

A WINDOW SUDDENLY OPENS
Contemporary Photography in China

ACCESSIBILITY BROCHURE

Sound and Visual Descriptions

HIRSHHORN

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EXHIBITION ENTRANCE

A Window Suddenly Opens: Contemporary Photography in China

Wall Text:

The past three decades have borne witness to profound political, cultural, and technological shifts in China. Nowhere are these changes more evident than in the evolution of photography from a political and documentary tool into a conceptual art form. Artists who had been trained in more traditional media, such as painting, recognized the camera's unique capacity to capture and distill the dizzying transformation of the world around them as the rise of international commerce led to new, increasingly urban lifestyles.

The beginning of the contemporary experimental art scene in China dates to the 1980s. After decades of isolation and strict control over artistic expression, the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 ushered in an era of openness, including international exchange, a flourishing of intellectual activity, and the creation of a robust artistic avant-garde. This exhilarating burst of freedom came to an abrupt halt in 1989 when pro-democracy protests at Tiananmen Square were violently crushed by the government, but in the wake of this tragedy, a dissident art scene emerged in Beijing that was centered around self-expression. This emphasis represented a dramatic departure from the collective ethos of earlier generations, a shift that artists Rong Rong and Liu Zheng documented from 1996 to 1998 in their self-published magazine *New Photo*. As they explained in the preface to the third issue, "When *concept* enters Chinese photography, it is as if a window suddenly opens in a room that has been sealed for years. We can now breathe comfortably, and we can now reach a new meaning of 'new photography.'"

This exhibition features more than 175 works by 25 artists who have revolutionized the medium of photography in China over the past 30 years. The majority of the works on view will enter the Hirshhorn Museum's permanent collection in a landmark gift, offering the Museum the capacity to represent the prescient voices of these artists alongside those participating in other avant-garde movements around the world.

Curated by Betsy Johnson, Assistant Curator, with Alice Phan, Curatorial Assistant

For sound and visual descriptions of the works on view, as well as full exhibition text, please visit <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/awsoaccess>.

No device? Limited print and Braille versions are available for reference at the welcome desk in the lobby.

For unique videos of artists speaking about their work, use our award-winning art guide, Hi, wherever you see this symbol [a black-and-white eyeball with three eyelashes at the top left]. Open hi.si.edu, then point your phone at a work of art.

A Window Suddenly Opens: Contemporary Photography in China has been made possible with support from the Hirshhorn International Council and Hirshhorn Collectors' Council.

Visual Description:

The entrance of *A Window Suddenly Opens: Contemporary Photography in China* features a title wall painted from floor to ceiling in a bright stop-sign red. To the left of the red wall is a charcoal-colored wall with small white text (wall text above). At the center of the red wall to the right of an open doorway, large white text reads:

A WINDOW SUDDENLY OPENS
Contemporary Photography in China

The exhibition entrance is located in a rectangular bay with two escalators at its center, one moving up and the other down. To the right of the red exhibition entrance wall is a long, curved wall with 36 large photographs arranged in two rows that fill almost its entire width.

ESCALATOR LOBBY

Song Dong

B. Beijing, China, 1966

Stamping the Water (Performance in the Lhasa River, Tibet, 1996)

1996

36 color photographs

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Galvanized by the tragic conclusion of the pro-democracy protests at Tiananmen Square in 1989, Song Dong retreated to his studio, where he crafted performances that turned a critical eye on the strict policies implemented by the Chinese government. In 1994, he debuted *Another Class, Do You Want to Play with Me?*, a performance-based installation that featured numerous faucets and pipes overhead, piles of test papers strewn on the floor, wordless books, and empty blackboards ready to be filled by participants as a critique of the educational system. The following year, he began the daily *Water Writing Diary* (1995–present), recording each day with fleeting text written in water on a rock. In *Stamping the Water*, which builds on these formative works, Song Dong employed a large wooden seal imprinted with the Chinese character for “water” to stamp the surface of the Lhasa River in Tibet for the duration of an hour. This futile act conjures the ineffectiveness of human action, regardless of effort or intent. As Song Dong recounts, “I exerted great force, but in the end left no trace.”

Visual Description:

Filling the center of a large, curved white wall are 36 3-by-4-foot color photographs. The photographs are arranged in two stacked rows of 18 images each. Each photograph shows a nearly identical landscape scene with water in the foreground and mountains and green trees in the background. At the center of each image, a person in dark clothing is squatting waist-deep in the water. The person holds a large wooden stamp roughly the size of their head with a Chinese character for “water.” The images show the progression of an action, like stills from a movie. Across the images, the person raises the large stamp with both hands overhead and brings it down to “stamp” the water, which produces a large splash.

GALLERY 1

Wall Text:

HISTORICAL TIMELINE | 1976–PRESENT

Entering China shortly after the 1839 announcement of its invention in France, photography developed as a tool for portraiture, news reportage, advertisement, and art well into the early twentieth century. In the 1930s and '40s, it was used for war propaganda, and, following the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, it was employed to create an idealized version of New China to generate support for the Communist government. For the next three decades, photographers were instructed to work in this style, following Chairman Mao Zedong's orders to produce photographs that would manipulate the masses. What follows is a chronology of events that contributed to the development of photography as an art form since Mao's death in 1976.

