artists in gaining the international recognition they deserve.
- 3) Contributing to the building of the Chinese art operating system (the art operating system being this living, ever changing organism consisting of the artist, the critic, the art media, the curator, the collector, the gallery, the auction house, the museum, the public and the private institution, the maker of cultural policies and so on). Each country develops an art-ecosystem according to its own distinct needs. Here is the role of the CCAA Chinese Contemporary Art Award which I founded in 1997: It can serve as a platform for initiatives such as Artist Award, Art Critic Award, promotion of patronage and others. Its main thrust is to foster independent discussions of art - independent of ideological and market constraints.

WHY M+?

By joining forces with M+, the art works will ultimately come full circle back to China as I have always hoped they would. This comes predominantly in the form of a donation. It reflects my intention to return something to China for what it has allowed me to experience over the last 33 years: an incredible journey, whose most intense core has been formed by so many encounters with Chinese artists. This is my contribution: to enable these artists to have a space within M+ where they will communicate with an international audience, but where they will ultimately meet with a Chinese public that so far has only a fragmentary insight in its own art. Having explored various opportunities, I am convinced that there is no better platform for my collection and for Chinese contemporary art than that which M+ can provide. One and a half years of ever more intense interaction with several exponents of WKCD, and with M+ Director Lars Nittve in particular, have convinced me not only of their aspiration to build a world class institution, but also of their professionalism and ability to actually get there. My wife Rita, who has passionately supported my collecting all along, and I are both happy that my collection is a core component in this endeavor. Equally happy are a large number of great artists who have contributed to the collection. It is also they – to preempt the obvious and inevitable question of why not Beijing, why not Shanghai? - who have encouraged me to take this step towards Hong Kong: for although a believer in supporting public institutions rather than building private museums, I came to realize, in the exchanges with Mainland public institutions,

that they are not yet ready or willing to accept a donation such as the art represented in my collection. Still, I insisted in the contract that M+ would be open and forthcoming in cooperating with Mainland institutions when the latter desired to work with pieces from my collection, and M+ gladly accepted.

I am also very happy that M+ will join in broadening the CCAA Chinese Contemporary Art Award platform. I established it and by now have created a brand with credibility. This credibility stems very much from its high profile jury members who give it its academic value, from its publications and from its independence of the market and of other constraints usually dictated by award initiatives in China. To broaden the platform means to broaden its activities beyond awards. From very early on I have expressed my desire to share this platform with others and to ultimately make it a Chinese-owned initiative. The deliberate and unexcited debate about what is meaningful art and what is not should be shaped from within China. I am very happy that M+ will now add its clout and a Hong Kong perspective to this undertaking.

A Foreword to Viewing the M+ Sigg Collection: Why I collected what I collected

By Uli Sigg

What the M+ Sigg Collection consists of

The M+ Sigg Collection consists of 1510 works. Its earliest part dates from the Cultural Revolution Period (1966-1976). Then follow a couple of works from the No Name Group (mid 1970s), considered by some to be precursors of Chinese contemporary art which is seen to commence in 1979 and which is covered extensively in the collection until early 2012. The works range across all media including painting, sculpture, photography, performance documentation, video, installation and multimedia. The M+ Sigg Collection is an extraction from the Sigg Collection. The selection process aimed to allow the viewer to read a coherent storyline from the inception of Chinese contemporary art, including some of its roots, to the current decade.

A brief collection history

I arrived in China in 1979 and followed from then on the beginnings and subsequent development of Chinese contemporary art as best I could. Yet I did not collect any work then, for I was looking for the forefront of contemporary art as I had studied it in the West, and for long I could not find art of this kind. When again analysing the state of contemporary art in the 1990s I discovered that no one - individual or institution - had been collecting Chinese contemporary art in any but a purely random manner. Consequently, I changed my focus from that of a private collector searching for works according to his personal taste to one an institution might have: attempting to mirror the art production of the experimental artists living in the PRC, along the time line and across all media. I was interested in the works created in this unpredictable milieu and in the atmosphere of a nation in total transformation. Therefore works from the Diaspora artists living outside the PRC are rather sporadic and for cross-reference. The M+ Sigg Collection assembles works from 320 artists and thus provides a broad spectrum. This is the main aim: to inform the impressive breadth and depth of Chinese experimental art rather than single works or single artists. It is intended as an encyclopedic documentation referencing Chinese experimental art production in this specific period and to form in its current state a solid base for further collecting. The M+ Sigg Collection invites a critical reflection on the short history of contemporary art in China and cultivates lucid insights into Chinese society in a historical period that in retrospect will be considered very important.

Some thoughts on collecting

The M+ Sigg Collection has not been assembled in the simple pursuit of lining up masterpieces; in contemporary art attributions as such come and go. The type of institutional collecting seeks to bring together works with the vision of webbing a full context of a subject matter and through their combination to create additional meaning by enabling works themselves to charge each other up. Just as much as identifying the so-called masterpieces, this is about finding the pieces that may go unattended or are ascribed to artists considered second tier, a categorisation that is itself subject to change over time, in order to fill the perception gaps, narrate the underlying subtexts and open up

further space for the imagination of the viewer. This purpose may even suggest inclusion of a work by an artist with lesser potential, provided that this single work can document a specific phenomenon particularly well.

Every collection is a process materialized; it is a distillate of the collector's vision, imagination, intuition and passion, of research efforts, of the opportunities seized, of the resources made available, of hard work, and of the lack thereof. No collection can ever be complete, and this one is no exception. Artists are missing who deserve representation. Indeed collecting has its constraints: Financial means are finite, appropriate works may not be available at a given moment etc. No Chinese institution, for whatever reason, has ever publicly documented its contemporary art collection. The M+ Sigg Collection seems to be the first one made transparent. Today the M+ Sigg Collection is the most comprehensive known record of Chinese contemporary art. Yet it is work in progress, to be continued by M+, now in a new framework.

The impact of cultural identity

In any collecting activity subjective criteria take part in the selection process, consciously or subconsciously. This is particularly complex when collecting art created in a fundamentally different culture than one's own, which in my case happens to be European. One has to acknowledge, identify and overcome the blind spot that inevitably exists in such an endeavor. I am very fortunate to have had the most intense interactions with Chinese individuals, culture and society through my diverse activities in China over 33 years. Each activity allowed me a different access to the country: one as a business person establishing the first joint-venture company between China and the outside world in its current modernization process - this brought me into close contact with workers on the factory floor and up to the highest cadres on ministerial level and had me travel throughout the country at a time when this was a privilege reserved for very few Chinese people; a second access as a diplomat who had everything to deal with, from development cooperation projects in poverty-struck regions, political analysis, human rights dialogues to economic negotiations on all hierarchical levels; yet another access as a researcher and collector of Chinese contemporary art through intense discussions with and learning from artists and cultural workers in China, and by establishing and conducting the CCAA Chinese Contemporary Art Award and Art Critic Award. All these activities have provided rich Chinese context. While the public may see me as a collector I perceive myself rather a researcher of my ultimate study object which is China. And for art, I just happened to be in a financial position to acquire some of the fruits of my research. Since the early 1990 I also had much support in my collecting from my wife Rita, be it through her superb communication skills with artists, be it through not objecting to even the most extravagant acquisitions.

Another impact on my collecting comes from my longstanding engagement with Western contemporary art. It had me refrain from collecting Chinese contemporary art at a time when the works had characteristics clearly derivative of Western concepts. With hindsight, this may be somewhat regrettable for an encyclopedic collection. But given my earlier focus on the forefront of global contemporary art, well into the 1980s I did not see Chinese art creation as yet contributing to this particular global art discourse. These works were of high importance to Chinese art history but not beyond. Therefore when I later added such works to the collection, I restricted myself to a few examples that I consider sufficient to illustrate the various trends. This has also been my attitude towards early works of artists who later came to much acclaim. And it has remained an issue in every

acquisition: Whether an artist, a concept, a single artwork is in synch with or could ideally contribute to the global art discourse, or if it rather is of relevance for Chinese art history only.

The canon of Chinese contemporary art and artists has not yet been written. A broader perspective inclusive of the global discourse on contemporary art will add to this endeavor which is in process now. Fusing these aspects and others in my collecting may have led to different weightings as compared to a purely Sino-centric perspective. So be it. Through my participation in TATE and MOMA councils - and specifically through working closely with many prominent curators from East and West, I have learned that we act as individuals rather than agents of Eastern or Western cultures, and that the one thing we may have in common is vastly differing views on art.

Uli Sigg

2014.04.26 Sat, by Christopher Moore Translated by: 路弯弯

15 Years of CCAA: Interview with Uli Sigg

[>> print](#)

Uli Sigg describes himself as a mere researcher, belying the transformational scope of his contribution to art and China. For two decades Uli and Rita Sigg have collected "Chinese contemporary art", forming the largest and most important collection of its kind. In July 2012, the Siggs gave 1,463 works to Hong Kong's nascent **M+ Museum of Visual Culture**, including many uniquely important historical works, a donation among the most important to any museum in recent decades. To coincide with the opening this week in Shanghai of the **15th anniversary exhibition of the "Chinese Contemporary Art Awards"** (CCAA) at the Power Station of Art, Randian's Chris Moore spoke at length with Uli Sigg about the history and philosophy behind CCAA, still the most respected art award in China.



