

WHAT ABOUT CHINA?

25 JUNE – 13 OCTOBER 2003, SOUTH GALLERY, LEVEL 1

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As a preview to the Year of China in France, the Centre Pompidou is presenting *What About China?** a totally different kind of event offering a roundup of the contemporary arts in China in all their vitality and diversity. Fifty artists have been invited to take part in this multidisciplinary exhibition covering the visual arts, architecture, cinema and music.

China has always been a source of fascination for the French. Unsurprisingly, though, the French view is often a very partial one: so how do you provide an overview of the creative scene in a country in the throes of radical change, with 1.3 billion people building a "New China" whose dynamism and vitality are nothing short of astonishing?

This exhibition is not intended to be exhaustive. Its goal, rather, is to generate interest in contemporary China and provide a glimpse of its creative profusion in all spheres: painting (Fang Lijun, Liu Xiaodong, Zhou Tiehai), photography (Mu Chen and Shao Yinong, Weng Fen, Shing Danwen, Bai Yiluo), sculpture (Shi Hui, Song Dong), installations (Hong Lei, Yang Maoyuan), video (Yang Fudong, Kan Xuan, Li Yongbin, Wang Jianwei), cinema (Jia Zhangke, Ning Ying, Ju Anqi), music (Guo Wenjing, Cui Jian, He Xuntian), architecture (Ma Qingyun, Wang Shu, Chang Yung Ho, Liu Jiakun), together with ancient objets d'art and examples of the crafts.

The exhibition is being held in the South Gallery, where all the partitions have been removed to offer visitors total freedom in their approach to the exhibits. The works on display have been arranged grid-fashion around an enormous model of Beijing created by Li Hao: around the hutong – the traditional narrow streets – rise a plexiglas forbidden city and modern apartment and office blocks. Thus the layout leaves visitors free to choose their own itinerary, in the same way that China offers itself so simply and naturally to the eye of the foreign visitor.

Catalogue

To mark the occasion the Centre Pompidou is publishing a catalogue edited by Alfred Pacquement, with the assistance of Chantal Béret, Marion Bertagna, Laurent Le Bon and Alain Sayag. Articles by Chinese and Western specialists will be complemented by numerous illustrations.

Editions Centre Pompidou
22 x 22 cm, approx. 428 pages,
600 illustrations in colour. Price to be announced

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Useful information:

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This exhibition is part of the official programme for the Year of China in France.

It has been prepared in association with the China International Exhibition Agency, at the Chinese Ministry of Culture



with the backing of the French Association for Artistic Action (AFAA)

Opening hours

Exhibition open 25 June – 13 October 2003

Daily except Tuesdays, 11:00 – 21:00 (ticket office closes at 20:00)

Admission:

6.50 euros, concessions: 4.50 euros

Admission free to holders of the Centre Pompidou annual pass

Information: 01 44 78 12 33 or www.centrepompidou.fr



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THE YEAR OF CHINA IN FRANCE

The Year of China in France will take place from October 2003 to July 2004. As the first part of "France/China: Taking Turns", it is intended to enhance Franco-Chinese cooperation. It will be followed, from October 2004 to July 2005, by a "Year of France in China".

The Centre Pompidou's What About China? foreshadows the Year of China in France and is included in the official programme. The programme itself is part of the foreign cultural exchanges organised for several years now by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the French Association for Artistic Action. The Year of China follows the Year of Algeria and precedes the Year of Poland.

China is a country undergoing radical change. In 2008 it will host the Olympic Games in Beijing and in 2010 the World's Fair in Shanghai. The cultural exchanges with France planned for "France/China: Taking Turns" are part of a new context of international outreach.

The Year of China in France will give the French public the chance of a better understanding of the extent, diversity and dynamism of Chinese culture. The French have long been fascinated by China, but their view is often a simplistic and dated one.

Thus the Year of China in France will be an opportunity to renew French perceptions of Chinese culture. Many Chinese artists will be invited to participate in an event aimed at generating greater mutual understanding and the development of cooperative ventures.

The Year of China in France will explore three more or less emblematic aspects of Chinese culture: Eternal China, China land of tradition and diversity, and China land of creativity and modernity – with the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou as a flagship event.

Each of the three themes will find expression in a series of exhibitions, debates and major cultural events, including performances of traditional Chinese music and opera. The Year of China in France will also offer a host of discoveries in fields as varied as contemporary art, cinema, dance and literature – not to mention acrobatics, cuisine and the art of gardening.

WHAT ABOUT CHINA?

BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

® VISUAL ARTS

BAI Yiluo

Born in 1968, Bai Yiluo lives in Beijing and produces experimental works based on photographic development techniques. On show will be her *Fly Rayogram*.