1976

In early April, more than one million people gather in Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of Premier Zhou Enlai, who had struggled for power against the current governing regime. The demonstrations, which later become known as the April Fifth Movement, are forcefully suppressed and go unmentioned in official media. At great personal risk, several protesters photograph the movement, giving rise to an era of citizen photojournalism in China.

On September 9, Chairman Mao Zedong dies, and in October, the members of the ruling Gang of Four (Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenxuan) are put in prison. The Cultural Revolution comes to an end.

Image description: A black-and-white photograph shows a crowd of people. At the center, a person is elevated so that their torso is entirely above the heads of the crowd. Their right arm is raised and their left hand holds a paper. They appear to be speaking.

Image credit: Luo Xiaoyun (b. 1953, Beijing, China), *Mainstay*, April 4, 1976. Gelatin silver print; 2 9/16 x 3 15/16 in. (6.7 × 10 cm). From Claire Roberts, *Photography and China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 122, fig. 93. © Luo Xiaoyun

1978

The Beijing Spring, a brief period of political and artistic freedom, begins in November under the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping. In December, Deng announces the Open Door Policy, heralding a new era of economic and social reforms and increased openness to capitalism and Western culture. The same month, the first Chinese grassroots photography organization, the April Photo Society, is founded.

Image description: A black-and-white photograph shows people marching together holding large signs in Chinese.

Image credit: Archival footage of protesters from the documentary *Beijing Spring* (2021; dir. Andy Cohen and Gaylen Ross). Wang Rui/AC FILMS. *New York Times*, December 9, 2021

1979

In January, the book *The People's Mourning* is published, featuring approximately 500 photographs taken during the April Fifth Movement.

The one-child policy is introduced, requiring couples from China's ethnic Han majority to limit their families to one child. The policy is officially implemented in 1980 and stays in effect through 2016, leading to population imbalance due to selective abortion and infanticide targeting girls and a larger percentage of the population now aging out of the work force.

Image description: At the center of a collaged image is a gold hammer and sickle symbol inside a faded circular red wreath. The wreath and symbol are shrouded with a red ribbon. To either side of the central emblem, a sculpted crowd of people face the center. A black register with gold Chinese characters fills the bottom of the image.

Image credit: Cover, *The People's Mourning* (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1979). From Asia Art Archive, *Departing from Socialist Realism, April Photo Society, 1979–1981*

On April 1, an exhibition organized by the April Photo Society titled *Nature, Society, and Man* opens in the Orchid Room, Zhongshan Park, Beijing, showcasing 280 works by 51 artists.

Image description: A black-and-white photograph shows a group of people standing together in front of a sign with Chinese characters.

Image credit: Members of the April Photo Society in front of the venue of the *Nature, Society, and Man* exhibition, April 1979. From Asia Art Archive, *Departing from Socialist Realism, April Photo Society, 1979–1981*

1980

The southern city of Shenzhen is designated the first “special economic zone,” leading to its rapid transformation from a fishing village to a major manufacturing city. Today Shenzhen has a population of 12.7 million, the fourth-highest in China, and is often referred to as China’s Silicon Valley due to its status as a major technological hub and one of the fastest-growing regions in China.

Image description: A cityscape with tall skyscrapers is seen in front of a sunrise. The silhouette of a mountain is seen in the distant background.

Image credit: Shenzhen, China, as seen in 2021. Photo: Charlie Fong

1985

In November, a retrospective of Robert Rauschenberg's work opens at the National Art Gallery in Beijing. This is the public's first opportunity to see original works by a contemporary Western artist.

Image description: An image of an artwork is seen on a long, thin scroll with wooden handles on either end. Images are painted and collaged along the middle of the scroll, with repeating images of large wagon wheels, Chinese iconography (such as a dragon head and warrior figure), and buildings, trees, and bodies in motion. The images are layered with shiny silver and gold shapes and painted sections of bright blue and orange.

Image credit: Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008, b. Port Arthur, Texas), *Untitled / ROCI CHINA*, 1985. Silkscreen ink, acrylic, fabric, gold and silver leaf, and graphite on fabric-laminated paper with rattan; 68 1/8 × 366 1/8 × 4 3/8 in. (173 × 930 × 11.2 cm).
© Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

1986

In January, Deng Xiaoping is named Man of the Year by *Time* magazine. He is depicted on *Time*'s cover as part of a collage with Robert Rauschenberg's work *China*.

Image description: A *TIME* magazine cover shows an older Chinese man, collaged images, and the words "MAN OF THE YEAR" / "Deng Xiaoping."

Deng Xiaoping on the cover of *Time* magazine, January 1986

1989

In February, the first officially sponsored exhibition of avant-garde art, *China/ Avant-Garde*, is held at the National Art Gallery in Beijing. The exhibition is temporarily shut down just two hours after opening when one of the artists, Xiao Lu, fires a pellet gun at her work.