[See all photos \(10\)](#)



Uli Sigg 乌利·希克

Uli Sigg: I always wanted to resolve this [the difficulty of presenting Chinese art to the world] as a person myself, but this proved much more difficult than I thought. This brings us to CCAA. I set it up there but I always felt it should be the Chinese people deciding what meaningful art is—and therefore to put [CCAA] in their hands—but that proved quite difficult. Some think it should be even more associated with my name, and that it would be beneficial to the award, while I thought I should be totally dissociated from it. So now we are somewhere in between. As a procedure, CCAA has been totally disconnected from me—not totally, in that I'm a member of the jury, but I am one of many. For a long time, there is this myth I am the person deciding, but of course I am not.

Chris Moore: What makes contemporary art and what makes contemporary art Chinese?

Uli Sigg: Well, what makes contemporary art is art that speaks to our time and the language is from our time, if not the content. If I searched for one element: representing our time. I mean, we could go on for hours as to what makes it contemporary, but basically either the content or the language is about our time.

When I set up the award, I had several debates. I was preparing the award with Karen Smith, and we discussed whether it should be called the “Chinese Contemporary Art Award”—which is its name now—or “Contemporary Chinese Art Award”. This brings us to your question: is there a “Chinese” contemporary art? Is it Chinese in its essence or just art made by Chinese people? Or is it made in China? Or is it made in the Chinese cultural space? That is the

definition I like, myself. So, Chinese contemporary art is art that is made *in* the Chinese cultural space—you may say, greater China.

CM: That's extremely wide.

US: Yes, it is very wide.

CM: For instance, that could include someone like David Diao, who has actually spent the vast majority of his life as a Chinese migrant in America.

US: There are some, shall we say, impositions inherently in this, like whether this applies to the whole diaspora. But if it has to come out of someone very close to the Chinese cultural space and *accepts to be* part of that space, then probably the answer is yes. I had such discussions with people like Gu Wenda. We talked about the fact that a large number of people think that many in this generation of Chinese artists in the diaspora were playing the Chinese card as a very successful strategy in the West. And his response was, "What do you expect me to do? I grew up in China. I spent 28 important years of my life there. I got all my education and my whole background there—do you expect me to throw this away when I move to the States? Even if I wanted to, I probably couldn't." On the other hand, I'm not necessarily interested in art produced simply by someone with a "yellow" face. That doesn't make it Chinese yet! Because some artists, unlike Gu Wenda, left China with a very clear purpose, to abandon their Chinese identity and not have any relationship or be associated at all with China. Maybe that person leaves [the] Chinese cultural space. This probably illustrates what I mean by Chinese contemporary art.



2002 Best Artist Award, Yan Lei, "Limited Art Project", installation, dimensions variable, 2012

2002年最佳艺术家, 颜磊, 《有限艺术项目》, 装置, 尺寸可变, 2012



2006 Lifetime Contribution Award, Huang Yongping, "Nightmare of King George V", mixed materials, 244 x 356 x 168 cm, 2002

2006年杰出成就奖, 黄永砅, 《乔治五世的恶梦》, 综合涂料, 244 x 356 x 168 cm, 2002

US: There is this very popular notion of having this global world and national identity not playing a role anymore. I don't believe in that. For me there still *is* Chinese art. There is also Swiss art or American art, even though we may look at it as simply contemporary. I understand those Chinese artists who intend to be just one good artist among good artists, and to get away from being perceived as Chinese—there are reasons for it—but in the end you have your cultural roots, your upbringing, and it will always shape your art, and it probably would be wrong to deny that in your impulse for artistic creation. I always think of, say, Richard Prince, who many people think of as a "global" artist—but he could only become "Richard Prince" in the US (I'm thinking of his cowboy and his pop nurses, joke paintings etc). So if you look at his oeuvre, it has a very strong national identity, even though we would call him a "global" artist—what we broadly consider as Western—he still shows strong traits of a national identity. That is highly desirable, from my perspective.

And if we look at Chinese art, you have it departing from a very specific situation and specific look—like in 1979 and throughout the 1980s and 1990s—because the artists led a distinctly different life from their peers in London or New York or wherever. Whereas now, all of a sudden, they have access to the same information and the same books, they are on the internet, they travel and exhibit with other people, so their lives are sort of similar now. So a lot of the art looks alike, but a lot still doesn't look alike. These are the issues for me, when you talk about Chinese contemporary art; the art is still a reflection of a specific situation—in China, in London, in New York—but it still remains specific to a degree. Thank God!

CM: A good answer. Not everyone gives an answer to that question as good as yours.

US: Yes, for you it is an issue, I guess. It's just this not to be seen as a mere *Chinese* artist—"I want to be a good artist!" otherwise there is this fear "I have been invited because of my Chinese passport" or something. I don't understand it, but it's there.

CM: Paranoia is part of the artistic condition, isn't it?

US: And it went from being a disadvantage to be Chinese for so very long to becoming a strong advantage—*only* in terms of being seen, because then every gallerist, curator, museum director and collector go on pilgrimages to Beijing and Shanghai, so the artists got seen by so many people. If they had been an artist in New York or Berlin, that definitely would not have happened. So it sort of flipped from having been at the periphery of attention to having many opportunities which others don't have in other capitals of the world. Though of course, the Western world still provides the gatekeepers to the big events—the documentas, Venice Biennales and so on. So we see more balance in the power game than in the past—in the sense that the gatekeepers are still Western, but the Chinese artists get more and more attention.



2010 Lifetime Contribution Award, Zhang Peili, "A Gust of Wind", video installation (5 channels, loop), 13'40", 2008

2010年杰出成就奖, 张培力, 《阵风》, 五屏幕录像装置, 13'40", 2008

CM: This raises another problem. Artists from the 1990s—Yue Minjun, Zhang Xiaogang and even Xu Bing—have the problem of being more than mid-career artists. What do they do now? How do they reinvent themselves when China is already very much part of the international art world? I think some of them are struggling. I think Xu Bing is, partly because he is now very much part of the administrative system in China through his role as Vice-President of CAFA. Zhang Xiaogang, I don't know, but he seems to have drifted a little bit. Yue Minjun has kept clear of these structures, and perhaps he is reinventing himself now—his more recent work I find quite interesting; I'm not popular in saying that, but I think it is. Do you feel this is an issue?

US: I feel that these are two different issues. One is, can you be involved in official China, in the official apparatus, and still maintain autonomy and creativity? Then there is the general issue of the mid-career artist. On the first, it's difficult for me to comment. I mean, can you have a foot in each camp? I guess you can—some people can, successfully. I wouldn't want to make a judgment on Xu Bing's creativity, but it still seems to be there. But if we talk about mid-career artists, then I think this generation you mention, so successful in the '90s, has this problem, having had very strong ideas, having exploited those ideas fully, and now having to create a second or third idea of equal artistic strength. Maybe we are too demanding in that we expect artists to reinvent themselves a few times in their life. I always think of Morandi who had his ten bottles and painted them for fifty years; we think these are great paintings. So it has to do with our times—which are so demanding that we expect an artist to come forward with something entirely new every few years. Of course, the great artists can do that, but already to have had one strong idea is a big artistic achievement, in my view. It separates them from millions of other artists. Are they able to have a second one, or in some cases a third one or a fourth one? I guess they have the personality, but it can take ten years to develop that second strong idea. For the artists it is very difficult to sustain this period, but they all have the kind of artistic personality that any day they could hit on a new idea.

Thirdly, this generation has grown up rubbing against the system, against some very firm beliefs, and all of a sudden it's as if their enemy has died. Of course, there is still resistance there, but now the system is much more agile. So as an artist, you have to find a new paradigm, and that is not an option in the same way—then you must find another impulse. Cynical Realism came out of 1989 and out of the very specific condition they were in—of being disillusioned, resigned, of not wanting to contribute to this “new” China. That created a very strong movement and a very strong impulse; it was that kind of resistance against which they created art, and now their environment is totally different. If you grew out of that mold of producing art, how do you find a new mold—giving you the stimulus?

I think that this is the broad problem of that generation. Some have found something very successfully, and others haven't.

CM: Probably out of all of them, Cai Guo Qiang has maintained the greatest flexibility.

US: Yes, probably true. Of course, for a painter, the field is much narrower—probably a more difficult problem to solve.



2012 Best Young Artist, Yan Xing, "Two Videos, three photographs, several related masterpieces, and American art" (photo No.3), edition of 3 + 1 photography (b/w), ultra giclee, 136 x 170 cm (print); 152 x 186 cm (framed); 2013

2012年最佳年轻艺术家, 酈醒, 《两部录像、三张照片、几件与之相关的杰作和美国艺术》(摄影 No.3), 3版 + 1 AP 黑白摄影, 艺术微喷, 136 x 170 cm (照片尺寸); 152 x 186 cm (外框尺寸); 2013

CM: We should turn to CCAA. What are the origins of the award?

US: I saw all these very good artists in the 1990s, but I saw that there wasn't an internal debate in China that went beyond the academic circles of the contemporary art world. I also saw that internationally, nobody paid any attention to these good artists in China. I was thinking what I could do to improve that situation. Of course, today it's hard to imagine that no one knew about Chinese art and that nobody took any interest. Today it's very different. It's hard for us to imagine that 15 years ago, this was not the case. Yes, there were exhibitions abroad and now people talk about these exhibitions, but they were mainly in second-tier cities, museums, small places, and they were seen by a specialist public—fans of China, sinologists, etc—but they were not in the big venues. I thought that if I created an art award—since there wasn't one in China—maybe at some point it would become something like the Turner Prize in the UK. Maybe that could raise interest domestically, beyond the more academic circle, and it would allow me to bring the international big shots to China so that they see the Chinese art and incorporate Chinese artists into their projects. It wasn't so much that everyone would do a China exhibition. It wasn't even about who is winning. But they would see the artists and things that they liked, and they would show it abroad. These two reasons—and both worked, in a way.