CHEN Lingyang

Born in Zhejiang in 1975, Chen Lingyang lives in Beijing and is one of China's most promising young artists. Pursuing her own very private concerns, she has created a series of subtly elegant photos exploring the relationship between natural and feminine cycles. The work presented here is a photo mounted on a lightbox, showing an urban landscape at night. Despite the darkness the viewer descries a female body stretched out over the roofs of the buildings; the result is a disturbing atmosphere reminiscent of that found in Chinese mythology.

CUI Xiuwen

A young graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, painter Cui Xiuwen has recently begun to use video for intimist, highly personal works.

FANG Lijun

Born in 1963 and a graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, where he now lives, Fang Lijun is unchallenged as the leading representative of Cynical Realism, the movement that sprang out of the events of Tiananmen Square in the early 1990s. His brightly coloured pictures are instantly recognisable, their subject being always the same bald-headed character wearing the bored expression typical of the period. In the late 1990s Fang Lijun began creating enormous woodblock prints on hanging scrolls. The exhibition will present two previously unshown prints by the artist.

FENG Mengbo

Born in 1966 in Peking, where he still lives, Feng Mengbo is known worldwide as China's first multimedia artist. After a classical training as an oil painter, Feng began to explore the new technologies, to which he now brings real passion and total mastery. Here he will show his latest work: an interactive game requiring the player to dance on a specially prepared carpet.

GENG Jianyi

Born in Henan in 1965, Geng Jianyi holds a degree in oil painting from the Zhejiang province Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, where he currently lives. He has been a figure on China's contemporary art scene since the appearance of the New Wave in 1995, when he and Zhang Peili founded the Pool Society group. Both, via their performances and video experiments, have had a real influence on the young generation of the 1990s. For more than ten years now, Geng Jianyi has been working, slowly and continuously, on the meticulously prepared "books" that will be presented in the exhibition. Their torn-out pages, typographical variations and handprints left by his friends make each book a one-off illustration of a new concept.

HONG Lei

Born in 1960 in Jiangsu province, where he still lives, Hong Lei studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. A photography specialist, he has produced a number of series exploring the Chinese pictorial tradition. One uses black and white photographs that suggest painted landscapes, while another directly reproduces scenes from classical paintings. The artist modifies the internal reality of these scenes via changes to certain elements: the birds from the original paintings, for example, are shown as dead. More recently he has applied the same principle to an installation.

KAN Xuan

Born in Anhui province in 1972, Kan Xuan studied at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, where she was directly influenced by video artists like Zhang Peili. After working with a prolific group of young video makers in Shanghai, she moved to Beijing. Among her themes are the body and the sometimes insidious violence inflicted on it: in one video a dangerous-looking spider makes its way over two sleeping bodies as a children's song plays in the background; in another the artist swallows mouthfuls of undiluted condiments – pepper, glutamate, soy oil, cinnamon – and films her reactions.

LI Yongbin

A recluse living in a tiny apartment in Beijing, Li Yongbin has been working on the theme of time for several years. All his works are one-hour videos presenting the viewer with the changes that gradually come over an initially immobile countenance. The face of Face No. 4 emerges progressively through a mirror as the silvering is rubbed away, and merges with the reflection of an urban scene.

LIU Jianhua

A native of the province of Yunnan in south-western China – where he still lives, in the city of Kunming – Liu Jianhua is a representative of the Chinese kitsch school. He is particularly well known for his ceramic pieces showing women wearing coloured qipao (cheongsams): their heads and arms are missing and they are always shown in lascivious poses, in deep armchairs, spread across plates or on the bottom of wide traditional basins.

LIU Xiaodong

A teacher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, Liu Xiaodong is one of the most accomplished painters of his generation. Never straying from his chosen medium, he has a prolific output. In the early 1990s he emerged as leader of the New Generation of realists, a movement which, while remaining academic, rebelled against classical training by choosing its subject matter from everyday life.

LU Hao

In recent years Lu Hao, born in Beijing in 1969, has been concentrating on installations using plexiglas. In his use of this transparent substance for the creation of small scale buildings, cars, interiors, etc., he seems to be pinpointing the illusory nature of the material world. One of his major works is a colossal model of the city of Beijing that concentrates its main components – including the Forbidden City at the centre, the Temple of Heaven and Tiananmen Square – into an area of 80 square metres. In a subversive juggling with size, the modern high-rise neighbourhoods are made of transparent plexiglas, while the old parts of the city are shown using a larger scale.