Image description: A woman in black stands with her right arm outstretched from the camera. Her right hand holds a small gun that is pointed toward a structure with a red cross on a mirrored wall behind a pedestal in the center. A red telephone sits on the pedestal. The receiver hangs by a wire to the side of the pedestal. On either side of the pedestal are what look like display cases with clothed mannequins.

Image credit: Xiao Lu (b. Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China, 1962), *Dialogue*, 1989/printed 2006. Chromogenic print; 31 7/8 × 47 1/8 in. (81 × 119.7 cm). Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Bingyi Huang (187.2008). © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

1989

Between April and June, thousands of pro-democracy student protesters gather in Beijing's Tiananmen Square after the death of pro-reform political leader Hu Yaobang. During the last two weeks of May, martial law is declared in Beijing, and hundreds of thousands of troops enter the city. On the morning of June 4, troops advance on Tiananmen Square, killing and arresting thousands of protesters. A final death toll will never be confirmed for what later becomes known as the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre.

Image description: A man stands in front of four tanks lined up on a street.

Image credit: Jeff Widener, *Tank Man, Tiananmen Square*, 1989. Associated Press

1990

Government crackdowns cause avant-garde art activities to decline in China. In January, the periodical *Fine Arts in China*, which had played an important role in the avant-garde movement, is closed by the authorities. In September, *Art Monthly* is restaffed with conservatives.

In November, the Shanghai Stock Exchange opens as the first stock market in Communist China.

1992

The International Monetary Fund ranks China's economy as the third-largest in the world, after the United States and Japan.

1993

A community of artists forms in a low-rent area on the eastern outskirts of Beijing, just beyond the Third Ring Road. Later renamed Beijing's East Village, its artists explore photography as an adjunct to experimental performance art and Conceptual art until police disband it the following year.

In June, Chinese avant-garde artists appear for the first time at the Venice Biennale.

1994

The Internet arrives in China.

Ai Weiwei, Xu Bei, Zeng Xiaojun, and Feng Boyi privately publish *The Black Cover Book*, containing recent works by 28 Chinese artists alongside essays by Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp, and Jeff Koons and contemporary art news from around the world. Zhuang Hui joins Ai Weiwei and Zeng Xiaojun to publish two later editions: *The White Cover Book* (1995) and *The Grey Cover Book* (1998).

In December, construction begins on the Three Gorges Dam, a hydroelectric gravity dam that will become the world's largest power station by 2012. Built to protect residents of the surrounding area from floods, the dam has created environmental problems for China by triggering landslides and altering the ecosystem.

Image description: A large gray concrete dam with bright red structures on top fills the center of a photograph. Dark green trees fill the foreground. To the right of the dam is a large body of water with tree-lined mountains behind it.

Image credit: Three Gorges Dam, Hubei Province, China, 2009

1996

The Shanghai Biennale holds its first show at the Shanghai Art Museum from March 1996 through June 1997. It later becomes the most established contemporary art biennale in China.

In May, *New Photo* magazine is founded by Liu Zheng and Rong Rong. A total of four issues, all photocopied and hand-bound, are published until 1998. Circulation is limited, with only 20 copies for the first two issues and 30 copies for the last two issues.

Image description: A dark magazine cover reads "NEW PHOTO NO. 1" across its top. At the center is a photocopied image of people carrying large tankards; some look over their left shoulders at the camera. A bright red string binds the magazine on the left.

Image credit: The first issue of *New Photo* (1996), founded by Rong Rong and Liu Zheng. Photo: Deane Madsen

1997

The United Kingdom transfers the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China.

1999

Nineteen Chinese artists, including Ai Weiwei, Ma Liuming, Zhuang Hui, Zhang Peili, and Zhang Huan, participate in the 48th Venice Biennale, which opens on June 12.

Starbucks opens its first store in China in the Forbidden City, Beijing.

2000

The third edition of the Shanghai Biennale, organized by curator and critic Hou Hanru, introduces foreign artists to a Chinese audience.

2001

In March, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (dir. Ang Lee) wins Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards.

In December, China joins the World Trade Organization.

2002

Digital photography expands as the Nokia 7650—the first camera phone in China—enters the market. (The iPhone becomes available in China in 2009.)

2003

China sends astronaut Yang Liwei into space, becoming the third country in the world to send a human into space.

Image description: A man in a space suit leans out of a circular opening, waving one arm.

Yang Liwei, China's first human in space, on his maiden flight in 2003. China Global Television Network

2007

Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, a nonprofit art center in Beijing, is established by photographer Rong Rong and his wife, Japanese photographer inri. Three Shadows is the first contemporary art space in China dedicated exclusively to photography.

In October, China launches its first moon orbiter, *Chang'e 1*.

Image description: Gray buildings encircle a green courtyard and a red sculpture.

Image credit: Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing

2008

Apple opens its first store in Sanlitun, an entertainment and shopping hub in Beijing.

In August, Beijing hosts the Olympic Games.

Image description: A group of people in red stand in the center of a large, crowded circular stadium. Fireworks can be seen in the sky through a large opening in the stadium's ceiling.