CM: To create a platform within China and, secondly, to create a destination.

US: Attention and opportunities outside China. That worked very well and very quickly, with the likes of Harald Szeemann, as the first, bringing 20 artists to the Venice Biennale in 1999 after he had been in the jury and I had traveled with him and visited many studios together.

CM: I didn't realize that.

US: Yes, that's the only reason! He did several trips and jury meetings on his first trip in 1998. I think in January 1999 he was appointed to do the Biennale, so he only had about six months to organize it—in the jury 1998 he had seen a lot of Chinese art and that made him decide to give such a platform to Chinese artists. (1) Plus there's a big difference between the 1993 and 1999 Biennials. Of course now with Johnson Chang, the 1993 Biennial is back [in the news]. It was the first time *not* that China had a pavilion but that China came back as a competitor. But that pavilion—I saw it—was in the remotest part of the Giardini—you know, like where Yugoslavia and all this was. I saw it maybe two months after the opening and there were not even doors on the building. It was just the worst thing, and *nobody* went there. The Chinese [artists] were very excited, and I think it was Armani [the fashion designer] paying for the whole thing—it wasn't something official, it was an "Armani" pavilion, paid for by Armani—and very shabby, very poor conditions. Very good works, though, but nobody saw it. Whereas in 1999, Harald Szeemann was the first one to open the entire Arsenale (2). This was the first time the Arsenale had been part of the Venice [Biennale]. So the big international public—who would never ever go to a Chinese art exhibition—for the first time had to walk through the twenty artists. They had no choice! That's the difference with the past. So all the big professionals, museum directors, institutions, collectors, who never ever looked at Chinese art, all had to. That is why 1999 was so important.

But that was just one exhibition. There was also Alanna Heiss of PS1 [the founding director]; she showed Chinese artists. Chris Dercon [now director of Tate Modern] showed Ai Weiwei in Munich, Ruth Noack showed Lu Hao, Xie Nanxing, Hu Xiaoyan and Yan Lei in DOCUMENTA 12 and so on. So many, many results came from the various jury members.



1998 Best Artist Award, Zhou Tiehai, "Placebo-Szeemann", acrylic (airbrush) on synthetic canvas, 300 × 250 cm, 2000

1998年最佳艺术家, 周铁海, 《Placebo-Szeemann》, 布面油画, 300 × 250 cm, 2000

CM: CCAA works on a two-year cycle, with one year for art and one for writing. Why do you also want the prize to be for art criticism?

US: I always thought of CCAA as a tool to contribute to the "Chinese art operating system", as I call it. Each nation has its art operating system consisting of galleries, museums, art critics and artists, collectors and so on. I could see this very interesting art operating system emerging in China—this is why I consider myself as a researcher, not so much a collector—and that's why I thought an art award would be a very useful contribution. If we see it as a tool, I thought another issue that needs more attention is art criticism. Again I hoped that through creating an award I could contribute, not to solve the problem—I cannot do that—but to create attention and put it really on the agenda. There is a need for *independent* art critique. In the past, there was no independent art critique because of censorship throughout the 1980s and 1990s—you had magazines, but of course there was a lot of ideology there and people couldn't write freely. Then came the market and it became so strong in China that the auction catalogues would say what good art is and what bad art is. The collectors got their information through the auction houses, and maybe some gallerists, but basically through the market. Naturally, the market is also very strong in the Western world, but it is balanced by the institutions, like the museums and so on who can do their shows—which they cannot do in China the

same way—and through independent art critics. This balance is quite lopsided in China, because while art critique was dependent on political issues until the 2000s, all of a sudden the art critics had to write many, many books for the artists, which all of a sudden started to appear. This created another type of dependence. You can't write a book for the artists and be really independent. That is a contradiction! So one dependence was being replaced by another dependence. As you experience [as an independent magazine], it's just very difficult to survive. It's not that these people are not interested in being independent art critics, but how can you survive in this environment as an independent critic? For all these reasons, I thought such an award would bring attention to the situation and, as a by-product, maybe allow a piece to be written that probably wouldn't be written, because the market wouldn't pay for it. If you think of the first winner, Pauline Yao, writing about what I call the "semi-industrial production methods" of Chinese artists, I think this is a topic the market and the galleries wouldn't finance. In that sense, a piece can get written that otherwise wouldn't have been. I also still see it as a tool to point to other issues in the art operating system of China. It's a good tool, I think, an award—create some attention, some publicity, maybe even create some solutions. So, there are many more issues we could look at with an award.

But of course, I have my limitations. So far, with few exceptions, I have paid the bill. There is a limit to what we can do for financial reasons. We did get sponsorship from M+ for the last years and in the past, from time to time, we got a little sponsorship contribution. I was always hoping I would find *Chinese* institutions, Chinese collectors, individuals, media, whatever, and I would be so happy to hand it over to them. It shouldn't be a "Uli Sigg" thing—I've said this so many times! But so far it hasn't happened. I am convinced it is a very good concept—not because I created it!—but because it is really a very useful thing to develop the Chinese art operating system in a good way, since it creates debate and contemporary art is about this: It ought to exist in order to debate, to develop through a debate, to find its place through a debate. That place, of course, is a dynamic issue. It's not exactly, "so this is the winner"; it is more *why* is this the winner, or *why* would other people not consider this to be the winner? It is really about this. Whether or not "so-and-so" is the best artist in China is not the point, but why could this artist be considered the best? I think we have contributed much to this debate.

CM: There are other awards too, now, but the award that really counts is still CCAA.

US: This is precisely the case because of three things. Firstly, it is totally independent. It's not tied to a company name. It would have been very easy for me to bring in a sponsor or someone to foot the bill if I were to allow a name other than CCAA, but this would then create some dependency. Also, there are absolutely no ties to an artist. With other awards, the winner must donate a work. It's a very mixed blessing when the winner is obliged to give them a work! With CCAA, there is absolutely no obligation upon an artist. He just gets the prize and that's it. Thirdly, it's an academic jury. It is a purely academic jury in the sense that very important people of the art world—whether it is Harald Szeemann, Alanna Heis, Chris Dercon, Ruth Noack [documenta 12 curator], or Hans Ulrich Obrist. Then there are the Chinese jurors who all have weight in the Chinese art scene. I try to bring in the people who will do the next big thing, so that they can see the Chinese art *before* they do it. This has had a big impact. If you take the documenta of Ruth Noack, there were 7 or 8 Chinese artists. If you take the last documenta, the curator, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev was not introduced, let us say, in a systematic way to Chinese contemporary art, and so only two Mainland Chinese artists were included. It made a difference. Actually, she was a jury member *after* documenta. I invited her to participate, to get to know her. But it makes a big difference—it means twice as many Chinese artists in documenta and the Venice Biennale, because somebody recommends them. So the jury is very important to me. I want it to be half Chinese—Chinese experts—and the other half international experts.

CM: What are your hopes for CCAA's future?

US: Well, I hope it will take up a place in China like the Turner Prize has done in the UK in setting an agenda for debate, in magnifying the agenda for debate. I would hope for more Chinese people participating in the running of the award. CCAA is not to do with me. It is there for China...And more awards under CCAA, because there are still topics that need debate in China.

Endnotes:

1. "[Szeeman] became the first curator to include multiple contemporary Chinese artists in a traditionally Western-oriented institution. He also juxtaposed more well-known artists with up-and-coming ones in the same spaces. In order

to achieve his vision, Szeemann pushed for the elimination of a previously set age limit to exhibit in the Biennale.”

Melanie Tran, “Treasures from the Vault: Harald Szeemann’s ‘Project Files’”, *The Getty Iris*, May 31, 2013 [\[link here\]](#)

2. A sprawling 45-hectare shipyard and armory complex dating from 1104. Szeeman “supervised the partial renovation of the historic Arsenale complex, which includes the Corderie and Artiglierie, to be used as exhibition space. One of these buildings was designated for artists whose identifying nations did not already have pavilions of their own...” *Op cit.*



2012 Best Artist Award, Pak Sheung Chuen, “Paint a Sky, Using the Remaining Blue to Paint a Sea”
“Conceptual Painting (Two mural paintings: 1.7 M (H) x 3.5 M (W). Instruction: 21 x 30 cm), 2007

2012年最佳艺术家, 白双全, 《畫一個天／把用剩的藍色畫一個海》, 观念绘画, 170 x 350 cm, 2007



2012 Lifetime Contribution Award, Geng Jianyi, “Be accountable”, composite materials, text

behavior, 35 pieces, 1988

2012年杰出成就奖, 耿建翌, 《有所交代》, 装置、综合材料、文本行为, (35件), 1988

Keywords: [15 Years of CCAA](#), [art prize Asia](#), [Chinese art collection](#), [Chinese art prize](#), [Chinese Contemporary Art Award](#), [Chris Moore](#), [David Diaq](#), [Karen Smith](#), [M+ Collection](#), [M+ museum Hong Kong](#), [major museum donation](#), [randian](#), [Sigg Collection](#), [Uli Sigg interview](#), ["Contemporary Chinese Art Award"](#), [上海当代艺术博物馆](#), [中国当代艺术大奖](#), [墨虎恺](#), [希克](#)

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«Es war ein einmaliges Abenteuer»

Der Geschäftsmann und Diplomat Uli Sigg über seine Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst aus China, die er nun nach Hongkong verschenkt

Nichts hat unser Bild der chinesischen Gegenwartskunst so stark geprägt wie die Sammlung des Schweizers Uli Sigg. Nun geht der grösste Teil seiner Kollektion in den Besitz des M+ in Hongkong über. Im Gespräch mit Samuel Herzog äussert sich der Geschäftsmann über die Gründe und Modalitäten der Schenkung.