LU Qing

In recent times Lu Qing, born in Beijing in 1964 and still living there, has produced a single work each year: a roll of silk some thirty metres long. Repeated folding produces a grid effect on the fabric and meticulously, patiently, square by square and day after day, the artist fills it in with black Chinese ink. Little by little the work, with its emphasis on the continuity of the creative process, begins to extend along the floor beyond the artist's work table.

MU Chen et SHAO Yinong

The husband and wife team of Mu Chen and Shao Yinong has been active in Peking for several years now. In the course of working on their families, spread throughout China, they have created a stunning photographic and calligraphic family tree. The project focuses on the age-old clan organisation of the Chinese family, but at the same time reveals its fragmentation over the last century and its present configuration. Mu Chen and Shao Yinong's most recent work is a series of photographs of halls used for mass meetings during the Maoist period and now totally abandoned.

SHI Hui

Born in Shanghai in 1955, sculptor Shi Hui studied at the Hangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Her recent work includes a series of wood-pulp stones imitating the complex forms of the "artificial mountains" educated Chinese used to decorate their gardens.

SHI Jinsong

A young artist from Hubei, in central China, Shi Jinsong has recently been working on installations made of sugar and caramel.

Sweet Life offers everyday objects representing the material aspirations of today's Chinese, cast in gleaming caramel and melting ever so slowly.

SONG Dong

Living in Beijing and working fulltime as an artist, Song Dong is especially known for his videos and machines; he has also attracted attention with his performances and installations, including the Edible Bonsais series shown here. Totally convincing when seen from a distance, the bonsais are in fact made of fish heads, pieces of meat, chicken wings and other food matter.

WANG Guangyi

Born in 1956 and a graduate of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing-based Wang Guangyi is the best known representative of the Political Pop movement that developed in the early 1990s. Drawing on the imagery of the Communist Revolution, Wang's large canvases intermingle symbols of the consumer society China opted for in the 1980s.

WANG Jianwei

Living in Beijing, this major video artist is endlessly in search of new horizons. Initially an oil painter, he soon turned to video and took out the Vidéo Cube prize at the Paris FIAC in 2001. His recent work deals with personal appropriation of collective history via the individual experience of the artist, a concern given expression in *Ceremony, My Visual Archive*, the video installation included in this exhibition: set opposite each other, two video screens show extracts from the revolutionary operas and war films that marked Wang's childhood. Nothing if not eclectic, Wang Jianwei created China's first work of experimental, multimedia theatre, *The Screen*, premiered in Beijing and shown at the Kunsten Festival in Brussels in 2000.

WENG Fen

Weng Fen lives in Haikou, on the island of Hainan in southern China. The quality of his work is proof that China's move into the contemporary art field is not limited to the big coastal cities. Well known for a series of photos on the model Chinese family – featuring himself, his wife and his daughter dressed in various stereotyped ways – he has also created a series of conceptual photographs titled *Straddling the Wall*, which shows a little girl astride a wall and, in the distant background, an urban panorama.

XIAO Yu

Initially trained as an oil painter, Xiao Yu wasted no time trying out performances and installations. His first work to attract attention was *Ruan*, the name of the small hybrid creature he created by grafting together the limbs of different animals and which he preserved in formol. This work was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1999. He continued this arresting exploration of human violence to nature in other, scientifically-oriented installations: creating Siamese-twin mice, for example, and grafting ducks' wings onto stuffed rabbits.

XING Danwen

Born in Xi'an in 1967, Xing Danwen studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and for three years in the United States. Specialising in photography, she filmed all the performances by her "East Village" artist friends – the village in question being Dong Cun, now part of Beijing's eastern suburbs – between 1994 and 1998. She is currently preparing the results for publication in the form of a personal diary. Xing has also made many TV documentaries and her video installations have been shown abroad. More recently her photographer's eye has been drawn to "heaps" of electronic junk.

XU Tan

One of the four members of the Big Tail Elephant group, active in Canton since 1991, Xu Tan is one of the major figures on the Chinese contemporary art scene. A body of work focusing largely on the media and the Internet has attracted the praise of foreign critics and Xu has contributed to many international exhibitions, including "Cities on the Move".

YAN Lei

Yan Lei was born in 1965 and studied at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. Bringing a rigorously conceptual approach to bear on a wide range of media, this prolifically imaginative artist divides his time between Hong Kong and his studio in the Beijing suburbs. His numerous performances and videos often take the form of incisive attacks on the established order, portraying torture, physical humiliation and other bodily experiences. Yan Lei also denounces the contemporary art system in China in a series of acrylic paintings titled "Are You Among The Invited To The German Exhibition?". The underlying issue in all his artistic experiments is "What is art? What is an artist?"