Image credit: Beijing's National Stadium (Bird's Nest) lit by fireworks and the Olympic flame during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, Beijing, 2008. © 2008 / International Olympic Committee (IOC) / Richard Juilliart—All rights reserved

2009

China's central government blocks Facebook, Twitter, and Google.

2010

Shanghai's status as an international city is expanded by Expo 2010, running from May 1 to October 31 with the theme "Better City—Better Life." Over 73 million people visit and 246 countries and international organizations participate.

In October, jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China."

Image description: Against a dark black sky, a large cone-shaped sculpture is illuminated in lights—red at the top, yellow in the middle, blue at the bottom. The sculpture is reflected in still dark water below.

Image credit: Night view of an illuminated "sun valley" structure, part of the Expo Axis complex, Expo 2010, Shanghai. © Gary718 / Shutterstock.com

2011

In January, WeChat, now the most popular social media platform in China, is launched.

China overtakes Japan as the world's second-largest economy.

In April, Ai Weiwei is detained in Beijing, and police search his studio. He is held for 81 days under "economic crimes" without any official charges filed. He is later permitted to move abroad.

2012

Official figures suggest that city dwellers outnumber China's rural population for the first time.

2013

Xi Jinping assumes office as president of the People's Republic of China.

Art Basel Hong Kong holds its first fair.

2014

China's central government begins to block Instagram.

2015

The Shanghai Center of Photography (SCôP) opens in May.

Image description: On the front of a gray building with both curved and straight walls hangs a large black and white photograph of two people sitting and facing each other.

Image credit: Shanghai Center of Photography. © Shen Zhonghai. Courtesy Shanghai Center of Photography

2017

China overtakes the United Kingdom as the second-largest art market after the United States, accounting for 21 percent of the \$63 billion in global art sales this year.

China passes a new cyber security law that gives it more control over data from foreign and domestic firms.

2018

The National People's Congress votes to remove a two-term limit on the presidency, allowing Xi Jinping to remain "President for Life."

Lianzhou, a small city in China's southern Guangdong Province that is home to an acclaimed annual photography festival, opens the Lianzhou Museum of Photography, the country's first state-owned museum dedicated to photography.

2019

In June, months of anti-government and pro-democracy protests begin in Hong Kong as citizens clash with the government over a proposal to allow extradition to mainland China.

Image description: A crowd of marchers wearing surgical masks and holding flags and signs fills a street.

Image credit: Protesters march in Hong Kong, 2019. Lam Yik Fei, *New York Times*

2020

COVID-19 breaks out in Hubei Province and swiftly grows into a worldwide pandemic.

2021

Cao Fei becomes the first Chinese artist to win the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize, one of the most prestigious awards in the field of international photography.

Image description: An image shows two costumed figures facing each other, crouched in an attack position on an outdoor staircase and holding knives.

Image caption: Cao Fei (b. Guangzhou, Guangdong, China, 1978), *Deep Breathing* from *Cosplayers Series*, 2004. Inkjet print on paper; 29 1/2 × 39 3/8 in. (75 × 100 cm). © Cao Fei. Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space

2022

The Winter Olympics in Beijing successfully open, despite some boycotts from the West due to political tensions.

Zhang Peili

B. Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China, 1957

Continuous Reproduction

1993

25 black and white photographs

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Known as the “father of video art” in China, Zhang Peili was an active member of the '85 Art New Wave Movement, a group of intellectuals who sought to reconnect to the lineage of Modernism in China that had been interrupted by political suppression from the 1940s through the 1970s. Strongly influenced by European Dada and Surrealism and American Pop art, the '85 Art New Wave promoted a critical engagement with art through public programs such as performances, lectures, conferences, and unofficial exhibitions. Optimistic about the potential for real change, this movement flourished from 1985 until 1989, at which point government crackdowns on artistic expression forced artists to find unofficial avenues of support.

Continuous Reproduction, a rare photographic work by Zhang Peili, steadily degrades a Mao-era propaganda image of peasant girls over the course of twenty-five frames. A temporal meditation on the instability of memory, this seminal work encapsulates the conceptual framing that admitted new possibilities into photographic practice in the early 1990s.

Visual Description:

Twenty-five black-and-white photographs are arranged in a five-by-five grid. The photographs are roughly letter-sized, each with a white border and thin black frame. Each image depicts a group of five smiling girls facing the camera. In the middle of the image, one girl holds a wooden handle across her shoulder, with rope suspended to carry an item beyond the image frame.

At first glance, the images all appear the same, but as the viewer's gaze moves across from left to right and then down the grid, each image becomes less clear until the last image has only the faintest resemblance to the first. The details grow fuzzier and appear as though they were printed with less ink throughout the progression.

Zhang Huan

B. Anyang, Henan, China, 1965

Left to right:

Foam 7

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Foam 6

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Foam 9

1998

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Raised by his grandmother in poverty in the countryside near Anyang, Henan Province, Zhang Huan moved to Beijing in 1991 to study oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He soon found himself living among other artists in Da Shan Village, Chaoyang, which he later was instrumental in renaming Beijing's East Village. There, Zhang Huan staged several significant performances that were photographed by fellow East Village resident Rong Rong and can be viewed in the next gallery.