In den letzten zwanzig Jahren haben Sie eine umfangreiche Sammlung chinesischer Kunst seit den 1970er Jahren aufgebaut. Die westliche Kunstwelt hat diese Kollektion erstmals 1999 wirklich zur Kenntnis genommen, als Harald Szeemann seine Biennale von Venedig zu einem grossen Teil mit Werken aus Ihren Depots bestückte. Erstaunt hat man im Westen festgestellt, dass es tatsächlich so etwas wie zeitgenössische Kunst aus China gibt – jenseits von Propagandamalerei, traditioneller Kunst oder eher kunsthandwerklichen Produkten. Seither haben Sie immer wieder Teile Ihrer Sammlung im Rahmen international beachteter Ausstellungen präsentiert – auch in der Schweiz, etwa 2005 und 2010 in Bern, 2011 in Luzern. Nun schenken Sie den «grösseren Teil», wie es heisst, nämlich stattliche 1463 Werke, einem Museum, das noch gar nicht existiert, dem M+ in Hongkong. Warum diese Schenkung und warum gerade jetzt?

Die Absicht, die Werke dereinst an China zurückzugeben, ist früh gereift. Mitte der neunziger Jahre hatte ich erkannt, dass – von Zufallskäufen einiger Personen aus dem Westen einmal abgesehen – nirgendwo eine Sammlung existiert, die es dem Betrachter erlaubt, die chinesische Gegenwartskunst von ihrer Entstehung im Jahr 1979 bis heute integral zu sehen und zu verstehen. So entschied ich mich zum Versuch, mit meinem Sammeln diese Lücke zu schliessen und dieses Dokument, wie ich meine Sammlung nenne, dann an China zurückzuerstatten. Dieses Dokument gehört aus meiner Sicht nach China, damit das chinesische Publikum seine Gegenwartskunst zu Gesicht bekommen kann – eine Kunst, die es nicht wirklich kennt. Angesichts der für mich oftmals unglaublichen und kaum zu überbietenden Erlebnisqualität, wie ich es nennen möchte, die mir China – und ganz besonders die Auseinandersetzung mit seinen Künstlerinnen und Künstlern – beschert hat, scheint es adäquat, durch die Schenkung des überwiegenden Teils meiner Kollektion etwas zurückzugeben. Diese Meinung wird ausdrücklich auch von meiner Ehefrau Rita geteilt, die einen grossen Teil dieser Zeitreise mitgemacht hat. Warum jetzt? Es war ein einmaliges Abenteuer, diese Sammlung zusammenzutragen. Ein weiteres Abenteuer ist es, diesem Dokument die bestmögliche Zukunft zu verschaffen – überdies

halte ich nichts von Verfügungen von Todes wegen.

Warum fiel die Wahl auf das M+ – was zeichnet dieses Haus vor anderen Institutionen aus?

Hongkong ist auch China. Aber Hongkong entwickelt sich zur Drehscheibe für Kunst in Asien – vor allem auch was den Kunstmarkt anbetrifft. Mit dem grossen Wurf M+ – das geplante Haus ist in der räumlichen Ausdehnung durchaus mit dem MoMA in New York zu vergleichen – wird ein Museum in China entstehen, das mit meiner Sammlung seinen Fokus bekommt, nämlich chinesische Gegenwartskunst. Und dies in einem Ausmass, wie es allen andern Museen nun versagt bleiben wird.

Hongkong gehört zwar formell zu China, hat aber eine andere Geschichte, nach wie vor einen Sonderstatus und gilt als relativ «westliche» Stadt. Warum beschenken Sie nicht eine Institution in Schanghai, Peking oder Guangzhou, wo es ja ebenfalls eine lebendige Museumsszene gibt?

Das hat auch mit den politischen Randbedingungen zu tun, wie beispielsweise mit der Zensur. Um das Kunstschaffen einigermaßen vollständig in einer öffentlichen Institution abbilden zu können, braucht es gewisse Bedingungen, die heute in China kein Museum erfüllt. Auch entsteht mit dem M+ eine Institution, die sich durch grosse Professionalität im Umgang mit der Kunst auszeichnen wird. Ferner haben die Behörden und besonders der Direktor des M+, Lars Nittve, glaubwürdig signalisieren können, dass ein Museum von Weltklasse zur Welt gebracht werden soll.

Haben Sie denn überhaupt Verhandlungen geführt mit anderen Institutionen in China – oder kam Festland-China von Beginn weg nicht infrage?

Verhandlungen habe ich auch in der Volksrepublik geführt – das war mein erster Impuls. Leider musste ich dann aber zum Schluss kommen, dass die dortigen Institutionen entweder nicht bereit oder nicht gewillt waren, ein dreistelliges Millionengeschenk anzunehmen – was die Kunstwelt, die sonst anders tickt, generell überraschen mag. Ferner haben mir auch die Künstler fast ausnahmslos geraten, meine Sammlung nach Hongkong zu bringen.

Haben Sie nie daran gedacht, ein eigenes Museum mit Ihrer Sammlung zu eröffnen – zum Beispiel in der Schweiz?

Nein. Ich denke, dass diese Kunst nach China gehört. Zudem bin ich ein Fan von öffentlichen Institutionen. Die ständig mächtiger werdenden privaten Häuser dünnen doch die in der Regel im Urteil unabhängigeren öffentlichen Institutionen weiter aus; die Versuchungen der Sammler, persönliche Geschmacksnoten zum Standard zu machen, sind nicht von der Hand zu weisen. In meinem Fall wird

das durch die Institution M+ bestimmt ausbalanciert werden.

Können Sie etwas über das Umfeld sagen, in dem Ihre Sammlung da zu sehen sein wird?

Chinesische Gegenwartskunst wird nun zum Fokus des M+. Daneben wird auch der lokalen Kunstproduktion Platz eingeräumt, die ihre Stärke in der Tradition der Tuschkmalerei hat. Asiatische Kunst und Design werden auch ein wichtiger Teil sein, es wird ein Museum der «visual culture» schlechthin.

Was für ein Publikum erwarten Sie?

Zweifellos ein zahlreiches internationales Publikum – und ein sehr grosses vom Festland; dessen jährliche Besucherzahl übersteigt 30 Millionen. Das ist auch mein Hauptmotiv: den chinesischen Künstlern erstmals eine freie Kommunikation mit «ihrem» Publikum zu ermöglichen. Hongkong bietet ja auch ausser Shopping noch zu wenig – das ist das Motiv für den Bau des West Kowloon Cultural District, dessen Herz das M+ ist.

Sicher geben Sie Ihre Sammlung nur unter gewissen Bedingungen her – was sind da die wichtigsten Punkte, die Sie mit dem Museum ausgehandelt haben?

Das M+ wird zunächst mindestens 5000 Quadratmeter Ausstellungsfläche für meine Sammlung zur Verfügung stellen – und zu allen Zeiten mindestens einen Drittel, also 500 Werke, präsentieren. Das war für mich entscheidend. Dann sitze ich auch in verschiedenen Gremien. In Hongkong hiess es stets: «Wir wollen nicht nur die Sammlung, wir wollen den Sammler . . .» Wir werden sehen.

Das M+ bekommt ja nicht alles geschenkt. 47 Werke aus Ihrer Sammlung kauft das Haus für umgerechnet etwa 22 Millionen Franken. Warum haben Sie dem Haus nicht alles geschenkt?

Das M+ will damit sein ernsthaftes *commitment* für eine gemeinsame Zukunft ausdrücken. Das ermöglicht mir auch, mit meinen Initiativen des Chinese Contemporary Art Award für Künstlerinnen und Künstler, für Kunstkritik und für Förderung der Philanthropie in China fortzufahren. Und es macht es mir möglich, weiterhin zu sammeln!

Das Auktionshaus Sotheby's hat den Wert der über-eigneten Arbeiten aus Ihrer Sammlung auf etwa 185 Millionen Franken geschätzt. Was halten Sie von dieser Einschätzung?

Schätzungen sind Schätzungen. Viele Arbeiten haben keinen wirklichen Marktpreis – der war für mich auch nie relevant. Andererseits liesse sich wohl ein wesentlich höherer Preis realisieren, wenn ich versuchen wollte, einem der ultrareichen chinesischen Sammler den Platz an der Spitze der Sammler von chinesischer Gegenwartskunst einzuräumen – mit all seinem Prestige, vorab in China.

Vielleicht mögen Sie ja Ihre eigene Sammlung nicht direkt bewerten. Aber sagen Sie mir doch, welches Museum von diesem Sommer an die beste Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst aus China haben wird – und vor allem warum es die beste ist.