YANG Fudong

A graduate of the Hangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and now based in Shanghai, this young video artist works somewhere between video and cinema. His black and white film *An Estranged Paradise* was shown at the 2002 *Dokumenta* in Kassel. Thirteen minutes long and also in black and white, *Backyards - Hey Sun Is Rising* is one of the "Literati short films" Yang Fudong enjoys making and follows the doings of a group of young idlers armed with sabres in the streets of a village in southern China. There is no dialogue, but the music plays a vital part in this short film whose atmosphere is one of poetically imaginative undertones.

YANG Maoyuan

Born in 1966 and a graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Yang Maoyuan lives and works in Beijing. In parallel with his work as a painter he, like a number of other Chinese artists, has recently begun to take an interest in the human body and animals. In one series of striking installations he pumps up stuffed animals like balloons, until only the legs and head serve as reminders of the animal itself.

YANG Zhenzhong

Another of Shanghai's young video makers, Yang Zhenzhong studied painting before becoming interested in photography and video. Together with a few friends he plays an active part on the Shanghai cultural and artistic scene, long overshadowed by Beijing. He was notably one of the organisers of the 2000 "Art for Sale" exhibition. In his *I Will Die* video, shot in 2000, Yang Zhenzhong asks passers-by to recite the title sentence, resulting in thirty successive takes betraying their embarrassment. This ongoing project has already been carried out in Belgium and Germany and is programmed for France in the near future.

ZHANG Peili

Born in 1957 in Hangzhou, where he still lives, Zhang Peili was one of China's first artists to move into video and his influence on the succeeding generation is unmistakable. In 1987 he began exhibiting abroad and showed at the 45th Venice Biennale in 1993. After exploring personal experiences to do with resistance to physical and psychological pressure, he has now become interested in the relationship between the media and society, producing disturbing video installations.

ZHOU Chunya

One of China's great contemporary painters, Zhou Chunya was born in 1955. After several years in Germany he has returned to his hometown of Chengdu, where he is devoting himself to the creation of enormous, highly expressive canvases, many of which take green dogs as their subject.

ZHOU Tiehai

Born in and still a resident of Shanghai, Zhou Tiehai is a graduate of the University of Shanghai's Fine Arts Department. Adopting a critical conceptual approach, he has notably reworked Western magazines, giving them his own photographic and textual tilt; examples were shown at the Venice Biennale in 1999. Other work includes airbrush and other paintings denouncing abuses of power in international artistic and cultural exchanges, and a series of backdrops for photographic studios featuring Joe Camel from the cigarette advertisements. Practising his own form of subversion, he has now adapted this industrial, commercial method to the reproduction of traditional Chinese paintings.

ZHU Jia

Born in 1963 and holder of a degree from the oil painting department at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts, Zhu Jia has been making successful videos since 1998 and was a contributor to the "Cities on the Move" exhibition in 1999. His video *Passage*, an installation comprising three vertical projections, echoes the format of traditional Chinese painting: one of the videos shows faces in close-up, the other two use a backdrop of urban activity.

ZHUANG Hui

Born in 1963 in the western province of Gansu, Zhuang Hui now lives in Beijing. After working in a factory for ten years, he came to art through photography: an early black and white series titled *One and Thirty* shows him posing with other workers from the factory. He then went on to produce group images using a rotating device that enables the placing of hundreds of people on a single photo – an old technique still very popular in China, where it is used for school classes, village assemblies and work teams. While sticking to the tradition, Zhang Hui also fits himself into a corner of the picture. This series was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1999 and the Lyon Biennale in 2000. *Ten Years*, his most recent work, has been chosen for this exhibition: it takes the form of photos suspended in space, conveying impressions of his travels in China and around the world.

ARCHITECTURE

The most striking effect of economic growth on Chinese society is urban change. Accelerated urbanisation reflects a massive population shift towards the cities and a determination to get attention for the "globalisation showcases" now rapidly supplanting those of neighbouring Southeast Asia.

The exhibition also includes a slide show covering recent change in the three largest cities:

- Beijing, the political capital
- Shanghai, the "open" financial city
- Shen Zhen, the experimental new city created by Deng Xiaoping in 1982

The slides point up the emergence of generic cities, born of the last "great leap forward". Given today's urban hyperdensity and a shift in the concept of the city, some Chinese architects, among them Chang Yung Ho, Ma Qingyun, Wang Shu and Liu Jiakun, are coming up with experimental alternatives to the dominant "corporate architecture" approach.