In the first half of 1998, prior to moving to New York later that year, Zhang Huan created a series of fifteen photographic self-portraits titled *Foam*, which depict him slathered with foam holding portraits of his family in his open mouth. He explains, "Life is like a dream. It is transient. Just like foam, it sparkles and dies out in less than a second. I love this family and I hate this family. I wanted to eat them. I wanted to eat myself." Visually reminiscent of the iconic Man Ray portrait of Marcel Duchamp covered in shaving lather, the *Foam* series connects Zhang Huan's work with the Duchampian legacy of Conceptual art at this critical moment when he was severing ties with the past and preparing to leave China.

Zhuang Hui

B. Yumen, Gansu, China, 1963

One and Thirty—Artist

1995–1996

30 black and white photographs

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

The son of a professional photographer, Zhuang Hui grew up accompanying his father on trips to take portraits of regiments living along the northwestern border of China. He recalls the excitement of family members lining up to watch his father at work. This experience generated a lifelong interest in art as a social practice, and he collaborated with various social and political groups to produce portraits and art projects that visualize their shared identity. After witnessing the interplay between photography and performance in Beijing's East Village, Zhuang Hui decided to embark upon a series of portraits of artists, enlisting the help of a friend with a camera since he did not own one himself. He photographed thirty artists, inserting himself into each frame as the "constant," always wearing the same striped sweater. He later traveled to take similar portraits of peasants, workers, and children, completing a total of four iterations of the *One and Thirty* series.

Visual Description:

Thirty black and white photographs, each roughly the size of a small poster, are arranged in a grid with three rows of ten images. Each image shows two people standing one in front of the other, both facing left. In each image, the person to the left is different, but the person behind them to the right, the artist Zhuang Hui, wearing a striped sweater, stays the same. Behind the two people, the locations change, but all images show the pair in front of a brick wall, fence, or plain wall.

CORE GALLERY

Wall Text:

When *concept* enters Chinese photography, it is as if a window suddenly opens in a room that has been sealed for years. We can now breathe comfortably, and we can now reach a new meaning of “new photography.”

—Rong Rong and Liu Zheng, preface, *New Photo*, no. 3, 1997

GALLERY 2

Wall Text:

Reviving Self-Expression

After the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre in 1989, Chinese artists faced tight restrictions on official exhibitions and freedom of speech. Many chose to flee the country, but others who remained in China went underground, organizing their own exhibitions, publications, and events with the limited means available to them. On the eastern side of the dynamically changing city of Beijing, a short-lived artist community emerged that came to be called Beijing's East Village. A fertile hub from 1993 to 1994, the area was named after New York's East Village, where prominent dissident artist Ai Weiwei had lived before returning to Beijing in 1993 after a decade abroad. In Beijing's East Village, avant-garde artists came together to create work that was often provocative, testing authorities and sometimes leading to arrests. Before the community was forcefully disbanded by the police, the photographer Rong Rong documented the vibrant performance and installation art created by Cang Xin, Lin Tianmiao, Ma Liuming, Zhang Huan, and others. Over time, lines between performance and photography blurred as artists launched photographic explorations using their own bodies, prompting a consideration of photography as an artistic mode of self-expression.

Cang Xin

B. Baotou, Inner Mongolia, China, 1967

To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain

1995

Black and white photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Ma Liuming