Das M+! Es ist die einzige enzyklopädische Sammlung überhaupt. Die übrigen bedeutenden Sammler der frühen Stunde sind entgegen ihren Zusicherungen über den Markt ausgestiegen. Ferner ist sie mit einer etwas ungewöhnlichen Sichtweise ent-

standen; darin mag man ihre Schwäche oder ihre Stärke erkennen: Sie ist das Ergebnis einer 33-jährigen – mitunter zähen – Auseinandersetzung mit der chinesischen Realität, die ich als Wirtschafts-subjekt, als Diplomat, Politikanalyst und als Kenner auch der Westkunst mit einem weiten Netzwerk geführt habe und weiterhin führe. All dies gibt meiner Sammlung und wohl auch mir ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal.

Nur wenige Menschen aus dem Westen kennen China so gut wie Sie – trotzdem haben Sie die Kollektion mit westlichen Augen zusammengetragen. Was, glauben Sie, wäre anders, wenn Sie ein Chinese wären? Oder anders gefragt: Hätte ein Chinese mit den gleichen Möglichkeiten und der gleichen Passion in chinesische Kunst investiert, wäre seine Sammlung mit der Ihren vergleichbar?

Eher nicht. Lange wussten chinesische Sammler mit dem Paradigma der Westkunst nicht viel anzufangen: Die chinesische Tradition baut auf dem Fortschreiben und Entwickeln aus dem Bestehenden auf, während die Westkunst tendenziell mit dem Bestehenden radikal aufräumt. Das Paradigma der Avantgarde, das die chinesischen zeitgenössischen Künstler begierig aufgesogen haben, führte zunächst zu viel Kunst mit explizit politischen Aussagen. Die chinesischen Sammler hätten Werke mit einem Rekurs auf die Tradition höher gewichtet und sich wohl auf Malerei beschränkt. Diese Arbeiten habe ich auch gesammelt, sie wurden aber von westlichen Kuratoren nur selten für ihre Ausstellungen ausgewählt.

Sie haben sehr stark beeinflusst, was für ein Bild wir uns im Westen von der chinesischen Gegenwartskunst machen. Hatten Sie nie Angst, dass Sie dieses Bild zu stark beeinflussen könnten?

Nein. Viele Ausstellungen und viele Kritiker halten ja auch dagegen – wenn auch nicht nur mit guten Argumenten. Diese Auseinandersetzung läuft auch in China, wo der Kanon für diese 33 Jahre ja noch nicht festgeschrieben ist.

Sie haben ja einen Teil Ihrer Sammlung behalten. Was haben Sie behalten, und nach welchen Kriterien haben Sie es ausgewählt?

Zunächst umgekehrt: Ich habe für das M+ so ausgewählt, dass eine kohärente Storyline von den siebziger Jahren bis heute entsteht – mit dem Besten, was das Dokument hergibt. Behalten haben wir rund 600 Arbeiten, darunter viele Redundanzen und persönliche Stücke, Geschenke und dergleichen. Insgesamt bleibt uns doch noch eine ganze Zahl hervorragender Arbeiten.

Sie haben gesagt, dass Sie auch weiterhin sammeln werden – nur wie? Verschieben sich die Schwerpunkte?

Ja. Ich will den enzyklopädischen Anspruch aufgeben, das schafft Raum für Neues – zum Beispiel möchte ich vermehrt gemeinsam mit Künstlern Arbeiten produzieren. Im Moment bin ich zum Beispiel daran, mit einem Künstler einen Spielfilm zu produzieren. Er handelt von Kindern, die Kunst machen und verkaufen, für den Bau eines Altersheims – ein Anlass, über Kreativität in China zu diskutieren. Im Übrigen habe ich mich selbst stets als Forschenden wahrgenommen – einfach in der glücklichen Lage, die Forschungsergebnisse gelegentlich zu erwerben.

Glauben Sie, dass Ihre Schenkung auch einen Einfluss auf den Markt für zeitgenössische Kunst aus China haben wird?

Das glaube ich, ja, wenn auch nicht unmittelbar. Es hört sich unbescheiden an, aber besonders die asiatischen Sammler folgen meinen Ankäufen, soweit sie davon Kenntnis haben. Nun sind aber grosse Teile meiner Sammlung weder ausgestellt noch publiziert worden – gerade die ganz junge Kunst nicht. Das hat im Übrigen noch nie verhindert, dass über meiner Sammlung täglich der Stab gebrochen wird in Aufsätzen aller Art. Die Publikation der Sammlung auf der Website des M+ im nächsten Jahr und dann 2017 die ersten Ausstellungen dort werden viel kaum bekannte Kunst zutage fördern. Das wird dem Markt Impulse geben. Das liegt allerdings noch in einiger Ferne.

Und wie wird das offizielle China reagieren?

Ich erwarte keine öffentliche Verlautbarung. Von wenigen Ausnahmen abgesehen sind die Werke auch nicht in China deponiert. Sie wurden stets ordentlich und mit der seit drei Jahren nötigen Bewilligung durch das Kulturministerium ausgeführt.

Das M+ wird ja erst 2017 eröffnet – was geschieht mit Ihrer Sammlung in der Zwischenzeit?

Bis 2017 bleibt die Sammlung, wo sie ist, überwiegend in der Schweiz. In dieser Zeit wird die Kollektion von uns im Auftrag des M+ verwaltet. An der liberalen Ausleihpraxis soll sich auch nichts ändern.

Der Kulturzerfall und die zeitgenössische chinesische Kunst

Li Xianting

(Aus: *Mahjong. Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung* [Katalog zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Kunstmuseum Bern und in der Hamburger Kunsthalle], Hg. Bernhard Fibicher und Matthias Frehner, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006, S. 24–27.)

Dreifache Tradition als Grundlage

Über das gesamte 20. Jahrhundert hinweg erlebten die Chinesen die enorme Last des Kulturzerfalls. Dieser Zerfallsprozess wurde zu einer Gemengelage, in der sie unentwegt nach einer neuen kulturellen Identität suchen mussten, das heisst sie waren gezwungen, ein neues kulturelles Wertesystem zu finden und das alte umzuwandeln. Auf Chinas gewaltsame Öffnung durch westliche Kanonenbootpolitik im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert folgte im Jahre 1919 die anti-traditionelle »4. Mai-Bewegung«, die direkt den Verfall der traditionellen Literatenkunst nach sich zog. Fortschrittliche Denker und Künstler führten daher zur Rettung ihrer Kultur die westliche Tradition der realistischen Malerei ein. Besonders nach 1949 entwickelte sich eine Kunstform, die durch Mao Zedongs teils mit der Sowjetunion übereinstimmende, teils ihr entgegengesetzte Haltung bestimmt wurde und die im maoistischen China unter Maos Direktive aus einer Vereinigung des sowjetischen Sozialistischen Realismus mit ästhetischen Vorstellungen aus der chinesischen Volkskunst entstand – der Revolutionäre Realismus.

Eigentlich wäre die Übernahme der realistischen Malerei dazu angetan gewesen, China nach Westen und zur Welt hin zu öffnen. Doch im Kalten Krieg zwischen den Ideologien von Ost und West fiel dieser Versuch der Blockbildung der sozialistischen Staaten zum Opfer. Ausserdem kehrte in den ersten 70 Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts die westliche Kunst dem Realismus den Rücken und durchlief mit verschiedenen Experimenten die Zeit der Moderne. Auf diese Weise verlor die chinesische Kunst den Kontakt zur Entwicklung der modernen Kunst in der übrigen Welt, aber auch zur freien Geisteshaltung der traditionellen chinesischen Kunst mit ihrer Betonung auf den subjektiven Ausdruck. Damit geriet die Kunst in die missliche Lage, formal realitätsgetreu Objekte zu kopieren und inhaltlich von der Politik abhängig zu sein.

Als China gegen Ende des Kalten Krieges in den 1970er Jahren sich von neuem der Welt öffnete, entdeckten die Chinesen mit Schrecken, welche enorme Unterschiede sie von der Welt trennten, und die Künstler bemerkten das äusserst disharmonische Verhältnis zwischen ihrer Kunst und den modernen Tendenzen der internationalen Kunst. So kam es, dass die realistische Malerei, die sich in China nahezu ein Jahrhundert lang entwickelt hatte, für die Künstler vor allem der jüngeren Generation an Bedeutung verlor. Daher stehen wir im Jahre 1979, dem Beginn der zeitgenössischen chinesischen Kunst, immer noch wie zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts einer untergehenden Kultur gegenüber. Der Zerfall' des kulturellen Wertesystems führte schliesslich dazu, dass drei Traditionen nebeneinander bestanden: die traditionelle Tuschemalerei, der Realismus und die seit Ende der

1970er Jahre eingeführte moderne westliche Kunst. Unter dem Einfluss der Letzteren formierten sich drei verschiedene Gruppierungen. Da waren zum einen die realistischen Maler, die vor allem in den Kunstakademien vertreten waren. Die Akademien werden übrigens auch noch heute von der Ausbildung zur realistischen Malerei beherrscht, denn dadurch, dass die offizielle Ideologie aufrecht erhalten wird, nimmt das realistische Modell in der offiziellen Kunstszenen nach wie vor den ersten Platz ein. Zweitens waren in den staatlichen »Instituten für chinesische Malerei« die traditionellen Tuschemaler vertreten. Eigentlich hatte aber auch diese seit der 4. Mai-Bewegung von 1919 Elemente der realistischen Malerei übernommen. Als eine Kunst, die einerseits »echt chinesisch« und andererseits realistisch war, fand die Tuschemalerei auf offizieller Seite besonderen Anklang. Zum dritten gab es die zeitgenössischen Künstler. Diese Gruppierung mit hoffnungsvoller Energie setzte sich vor allem aus freien Künstlern zusammen. In ihrem Streben nach Autonomie und Modernisierung der Kunst entledigten sie sich der Fesseln, die ihr durch die staatliche Ideologie auferlegt worden waren. Noch wichtiger aber war, dass sie den Fokus auf die eigene Kultur richteten. Im energiegeladenen Geist der Zeit und in ihrer lebhaften Psyche suchten sie nach ihrem eigenen Wert.