CHANG Yung Ho

Born in Beijing in 1956, Chang Yung Ho took his degree at the Nankin Institute of Technology. He continued his studies in the United States – Master of Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley – where he also taught and became a licensed architect in 1989. In 1993 he returned to China, where he is seen more as a theoretician; he founded the Feichang Jianzhu Studio in Beijing and began to teach and to build. His first project, the Xishu bookshop in Beijing (1996), is an urban laboratory for exploring the issues of memory and experience that are also part of his "bamboo projects".

WANG Shu

Born in 1963 in Urumchi, in the autonomous region of Xinjiang, Wang Shu graduated from the Nankin Institute of Technology in 1998 and took his doctorate at Tongji University in Shanghai in 2000. He is the founder of the Amateur Architecture Studio in Hangzhou, where he also directs the School of Fine Arts Architecture Department. Both artist and architect, in 2000 he carried out the major University Library project in Suzhou and continues to work at transcending "critical regionalism".

LIU Jiakun

Born in 1956 in Chengdu, this graduate of the Chongqing Institute of Architecture in Sichuan province, opened his agency in 1999. A writer as well as an architect, Liu Jiakun divides his work between city and country, testing out a hybrid architecture that combines the Chinese heritage and the modernist tradition.

MA Qingyun

Born in 1965 in Xi'an, Ma Qingyun holds degrees from the Universities of Qinghua and Pennsylvania (1991). He founded the MRMADA agency in New York in 1995, followed by MADA in Shanghai in 2000. Totally opposed to the notion of "local" culture, Ma applies an urban strategy directly concerned with such concepts as megastructure, programmatic condensation, hyperdensity and the megacity, all of which appear in recent projects like the Shopping Complex and the University in Ningbo.

CINEMA

Four large cinema screens will be part of the exhibition itinerary, offering extracts from recent Chinese films selected by Le Monde cinema critic Jean-Michel Frodon.

Screen 1 *In Public*, by Jia Zhangke, 35m

Screen 2 *The Railway of Hope*, by Ning Ying, 40m

Screen 3 Montage of short extracts from films on the Big Image

Screen 4 Montage of short extracts from films on the city in China

A smaller screen will show *There's a Strong Wind in Beijing*, directed by Ju Anqi

OBJETS D'ART

EARLY OBJETS D'ART

Three early objets d'art will punctuate the itinerary, as part of its highly contemporary layout:

- A jade cong (cylinder)
(showing a human face, Liangzhu culture, 3100-2200 BC)
- Running hand calligraphy on a horizontal roll
(poem by Li Bai, calligraphy by Zhu Yunming, Ming Dynasty, 1460-1527 AD)
- Bronze mirror
(Western Han Dynasty, 221 BC)

EXAMPLES OF POPULAR ART

On show will be pieces from the collection of François Dautresme, who died only recently. Founder of the Compagnie Française de l'Orient et de la Chine, Dautresme began acquiring in 1960, amassing an enormous collection of handicrafts from all over China. Some of the works will be displayed in large showcases. The "Mao" showcase will welcome the arriving visitor, while the back wall of the gallery will be devoted to recycled pieces and samples of wrapping.

MUSIC

Marie-Hélène Bernard, a musicologist specialising in contemporary China, has created two programmes based on extracts from the work of six composers. Terminals equipped with headphones will allow visitors to listen to entire pieces by the same composers.

GUO Wenjing

Born in 1956, Guo Wenjing is the leading composer in China today and teaches composition at the Central Conservatory in Beijing. His most recent opera *Yeyan* (*The Night of the Banquet*) was performed at the 2001 Autumn Festival.

ZHANG Xiaofu

Zhang Xiaofu was born in 1954. After studying in France, he founded China's first Centre for Electro-Acoustic Music at the Central Conservatory in Beijing.

HE Xuntian

Born in Sichuan in 1954, He Xuntian quickly attracted attention with the powerful modernity of his piece *Tianlai* (*Sounds of Nature*). He teaches composition at the Conservatory in Shanghai.

CUI Jian

Born in 1961 and based in Beijing, he is the best known of China's rockers. He also composes film music.

JIA Daqun

Born in 1955, Jia Daqun teaches composition in Shanghai. In Chinese musical circles he represents a movement emphasising structure and theoretical developments.

QIN Wencheng

Qin Wencheng represents the younger generation of Chinese composers. Originally from Shanghai, he recently began teaching at the Central Conservatory in Beijing.

LIU Yuan

Born in 1959, this graduate of the Shanghai Conservatory now teaches in Beijing. Liu Yuan writes for symphony orchestras and was recently commissioned to write a piece for the traditional music ensemble Tian Yin.

ZHU Jian'Er

Born in 1922 and a member of the pioneer generation, Zhu Jian'Er is still busy composing in Shanghai. In the course of a long career he has explored a wide range of styles.