B. Huangshi, Hubei, China, 1969

Fen-Ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall

1998

Black and white photograph

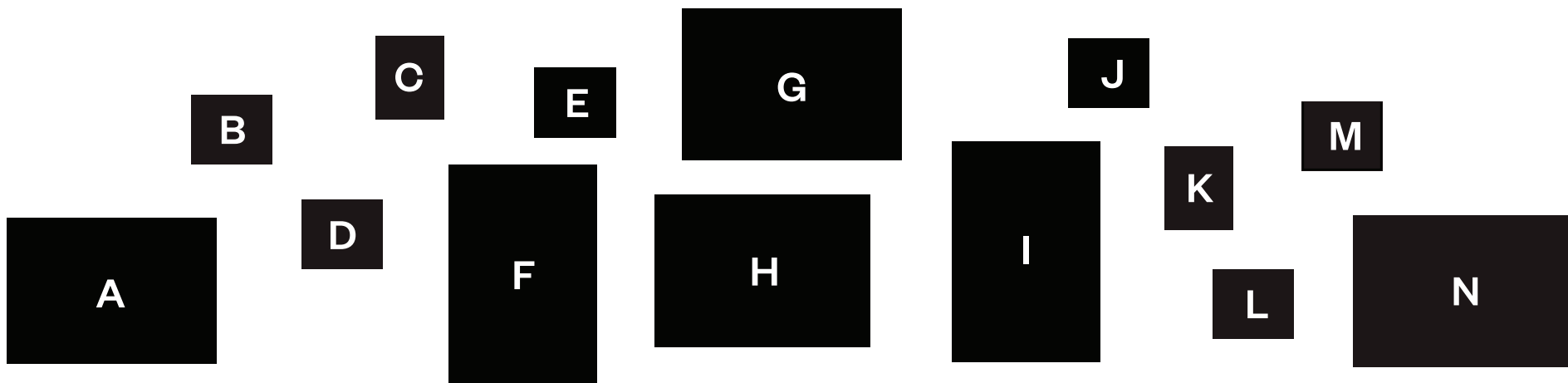
Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Ma Liuming moved to Beijing's East Village two years after graduating from the Hubei Academy of Fine Art, where he had studied oil painting. He quickly fell into the performance art scene, staging several iconic performances as his androgynous alter ego, Fen-Ma Liuming. His first performance as this persona, *Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch* (1994), documented by Rong Rong and shown on the adjoining wall, took place in his East Village courtyard and ended with the arrival of police, who arrested everyone present without explanation. This was the beginning of a broad campaign to force artists out of the village, which effectively brought about the end of this vibrant artistic community. Despite targeted persecution, Ma Liuming continued to perform as Fen-Ma Liuming throughout the rest of the decade before returning to painting in the early 2000s. *Fen-Ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall* is composed of sixteen images of the artist in the guise of his androgynous alter ego walking barefoot and naked across the largest monument to Chinese power, the Great Wall. Contrasting the rugged masculinity of the monument with his slight build and feminine hair, Ma Liuming's performance suggests a revision of the male-centric historical narrative of China.

Rong Rong

B. Zhangzhou, Fujian, China, 1968



A | East Village, Beijing (1995, No. 3)
1995
The Third Contact, performed by
Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan
Black and white photograph
Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

B | East Village, Beijing (1994, No. 1)
1994
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

C | East Village, Beijing (1994, No. 25)
1994
12 Square Meters, performed by
Zhang Huan
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

D | East Village, Beijing (1994, No. 11)
1994
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

E | East Village, Beijing (1994, No. 70)
1994
Tramping on Faces, performed by
Cang Xin
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

F | East Village, Beijing (1994, No. 22)
1994
12 Square Meters, performed by
Zhang Huan
Black and white photograph
Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

G | East Village, Beijing (1994, No. 20)
1994
12 Square Meters, performed by
Zhang Huan
Black and white photograph
Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

H | East Village, Beijing (1994, No. 46)
1994
Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch, performed by
Ma Liuming
Black and white photograph
Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

I | Beijing 1996, No. 5
1996
Black and white photograph
Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

J | Beijing 1997, No. 1 (2)
1996–1997
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

K | Beijing 1996, No. 1 (2)
1996
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

L | Beijing No. 2
1997
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

M | East Village, Beijing (1997, No. 26)
1997
Performances No. 6 and 7, performed by
Zhu Ming
Black and white photograph
Collection of Larry Warsh

N | East Village, Beijing (1995, No. 43)
1995
The Third Contact, performed by
Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan
Black and white photograph
Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Rong Rong

B. Zhangzhou, Fujian, China, 1968

Wall Text:

When Rong Rong discovered photography in the late 1980s, it was not yet recognized as an academic discipline in China. His first experience with a camera was offered by a village photographer who took annual portraits of Rong Rong's family and, one year, let him try out his twin-lens Seagull (made by the oldest camera company in China). Fascinated, Rong Rong rented the camera from the village photographer at a daily rate until he was able to save enough money to buy his own. After moving to Beijing to pursue a career as an artist in the early '90s, he soon made his way to the East Village and quickly integrated himself into the community by documenting its activities in photographs. His images offer an intimate view into artists' performances and installations—often fleeting and ephemeral—bestowing upon them a monumentality that has facilitated their incorporation into the historical record. Additionally, at a time when darkrooms were scarce, Rong Rong negotiated access at a nearby academy, where he printed not only his own works, but also those of his peers. His significance to the development of photography in China was further cemented by his publication, with Liu Zheng, of *New Photo* magazine from 1996 to 1998 and his 2007 establishment, with his wife, inri, of the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre in Beijing, China's first contemporary art space dedicated to photography.

Lin Tianmiao

B. Taiyuan, Shanxi, China, 1961

Left to right:

Spawn

2001

Mixed media

Collection of Larry Warsh

Seeing Shadow

2006

Digital photograph on canvas and thread

Gift of Cynthia Hazen Polsky, 2015 (15.8)

Wall Text:

Trained in the traditional arts from a young age by her father, who was an accomplished painter, Lin Tianmiao spent eight years assisting in the studio of her husband, video artist Wang Gongxin, and working as a textile designer in New York before returning to Beijing in the mid-1990s to pursue her own artistic career. Today she is best known for sweeping mixed-media installations created with cotton, silk, and other textiles wound around found objects, attached to photographs, and used in video artworks. This practice of “thread winding” was inspired by her mother’s use of raw thread in household tasks and similarly takes many forms, such as the small balls of thread affixed to the surface of her photographic self-portrait *Spawn* and the delicate strands that add depth to the clouds in *Seeing Shadow*. Although her work is often viewed through a feminist lens—her self-portraits are intentionally androgynous, and the objects she uses are often associated with the domestic realm—Lin Tianmiao has said that it is, first and foremost, autobiographical in nature and derives from an intuitive interest “in the conditions and transformations of the body in a way that [isn’t] self-consciously feminist.”