Die Ausbildung zum Realismus

Fortschrittliche chinesische Intellektuelle forderten ab dem 4. Mai 1919 lautstark den Niedergang der traditionellen Tuschemalerei und führten die westliche realistische Malerei ein, aus der sich besonders nach der Machtergreifung der Kommunistischen Partei 1949 durch eine vollständige Einvernahme sowjetischen Ideologie und Kunstform der Revolutionäre Realismus entwickelte - eine einzigartige Kunstform, die zu einer Tradition der chinesischen Kunst wurde. Als sich China 1979 von neuem öffnete, erlitt der Revolutionäre Realismus einerseits durch den Ansturm der westlichen Kunst und andererseits durch das Wiedererstarken der traditionellen Kunst einen schweren Schlag. Der Realismus behielt aber, auch nachdem er seine revolutionäre Hülle abgelegt hatte, weiterhin seinen festen Platz in der staatlichen Kunstszenen. Dabei ist vor allem die Tatsache wichtig, dass die chinesischen Kunsthochschulen bis heute von einem auf der realistischen Malerei basierenden Ausbildungssystem beherrscht werden. Für einen Studenten einer chinesischen Kunstakademie gehört also die Übung in realistischer Malerei nicht nur zu den wichtigsten Aufgaben seiner vierjährigen Ausbildung, sondern er muss sich, um die Aufnahmeprüfung bestehen zu können, schon früh in dieser Technik geübt haben. Studenten, die vor ihrem Kunststudium eine der Akademie angeschlossene Mittelschule besuchten und danach noch ein postgraduate-studium absolvieren, werden also beim Abschluss ihrer Studien eine 15-jährige Ausbildung in realistischer Malerei hinter sich haben. Daher sind die meisten Werke der chinesischen Maler mehr oder weniger mit dem Realismus verbunden. Man könnte auch sagen, dass sich sehr viele Gemälde der zeitgenössischen chinesischen Kunst aus der »neuen Tradition« des chinesischen Realismus entwickelt haben.

Obzwar eine Bürde für die modernen chinesischen Künstler wurde der Realismus aber auch zu einem wandelbaren Faktor. Und dazu konnte kein Weg besser sein, als sich

an den Ausdrucksformen des Surrealismus und der metaphysischen Malerei zu orientieren. Damit konnten die Künstler, ohne die realistische Maltechnik verwerfen zu müssen, direkt ihren inneren Empfindungen Ausdruck verleihen und sich dabei gleichzeitig auf den Weg der zeitgenössischen Kunst begeben. Parallel dazu existierte die traditionelle chinesische Kunst - die bildhaften Ausdrucksformen der Poesie und der Malerei -, in der die Formen der Objekte bis zu einem gewissen Grad belassen werden, während die Absicht des Künstlers dahin geht, seine inneren Empfindungen auszudrücken. Eine solche Kunstform war für die chinesischen Künstler aufschlussreicher. So war es ihnen - auch aufgrund ihres besonderen gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Hintergrundes - bei ihrer Einnahme des Surrealismus möglich, sich von der Dominanz von Traum und unterbewusstem in dieser Kunst zu lösen und sich mehr dem Ausdruck ihrer eigenen Existenz zu widmen. Da die Chinesen durch über lange Zeit schwierige Lebensumstände einen nach innen gewendeten Charakter entwickelt haben und weil in der chinesischen Ästhetik der konfuzianische Grundsatz gilt, dass ein Kunstwerk »sehnsuchtsvoll, aber ohne das Herz zu verwunden« sein sollte, wurden in den chinesischen Werken der surrealistischen Richtung die abgebildeten Gegenstände relativ selten wie in westlichen Werken übertrieben, zerstückelt oder ins Absurde gezogen, sondern vorzüglich in verfremdeter Weise dargestellt. Das passte besser zum indirekten, einfühlsamen und wehmütigen ostasiatischen Gemüt. Indem einige dieser Künstler auch die Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten des Pinselstrichs ausnutzten, konnte auch dem freien bildhaften Ausdruck im Stil der traditionellen Literatenmalerei Rechnung getragen werden. Aus dem Realismus konvertierte Kunstwerke sind am stärksten im Zynischen Realismus der frühen 1990er Jahre vertreten. Wichtigster Künstler dieser Richtung ist Fang Lijun mit seinen Glatzkopf-Serien im Popi-Stil, die sowohl auf die heutige Gesellschaft wie auch auf die Geschichte Chinas Bezug nehmen. Die Ereignisse auf dem Tiananmen-Platz 1989 hatten vor allem zu einem allgemeinen Verlust von Idealen geführt, was sehr rasch zu einem Gefühl von Langeweile, Sinnlosigkeit und Ohnmacht anwuchs. Der Popi-Stil wurde dabei zu einem Weg, das eigene Innenleben zu retten; es war nahezu der beste ausweglose Weg, den die Chinesen finden konnten. Den Begriff »popi« habe ich einem volkstümlichen chinesischen Ausdruck entlehnt; er beinhaltet Begriffe wie »Scherz«, »Rüpelhaftigkeit«, »sich gehen lassen«, »alles durchschaut haben«. Das Wort ist schwer zu übersetzen, im Englischen findet sich sein Gehalt teilweise in den Begriffen »loafer«, »hoodlum«, »hobo«, »bum«, »punk«. Dieser Stil zeigte sich Ende der 1980er Jahre anfänglich in Literatur und Kunst, bis er Anfang der 1990er Jahre auch in Musik, Film und Fernsehen ausgedehnt zum Vorschein kam und sogar zu einem Lebensstil wurde, der im breiten Volk Anklang fand. Popi, als eine Methode der geistigen Selbstbefreiung, hat unter chinesischen Intellektuellen Tradition. In der chinesischen Geschichte lassen sich dazu eine Menge Beispiele finden, vor allem aus Zeiten starker politischer Unterdrückung. So gab es beispielsweise während der Dynastie Wei und Jin im 3./4. Jahrhundert n. Chr. viele Gelehrte, die Verrücktheit vortäuschten oder ein zügelloses Leben führten, um mit der politischen Unterdrückung zurechtzukommen und eine gewisse persönliche Freiheit zu erlangen. In dem klassischen Werk *Neuer Bericht von Reden aus der Welt* (shishuo xinyu) aus jener Zeit gibt es viele Aufzeichnungen dieser Art, und wenn wir in den lyrischen Arien (sanqu) der Yuan-Dynastie (1271-1368) lesen, finden wir überall Gedichte im zynisch-spöttischen Popi-Stil. Shen Kuo (1031-1095)

schreibt in seinen *Notizen von Traumbach* (Mengxi bitan) über die Gelehrten der Yuan-Dynastie, sie hätten »in humoristischem und frechem Stil geschrieben«. Sun Daya aus der Ming-Dynastie (1368-1644) benutzte in seinem Vorwort zur *Sammlung himmlischer Flötenklänge* (tianlai ji) in Bezug auf Bai Pu, einen Verfasser lyrischer Arien der Yuan-Dynastie, die Bezeichnung »zynisch-humoristisch«. Auch neuzeitliche Schriftsteller wie etwa Zhot Zuoren (1885-1967) oder Lin Yutang (1895-1976) äusserten sich in ähnlicher Weise. So pries Lin Yutang den »Zügellosen« oder »Landstreicher« in hohen Tönen und war der Meinung, dass »der Zügellose der letzte und gefährlichste Feind im diktatorischen System« sei und dass »allein von ihm die gesamte heutige Kultur noch weitergeführt werden« könne.

