Cai Guo-Qiang: Traveler
Unlucky Year: Unrealized Projects from 2003 ~ 2004
An artist journeys through life like a traveler — sometimes luck runs with him, sometimes it turns against him. The nine gunpowder drawings chosen for this exhibition depict some of the unrealized explosion projects from 2003-2004. By revisiting works from the perspective of my dilemmas and challenges, the exhibition addresses the state of art and the art world today. The drawing installation will perhaps allow time and space for imagination, creativity, and thought.

Cai Guo-Qiang
June 2004

Cai Guo-Qiang: Traveler
Unlucky Year: Unrealized Projects from 2003 ~ 2004

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Building Chinese Tower in Paris
Project Proposal for China-France Cultural Years
Paris, France
Proposed in 2003

Across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower, a platform is built on top of the fountain of Trocadero. On the night of the event, a Chinese pagoda explodes from the platform and grows upwards until it reaches the same height as the Eiffel Tower across the river. The program is completed in nine sessions of explosions and 180 seconds.

Organized for the 2004 China-France Cultural Years, this project was funded by the Cultural Ministry of China. The building of this Chinese Tower in Paris was a symbol of the country's openness, ambition and power. It was also the artist's lighthearted take on the iconic Eiffel Tower.

The project was not realized due to the differences in cultural and professional approaches between the Chinese, French and Americans. The bureaucracy involved delayed the administrative work required for the project.
**Escalator: Explosion Project for Centre Pompidou**  
Paris, France  
Proposed in 2002

The preliminary proposal staged the project in three segments. First, bright flashes of light in the form of an escalator grows rhythmically in the sky for approximately 12 seconds. Then, after a three-second pause, an outline of the Pompidou façade flashes in the dark sky for three seconds. Lastly, after another three-second pause, gunpowder fuse descends the exterior escalator at the speed of 20 meters per second. Traveling time from top to bottom of the escalator is approximately seven seconds. The entire event is completed in approximately 30 seconds, burning the iconic image of the Pompidou into the night sky.

The densely populated business and residential district in which the museum is located made the safety, security and permission process for the project a very daunting one. In the end, the project was abandoned in favor of the other project proposed at the same time, *Building Chinese Tower in Paris.*
Spider Web
Project Proposal for The British Museum 250th Anniversary
London, United Kingdom
Proposed in 2003

Event Site: The British Museum front façade and courtyard
Documentation exhibit: inside gallery of the British Museum
Time: 7 June 2003, dusk
Materials: gunpowder fuse (1000 meters, with the speed of 40 meters per second),
and waterproofing plastic sleeves (1000 meters).

Gunpowder fuses are weaved into the shape of spider webs at a pyrotechnic company's
facility outside of London. On the afternoon of the event, the fuses are brought to
the museum. The webs are first installed on the two wings of the building with the
aid of a crane or cherry-picker. The big web for the center courtyard is laid on top of
the museum roof. One hour before dusk, the web is stretched out from the rooftop
to the courtyard ground. The audience will gather in a pre-designated area in the
courtyard. The web is ignited on the right and the lighted fuses race their way to the
center and then to the left. The whole explosion will take six seconds.

The spider has never been considered friendly to people. This is a misunderstanding.
In the natural world, spiders eliminate insects. Historically, the creative sophistication of
the spider's web has inspired weaving, net-making and architectural construction.
In Asia, the spider is considered to have spiritual power. In Africa, it is seen as a
medium between man and god. In ancient Rome, it acted as a weather forecast. In
England, it is a symbol of wealth. And in northern Europe, it is a god of love. To Cai,
the spider is an excellent site-specific "installation artist."

The Spider Web at The British Museum also refers to the dome over the building's
Great Court. It can be a metaphor for the museum's collection, which has cast a
web into the wealth of all the civilized worlds and, at the same time, has shown us
the intricate connections between all great civilizations. The web covering the
museum façade might bring the association of something ancient and decrepit. But
through flame and explosion, it delivers the messages of "No Destruction/No
Construction" and "Fire Brings Life" that are prevalent in Asian philosophy. It also
expresses this historical museum's very contemporary self-deprecating humor.

The museum underwent a directorial change during this time. The project did not
seem to fit the new direction of the museum and was never realized.
Bigfoot's Footprints: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 6
Project Proposal for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, and National Museum of African Art; Smithsonian Institution
Washington DC, United States
Proposed in 2002

Materials: solute shells embedded with computer chips
Time: dusk on the appointed date (evening of the exhibitions’ openings or another appropriate date)
Duration: approximately three minutes

Starting from the circular courtyard of the Hirshhorn, giant footprints appear in the sky, traveling toward the sculpture garden. They then circle around the Washington Monument, making the sky over the Freer and Sackler Galleries and the National Museum of African Art their destination, where they disappear into the night.

A strong gesture on the final theme of conversing with the unseen, this event ties in with a proposed Crop Circle installation inside the Hirshhorn. It also connects the collaborative efforts between the three museums while opening them up to the larger community of Washington DC. The idea of Bigfoot's Footprints was first conceived in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as a proposal to take place on the grounds that bordered East and West Germany. It was imagined that an invisible giant walked across borders without restriction, leaving only his fiery footprints behind. Today, with the advancement of technology, we are able to achieve this project in the sky. The location and time frame of the project today is equally significant, although perhaps more complex. It is a meditation on our history, and a reflection of our future discourse.