Cang Xin

B. Baotou, Inner Mongolia, China, 1967

Communication Series 2

1999

54 color photographs

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Cang Xin began using his body in his art while he was a resident of Beijing's East Village in the 1990s. In one striking performative work, documented by Rong Rong across the gallery, he placed thousands of plaster molds of his face on the ground and invited bystanders to crush them underfoot. Twice arrested as conflicts between police and residents of the East Village escalated, Cang Xin retreated from society for most of 1995, a period he describes as one characterized by heightened depression, anxiety, and strange ideations.

He emerged from this spell with a strong desire to reconnect with the physical world by licking objects, registering their taste and sensation in his body, and documenting the action in photographs. Over time, he became more selective, choosing to "communicate" primarily with things that represent Chinese culture, as can be seen in this series of fifty-four photographs taken in 1999, which includes objects such as a photograph of Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) and a traditional Chinese compass used in feng shui. Steeped in the philosophies of Daoism and shamanism, Cang Xin completes this action with ritualistic intent and links his practice to the cultural importance in China of taking pleasure in eating and drinking.

Qui Zhijie

B. Zhangzhou, Fujian, China, 1969

Left to right:

Tattoo Series No. 3

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Tattoo Series No. 6

1997

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Tattoo Series No. 5

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Qiu Zhijie's training was steeped in traditional Chinese culture—he was first exposed to Literati brush and ink painting at the end of the Cultural Revolution, when many of its practitioners reemerged into public view. A class of civil servants within the feudal system that preceded the founding of the Republic of China, the Literati were scholar-artist-poets and master calligraphers whose work focused on transcending the everyday world. Qiu Zhijie accompanied his teachers on excursions to make cliff rubbings of calligraphic inscriptions and on temple visits with Buddhist monks, where he would grind ink for their calligraphy practice. After viewing the *Xiamen Dada* exhibition at the Xiamen People's Art Museum in Fujian Province in 1986, which showcased works that link Zen Buddhism to European Dada ideology, he made up his mind to become an artist. His *Tattoo Series* combines Literati brushwork with a conceptual, performative practice centered around the use of his own body. For each work, he paints a composition—an overall pattern or a Chinese character—across his body and onto the surface behind him so that he and the wall appear to exist on the same plane. He advocates for what he has termed “total art,” an amalgamation of philosophies and traditions that span place and time to generate new meanings.

Visual Description:

A trio of larger-than-life size photographs, over 6 feet tall and 5 feet wide, show the torso of a shirtless man, the artist, standing against a white wall. He is facing forward with arms by his side. In each image, the artist has painted different symbols over his body and the wall behind him so that the symbols appear to continue across both seamlessly.

In *Tattoo Series No. 3* (on the left), the artist has painted a red circle with a diagonal backslash through the middle over his body and the wall.

In *Tattoo Series No. 6* (in the middle), the artist has painted black Chinese characters over his body and the wall.

In *Tattoo Series No. 5* (on the right), the artist has painted black lines that resemble a jigsaw puzzle over his body and the wall.

Gu Dexin

B. Beijing, China, 1962

Meat

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Gu Dexin was one of the first artists in China to incorporate unconventional materials into his practice. In the 1980s, for example, while working part-time in a plastics factory in Beijing, he brought home scraps and melted them down into attenuated organic shapes that exhibit the range of the material. He was drawn to plastic due to its diversity and ubiquity—it is used in everything from tablecloths to toys—despite its relative newness in China. Later, he added organic materials to his installations (meat and fruit were two of his favorites), reveling in the perishable materiality of these items and the changes that occur as they decay. This interest in material transformation is evident in his two-year project *Pinching the Flesh* (1997–1998), which consisted of a daily practice of pinching a piece of raw pork until it was dry and documenting the action in a photograph. He often staged these photographs en masse, sometimes alongside dried pieces of pork to show the life cycle of flesh from his living hand to its desiccated terminus.

While many other avant-garde artists left China for more receptive climates such as New York and Paris in the 1990s, Gu Dexin chose to stay, feeling that his work needed the constant push and pull of life in the capital city. In recent years, he has withdrawn from the arts and returned to what he has called a “normal life.”