Die Porträt-Serie *Lucky Family* von Zhang Xiaogang ist ein anderes typisches Beispiel für einen konvertierten Realismus. Die glatte Bildfläche, entstanden durch eine Maltechnik, in der keine Pinselstriche sichtbar sind, basiert auf der Technik und den ästhetischen Vorstellungen der Porträtmaler aus dem Volk. Ausserdem geht diese Technik auf einen anderen konvertierten Realismus zurück, nämlich auf die Kalender-Neujahrsbilder, die im 20. Jahrhundert mit der kommerziellen Werbung aufkamen. So schuf Zhang Xiaogang unter Verwendung von Kohlepulver und Wasserfarben in Anlehnung an die Technik des nassen Farbauftrags im fein ausgearbeiteten Gongbi-Stil der traditionellen Tuschemalerei einen glatten, farbintensiven und kitschigen Stil. Die Ausdrucksweise, die Zhang in seiner Serie *Lucky Family* benutzt, bezieht sich auch auf die konfuzianische Tradition des orthodoxen China, die auf die chinesische Fotografie einen unterschwelligen Einfluss ausgeübt hat. Traditionell war es im Volk üblich, von der ganzen »glücklichen Familie« ein Bild ablichten zu lassen - herausgeputzt in ernster, feierlicher Haltung und in der steifen Anordnung der hierarchischen Reihenfolge. So lehnt sich Zhang mit der glatten Bildfläche nicht nur an die historische Vergangenheit an, sondern bringt damit auch eine ironische Nachahmung einer besonderen Ideologie zum Ausdruck; das heisst die porträtierten Personen in Mao-Anzügen erinnern in ihrer Anordnung als Familienfotografie an die Blutsverwandtschaft zwischen der maoistischen Epoche und der konfuzianischen Tradition des Ahnenkultes und der Sippenzusammengehörigkeit. Der faszinierendste Maler des konvertierten Realismus ist Wang Xingwei. Seine konzeptuellen Gemälde zeigen den Einfluss der realistischen Malerei, doch gleichzeitig kommt bei Wang auch eine typisch chinesische Raffinesse zum Tragen, indem er Werke oder Konzepte aus der Kunstgeschichte unter Verwendung des erzählerischen Moments in der realistischen Malerei überzeugend mit chinesischen Revolutionsideen verbindet und dadurch eine Wirkung von Widersprüchlichkeit und gegenseitiger Auflösung erzielt.

Die Entwicklung der zeitgenössischen chinesischen Kunst ab 1979

Die zeitgenössische chinesische Kunst seit 1979 durchlief im Grossen und Ganzen vier Phasen. Die erste war die postkulturrevolutionäre Phase von 1979 bis 1984. Hauptinhalt dieser Zeit war die Wiederherstellung der Ordnung, das heisst es ging darum, allzu extreme Auswüchse der kulturrevolutionären Malerei zu normalisieren. Dabei wurden zwei Tendenzen deutlich, zum einen ein Protest gegen die chinesische Tradition des Realismus von der Neuzeit bis zur Kulturrevolution, der sich in der

Adaption der frühen Moderne der westlichen Kunst bemerkbar machte, und zum anderen eine Korrektur des kulturevolutionären Realismus, das heißt man wandte sich von dessen Abhängigkeit von der Politik und von der geschönten Darstellung der Realität ab und zur Darstellung des Menschlichen und Wahren in der Kunst hin. So entstand in der realistischen Malerei die Tendenz, die Wirklichkeit so zu widerspiegeln, wie sie wirklich ist, gleichzeitig entstand ein Interesse an den kleinen Leuten.

Die zweite Phase war die der »Kunstbewegung von 1985« von 1985 bis 1989. In dieser Phase war Kulturkritik angesagt, ja ein richtiges Kulturkritikfieber griff um sich, angefacht durch die massenhaften Übersetzungen von Werken der westlichen Philosophie und Literatur, die in den 1980er Jahren auf den Markt kamen. Der Leseifer wurde wahrhaftig zu einer Modeerscheinung. Autoren wie Nietzsche, Popper, Freud, Einstein, Heidegger, Eliot, Wittgenstein, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, Borges, Marcuse, Hesse fanden bei vielen avantgardistischen Künstlern Anklang. Gu Wenda zum Beispiel hatte während seines Postgraduate-Studiums von 1978 bis 1981 beinahe sämtliche Werke zu westlicher Philosophie, Naturwissenschaft und Literatur, die damals in Übersetzung erhältlich waren, gelesen und dazu noch die Werke der chinesischen Philosophen Zhtangzi und Laozi. Huang Yong Ping »verbrachte den ganzen Sommer 1984 mit der Lektüre von Wittgenstein und versuchte die Problematik der Kunst neu zu überdenken«. Zwischen 1983 und 1986 verfasste er Aufsätze mit Titeln wie »Bild-Begriff-Gegenstand«, »Wahrsagung des Schicksals der modernen Malerei in China«, »Im Namen der Kunst die Kunst widerlegen«, »Zur Problematik der künstlerischen Sprache« etc. Zur Veranschaulichung seien ausserdem einige Bildtitel genannt, die 1985/86 häufig in Kunstzeitschriften abgebildet waren: *Das Jahrhundert in stiller Betrachtung* (Gu Wenda), *Entstehung und Transformation der zehntausend Dinge* (Tan Liqin), *Mythologie auf der Rolltreppe* (Chai Xiaogang), *Der Mensch entstammt dem Fisch - und isst gern Fisch* (Yang Zhilh), *Die Menschheit und ihre Jahren* (Zhang Jianjun), *Schwarze Vernunft* (Wang Guangyi), *Wie das Pferd von draussen sie erspäht und sieht, wie wir von ihr erspäht werden* (Ye Yongqing). Diese Neigung, Philosophisches in die Kunst hineinzunehmen, ist im Grunde ein Versuch, mit Mitteln der Kunst moderne westliche Gedanken zu verdauen. Gleichzeitig wurde dadurch auch die Sehnsucht der mit dem Zerfall der chinesischen Kultur konfrontierten Künstler nach dem Aufbau einer neuen Kultur gestillt. Hinzu kommt, dass mit allen Mitteln die moderne westliche Kunst seit den 1960er Jahren eingeführt wurde. Insbesondere die Begegnung mit dem amerikanischen Pop-Art-Künstler Robert Rauschenberg, der sich 1985 anlässlich seiner Ausstellung in Peking aufhielt, wirkte sich auf die chinesische Kunstszenen wie ein Erdbeben aus. Dies führte unmittelbar zu einer breiten Nachahmung der westlichen Kunst. Anschliessend wurden innerhalb weniger Jahre nahezu alle wichtigen Trends und Kunstformen aus den vergangenen hundert Jahren westlicher Kunstgeschichte imitiert. Im Grunde hatten die meisten chinesischen Künstler mit den modernen westlichen Philosophien, Ideen und Kunstformen vornehmlich durch Übersetzungen, Abbildungen und Drucksachen Bekanntschaft gemacht, ohne je ihr Land verlassen zu haben. Daher spielten Faktoren wie der Zustand der chinesischen Kultur, der eigene Standpunkt und die persönlichen Anlagen eines Künstlers eine besonders grosse Rolle. So konvertierte zum Beispiel Huang Yong Ping mit der geistesgegenwärtigen Haltung des chinesischen Zen- Buddhismus die Ausdrucksweisen des Dadaismus und der Pop

Art, indem er deren literarischen Hauptwerke zu einem einzigen Brei verwusch. Ebenso verfuhr er mit Büchern zur westlichen und chinesischen Kunstgeschichte. In diesem Werk, einem der Klassiker der zeitgenössischen chinesischen Kunst, brachte er die seit einem Jahrhundert nicht enden wollende Diskussion über die Ost-West-Problematik mit der Schlagfertigkeit des Zen-buddhistischen Geistes zum Ausdruck.

Die dritte Phase, die ich als »post-89er Phase« bezeichne, dauerte von der zweiten Hälfte des Jahres 1989 bis 1994. Wichtige Ereignisse dieser Zeit sind die Eröffnung und die unmittelbar darauf folgende Schliessung der Ausstellung moderner chinesischer Kunst 1989 in Peking sowie die Ereignisse am Tiananmen-Platz im selben Jahr, die die gesellschaftlichen Voraussetzungen dafür schufen, dass der Zynische Realismus die Bühne der Kunstwelt betrat. Parallel zum Zynischen Realismus lief die politische Pop-Kunst. Dieser Ausdruck bezeichnet einen Trend, in dem die Form der Pop Art dazu benutzt wurde, westliche Kommerzsymbole oder Gestalten aus der sozialistischen Politik auf humoristische oder absurde Weise darzustellen. Im Grunde können wir das als ein geistiges Zeichen für das baldige Ende des Kalten Krieges betrachten, denn diese Kunstform symbolisierte die Infiltration der mächtigen westlichen Marktwirtschaftsstrukturen in die Ideologie des sozialistischen Lagers, der dadurch ein schwerer Schlag versetzt wurde. Ein Gefühl für die Absurdität der Politik war den damaligen Künstlern fortan zu eigen. In ihrer Ausdrucksform wurde die politische Pop-Kunst in China deutlich von amerikanischen Pop-Art-Künstlern wie Andy Warhol beeinflusst. Doch anders als in der amerikanischen Pop Art, die sich vor allem damaligen Trends zugewandt hatte, wurden nun Erinnerungen an eine vergangene Kultur mit neuen Tendenzen vermischt. So stellte zum Beispiel die Serie Grosse Kritik von Wang Guangyr Reminiszenzen an die Kulturrevolution und aktuelle Trends nebeneinander.