The daunting tasks of raising funds and organizing the complex project prevented the project to be realized.
Out of Desperate Misfortune Comes Bliss
Project proposal for the Ground Breaking Event at the former Defense Ministry site
Tokyo, Japan
Proposed in 2004

At the excavation site of the former Japanese Defense Ministry, red colored pillars of fire explode out of the ground in the form of the "Stagnation" hexagram from the I-Ching. This is a symbolic gesture to cleanse the negative and unclean energy of the past, similar to a farmer burning his field. Immediately following, green smoke shells explode in the sky in a growing "Advance" hexagram pattern. A final flash of the horizontal "Advance" hexagram echoes the red "Stagnation" sign as a projection of the future.

Just prior to the project in April 2004, multiple issues, such as Japanese hostages being held in Iraq, and local residents' concern about the possible noise level of the project, were given as reasons to cancel the project. However, perhaps the real estate company that was developing the site was not prepared to commission an artwork with such powerful political and historical significance. As a result, the responsibility and burden were too heavy for the organizers to bear.
Sun Ship
Project proposal for EXPO 2005 Aichi Japan
Proposed in 2003

In daylight, smoke shells embedded with computer chips are shot into the sky to form a large ancient Egyptian Sun Ship. As the form of the ship dissipates in the wind, it turns into a white cloud. This work proposes the use of state-of-the-art technology to continue an ancient dialogue between man and heaven, transmitting stories beyond history and culture.

The fear of scaring a particularly rare bird caused the cancellation of the event, which was sited close to a bird sanctuary.
Movement Cultivates Vitality
Project proposal for EXPO 2005 Aichi Japan
Proposed in 2004

1. Clouds
Tiger tail and flying dragon fireworks are installed on nine truck beds. As the trucks drive on the highway along the project site, the tiger tails and small dragons are fired to form a moving cloud.

2. Rainbow
A long row of small firework fountains is fixed to the exterior of the train that bypasses the EXPO Opening Ceremony site. As it moves forward, a waterfall in rainbow colors are fired from the train.

3. Aurora
Fireworks are installed on construction cranes at the ceremony site. As the cranes swing around, fireworks are fired to make Northern Light-like effects.

These ideas present the Chinese philosophy of Movement Cultivates Vitality – that movement and life force are derived out of movement itself.

The bullet train track was located near the ceremony site. The reason the proposal was turned down was out of fear that smoke from the project might obscure the sight line and cause the train to automatically stop.
Bird of Light
Project Proposal for Miramar Air Show, San Diego Art Museum
San Diego, United States
Proposed in 2004

Roman candles are fixed to the wings of an airplane in a wave formation. As the plane flies across the night sky, the roman candles are ignited in succession with computer controls from the cockpit. Silver-white lights continuously illuminate the dark sky, creating the illusion of the wings of a bird flapping and gliding across the universe. Perhaps this piece reflects the humanistic and artistic imagination of man’s dream of flight.

Two proposals were made for the Air Show. The budget permitted only one. The daytime project was chosen for the event.
Xihu Guan Chao (Tide Watching on West Lake)
Hangzhou, China
Proposed in 2003

Outside the city of Hangzhou, the river Qiantang flows into the ocean, where the tidal wave is world-renowned — many people come for tide watching. Inside Hangzhou city is Xihu, the West Lake, where many love stories are inspired and told. The lake is known for its beauty and tranquility.

Ninety thousand meters of gunpowder fuse, of 40-meters-per-second speed, are strung with 4,200 red shells and laid out on the placid West Lake. Once lit, the explosion comes in successive waves, sweeping across the lake like the tidal waves of Qiantang, translating a natural wonder into a manmade wonder.

When the work progressed to the technical stage, Cai Studio's Japanese technician repeatedly warned the organizers of the risks and challenges of making a project on the water. The warnings caused the Chinese organizers to lose confidence, and the project was cancelled.
Gunpowder Drawings:

5
Drawing for Building Chinese Tower in Pairs
Gunpowder on paper
300 cm x 400 cm
2003

6 - 7
Drawing for Escalator: Explosion Project for Centre Pompidou
Gunpowder on paper
300 cm x 400 cm
2003

10 - 11
Bigfoot’s Footprints: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 6
Gunpowder on paper
200 cm x 680 cm
1991

*Only three gunpowder drawings had been made at the time this booklet was designed and printed.*

Cal Guo-Qiang

Born on December 8, 1957, Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China. Currently lives and works in New York.

Awards: CalArts/Apert Award in the Arts, USA, 2001
The Venice Biennial International Prize – Golden Lion, 48th Venice Biennial, Italy, 1999

Selected Solo Exhibitions and Projects:

2004  Curated BMoCA: Bunker Museum of Contemporary Art, Kinmen, Taiwan
Cai Guo-Qiang: Traveler, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA

2003  Cai Guo-Qiang: Inopportune, MASS MoCA, North Adams, USA
Man, Eagle and Eye in the Sky: Kite Project for Siwa, Siwa, Egypt
Light Cycle: Explosion Project for Central Park, New York, USA
Ye Gong Hao Long: Explosion Project for Tate Modern, Tate Modern, London, UK
Cai Guo-Qiang: An Arbitrary History, S.M.A.K. Gent, Belgium

2002  Cai Guo-Qiang: Ethereal Flowers, Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea Trento, Trento, Italy
Cai Guo-Qiang, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China

2001  An Arbitrary History, Musee d’art Contemporain de Lyon, Lyon, France
Artistic Direction for APEC Cityscape Fireworks, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, Shanghai, China

2000  Project for Projects. Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, France

Selected Bibliography:

An Arbitrary History, Lyon: Musee d’Art Contemporain de Lyon, 2002
Cai Guo-Qiang, Trento: Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea Trento, 2002