Die vierte Phase von 1995 bis heute zeigt die pluralistische Landschaft der zeitgenössischen chinesischen Kunst in der globalisierten Welt. Oft stellen mir Kollegen die Frage: Warum wird eigentlich ausgerechnet die zeitgenössische chinesische Kunst als eine »chinesische Kunst« bezeichnet? Ich gebe dann zur Antwort, dass dies mit deren Betonung des chinesischen Hintergrundes und der offensichtlichen Verwendung chinesischer Merkmale zu tun habe. Zwar entstand die zeitgenössische chinesische Kunst vor dem Hintergrund der Öffnung Chinas, doch von Ende 1979 bis zur Mitte der 1990er Jahre war die Öffnung, auf die sich die zeitgenössische Kunst stützt, noch etwas ganz anderes als die Öffnung im Sinne einer Globalisierung, von der wir heute sprechen. Denn zum einen stand die chinesische Kunst in ihrer Entstehung und Entwicklung immer in direkter Verbindung mit der chinesischen Kultur und Politik wie auch mit den Veränderungen in der chinesischen Gesellschaft, zum anderen war die Öffnung der zeitgenössischen chinesischen Kunst gegenüber dem Westen gar nicht eine Öffnung im Sinne eines internationalen Austausches mit der zeitgenössischen Kunst anderer Länder, sondern vielmehr ein Erlernen der modernen westlichen Kunstgeschichte der vergangenen hundert Jahre. In diesem Prozess galten jeweils bestimmte Kunstformen als nachahmenswert. Im Grossen und Ganzen waren es von 1979 bis 1984 die Impressionisten und der Abstrakte Expressionismus; von 1985 bis 1989 der Dadaismus, die Pop Art und der Surrealismus sowie Künstler wie Duchamp, Warhol und Beuys. Aus Gründen, die mit

der Entwicklung der chinesischen Kunst und mit den kulturellen Gegebenheiten zu tun haben, kehrte die junge Generation gegen Ende der 1980er Jahre ganz einfach wieder zum Realismus zurück. Doch seit sich ab der zweiten Hälfte der 1990er Jahre die chinesische Kunst der Welt zugewandt hat, nehmen chinesische Künstler aufgrund der Globalisierung sehr häufig an verschiedenen Ausstellungen in der ganzen Welt teil. Wichtigstes Merkmal dieser Phase ist, dass die chinesische Kunst fortan nicht mehr so eng mit gesellschaftsgebundenen Denkströmungen verknüpft ist und ein Erscheinungsbild von nie gekannter Vielfalt bietet. Gleichzeitig beginnen sich einige Richtungen der zeitgenössischen Kunst Chinas auch der Entwicklung der internationalen Kunstwelt anzugleichen, beispielsweise was die Begeisterung für die Fotografie, die Videokunst oder das Aufkommen von Kunst mit Gewalttendenzen betrifft. Künstler wie Hong Lei, Hai Bo, Lin Tianmiao, Chen Lingyang, Wang Jinsong, Wang Qingsong und Yang Yong widmen sich begeistert der Fotografie, während Zhou Xiaohu, Li Yongbin und Xu Zhen in der Videokunst eine wichtige Rolle spielen. Besonders erwähnenswert ist eine kleine Gruppe zeitgenössischer Künstler, die seit Anfang der 1990er Jahre im südchinesischen Guangzhou, einer der ersten offenen Städte Chinas, mit ihren Aktivitäten Aufsehen erregten – die Grossschwanzelefanten. Zu dieser Gruppe gehören die Künstler Xu Tan, Chen Shaoxiong, Lin Yilin und Liang Juhui, die sich, obwohl sehr unterschiedlich in ihrer Kunst, in einer Umgebung, die nur noch von Geld und Gier beherrscht ist, allein aufgrund ihres beharrlichen Strebens in der Kunst zusammengeschlossen haben.

Auch die Aktionskunst bildet seit Mitte der 1990er Jahre einen Schwerpunkt. Im Gegensatz zur Aktionskunst der 1980er Jahre, für die vor allem Körperentwicklungen und, im Zuge des damaligen Kulturfiebers, die Auswahl stark kulturbezogener Lokalitäten wie die Grosse Mauer, der Yuanming-Garten oder die Ming-Gräber bezeichnend gewesen waren und deren Werke oft zur Kulturkritik tendiert hatten, wurde in der Aktionskunst Mitte 1990er Jahre die Ausdruckskraft des Körpers an sich betont, wobei die Künstler auch immer mehr selbstmisshandelnde Methoden anwandten, um ihre innere Bedrücktheit oder ihre Beziehung zum kulturellen Umfeld darzustellen.

Der eiskalte Pekinger Winter ist normalerweise eine Zeit, in der kaum Ausstellungen zu sehen sind. Im Winter 1998 jedoch waren die Ausstellungen so zahlreich, dass man geradezu von einem »El Niño« der Kunstszene sprechen konnte. Besonders beachtenswert ist, dass in einigen Ausstellungen in Kellerräumen Künstler mit Gewalttendenzen auftauchten. So machten Künstler wie Xiao Yu, Sun Yuan, Zhu Yu und Zhang Hanzi in ihren Werken direkten Gebrauch von menschlichen Leichen oder Leichenteilen. Beispielsweise stellte Xiao Yu aus einem Hasen, einem Vogel und dem Schädel eines menschlichen Säuglings ein Tier zusammen, das mangels Benennbarkeit statt mit chinesischen Schriftzeichen mit westlichen Buchstaben als »Ruan« betitelt wurde - ein Werk, das beim heutigen Stand der Biologie Grauen vermittelt. Und das Herstellen namenloser Tiere spiegelt das Gefühl des Künstlers gegenüber eben diesem Grauen wider. Im Grunde ist der Hang zur Gewalt im künstlerischen Ausdruck, seitdem in den 1990er Jahren vor allem jüngere englische Künstler wie Damien Hirst gewaltsame Darstellungsarten benutzen, bereits in der ganzen internationalen Kunstwelt zu einer Sache der Haltung geworden. Zweifellos

wird hier die Kunst vor die Frage gestellt: Was kann Kunst noch tun? Nachdem das Tabu, Tierleichen zu verwenden, durch junge Künstler aus England gebrochen worden war, brachen nun junge Künstler aus China das Tabu, Menschenleichen zu benutzen. Natürlich können wir fragen, warum der menschliche Körper, wenn er doch der Wissenschaft zur Verfügung gestellt werden darf, nicht auch der Kunst zur Verfügung gestellt werden kann? Die Gewalt an sich ist in unserem Leben durch Fernsehberichte oder durch Darstellungen in Filmen schon längst zu einem unterschweligen Konsumobjekt geworden.

Die kitschig-vulgäre Kunst ist auch eine spezielle Kunstform aus derselben Zeit. Typische Vertreter sind Künstler wie Xu Yihui, die Brüder Luo, Hu Xiangdong, Feng Zhengjie, Wang Qingsong und Chang Xugong. Diese Künstler sind bis zu einem gewissen Grad von Jeff Koons beeinflusst, doch betonen sie in ihren Werken deutlich den bäuerlich-chinesischen Geschmack. Deshalb verwenden sie bevorzugt Materialien und Methoden aus dem chinesischen Kunsthandwerk und schaffen damit unmittelbare visuelle Reize. Gleichzeitig haben sie aber auch eine tiefer gehende Bedeutung, nämlich die chinesische Revolutionskultur des gesamten 20. Jahrhunderts zu verspotten. Denn im 20. Jahrhundert war das massgebende Kriterium in der Kultur Chinas die Popularisierung, und dieses Kriterium war den Menschen von oben auferlegt worden. Seit dem Ende der Qing-Dynastie (1644-1911) hatten sich nahezu alle Denker in China, die im Interesse der Nation die Rettung und Erstarkung ihres Landes anstrebten, vehement für die Popularisierung der Kultur ausgesprochen. 1943 hielt Mao Zedong seine Rede über Literatur und Kunst in Yan'an, in denen er seine Vorstellungen von der Popularisierung der Kunst systematisierte und konkretisierte. Er rief darin die Künstler auf, von den Bauern und der Volkskunst zu lernen, um eine Kunst zum Gefallen der Arbeiter, Bauern und Soldaten zu schaffen. Doch seit der Öffnung in den 1980er Jahren verlor diese während Jahrzehnten aufgebaute Wertvorstellung für die Menschen an Bedeutung. Bald wurden die Lebensgewohnheiten der grossen Masse - von Gebrauchsartikeln, Lebensmitteln bis hin zu Seh- und Hörgewohnheiten - von der westlichen Konsumkultur durch Joint Ventures und deren Produkte - Fernseher, Konfektionsware, Schlagermusik, Fastfood - fast vollständig durchdrungen. Film- und Popstars ersetzten die Revolutionshelden und wurden zu Idolen der Kinder und Jugendlichen, während in der ersten Hälfte der 1990er Jahre die Wirtschaft einen nie gesehenen Aufschwung erreichte. Hinter all dieser Pracht verbargen sich aber Wünsche nach Reichtum verschiedenster Schattierungen, sodass die hereinströmende westliche Konsumkultur in China zu bäuerlichen Prosperitätsidealen konvertierte. Kaum war der allzu lange unterdrückte alte Gott des Reichtums wieder hervorgebeten worden, lebten im Zuge des wirtschaftlichen Aufschwungs alte Vorstellungen wieder auf. Segenswünsche wie »Prosperität und Reichtum«, »Florierende Finanzen« kamen wieder in Mode, und die Farbe Rot, dieses Symbol für Glück und Freude aus dem bäuerlichen China, erschien nun, nachdem sie ihre historische Mission beendet hatte, in neuer Aufmachung: Rote Lampions ersetzten die roten Fahnen, alle Arten von roten Reklamen und Werbetafeln ersetzten die roten Propagandasprüche. Daher repräsentiert die kitschig-vulgäre Kunst den intuitiven künstlerischen Ausdruck der bäuerlichen Aufschwungsideale wie auch deren Realität und Ästhetik, die durch die westliche Konsumkultur nach einer langen Phase des Untergangs neu hervorgerufen worden sind.

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