Zhang Huan

B. Anyang, Henan, China, 1965

Family Tree

2000

9 color photographs

Collection of Larry Warsh

GALLERY 3

Wall Text:

Reckoning with the Recent Past

The twentieth century in China was marked by revolution. The last imperial dynasty, the Qing dynasty, was overthrown in 1911 and replaced by the Republic of China (1912-1949), a modern state established to shed the decadence of feudal society. Many of the Literati cultural traditions that are associated with traditional Chinese culture—landscape painting, calligraphy, and poetry—were deemed elitist by revolutionaries and suppressed for much of the rest of the century. With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong initiated even stricter regulations, requiring art to adhere to prescribed aesthetics and limiting people's clothing to government-issued uniforms. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) further tightened restrictions on artistic expression. Even after it ended, the government exerted power over people's lives in extreme ways, as in the one-child policy, a population control initiative launched in 1980 that limited families to a single child. Beginning in the 1990s, experimental photographers such as Qiu Zhijie, whose work is seen in the previous gallery, and Hong Hao, Hai Bo, Huang Yan, and Hong Lei, whose work is seen here, used their art to visualize the impact of these restrictions and to revive cultural traditions that had been pushed aside by the revolution.

Wang Jinsong

B. Heilongjiang, China, 1963

Left to right:

Parents

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Standard Family

1996

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Before shifting his practice to photography in the mid-1990s, Wang Jinsong was a well-known painter in the style of the Cynical Realists, a painting movement that registered the despair following the Tiananmen Square massacre through antiheroic compositions centered around powerless protagonists who comprehended the meaninglessness of life. In 1996, he completed both a series of oil paintings, *One Child Policy*, and a photographic work, *Standard Family*, that visualize the reality of China's population control initiative that was strictly enforced from 1980 through 2016. Whereas his paintings evoked the sense of loss that resulted from the one-child policy through poignant portraits that left some of the subjects monochromatic or faceless, his photographs took a more clinical approach, documenting the consistency of the three-person family unit across two hundred portraits. This seriality—emphasizing the ubiquity of a phenomenon by capturing it over and over again—became a hallmark of Wang Jinsong's photographic practice as he later turned his lens on such cultural shifts as elderly couples living alone and spray-painted signs marking demolition sites within the ever-changing city, the latter of which are on view in the next gallery.

Hai Bo

B. Changchun, Jilin, China, 1962

Left to right:

I Am Chairman Mao's Red Guard

1999/2000

2 color photographs (diptych)

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

They No. 5

2000

2 black and white photographs (diptych)

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Hai Bo uses his camera to compress time by restaging photographs of his friends, family, and himself decades after the original images were made. He recalls the moment when this idea first came to him: "I found a picture totally by chance and in the left corner were the words: 'For the future 1973.5.20.' Suddenly, a not-so-distant generation became so familiar that it seemed to be engraved on my bones."

He considers the recreating of these photographs to be a form of time travel to the original moment, if only "for 1/125 of a second"—the duration of the camera shutter's release. The time span visualized in *I Am Chairman Mao's Red Guard* and works from Hai Bo's *They* series, such as *They No. 5*, is laden with social and political implications that permeate the images through clothing, posture, facial expressions, and, in some cases, absence, as seen in the seats left empty by people who are no longer living. By collapsing history in this way—for instance, by visualizing how a young woman who was part of the student brigades that persecuted millions during the Cultural Revolution has matured—Hai Bo offers a glimpse of the humanity that shines through complex histories, showing that people remain true to themselves regardless of the forces of time and changes that push against them.

Huang Yan

B. Jilin City, Jilin, China, 1966

Left to right, top to bottom:

Chinese Landscape Series No. 1

1999

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Chinese Landscape Series No. 6

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Chinese Landscape Series No. 3

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Chinese Landscape Series No. 8

1999

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

A poet by training, Huang Yan began painting Chinese landscapes on unusual surfaces—such as furniture, instruments, and the human body—in the mid-1990s, often in collaboration with his wife, Zhang Tiemei, a skilled painter who created the landscapes depicted here on his chest and arms. Huang Yan's landscapes are rooted in his interest in the Literati, an elite civil-servant class of scholar-artist-poets who yearned for the mountains, where they might directly contemplate their relationship to nature, giving expression to their thoughts and experiences through writing and painting. He explains:

In 1994, I realized that the thinking of the Literati was germinated through the alternation of their will to remove themselves from the world and their desire to be

integrated within it. The history of landscape painting serves as a concrete example of this fact. . . . The landscape is the most authentic representation of their philosophy, of their personal way of conducting themselves in the world. Each mountain, each stone, each blade of grass, each tree acted as a conduit for the expression of their feelings.

This emphasis on self-expression had been eclipsed by the rise of collectivism in the early twentieth century, but it returned in the mid-1990s as artists again sought to articulate personal truths. As is the case in Huang Yan's *Chinese Landscape Series*, many artists utilized their own bodies as a conduit on this journey back to the self.

Visual Description:

Four large landscape oriented photographs are arranged in a two-by-two grid on a mint-green wall. Each photograph is nearly 4 feet tall and 6 feet wide, and shows only the torso and arms of a shirtless man. In each image, the torso, arms, and hands are painted with a white wash that has dried and crackled on the skin. A hand-painted traditional Chinese landscape is painted over the white background. Mountains drawn outlined with thick black curves and splashes of mint green cover the man's chest. At the base of the mountains on the man's lower chest are a few small brown cottages. Long, thin brown trees with black and green foliage span the length of the man's arms and stomach. On the man's right hand, a person is perched under the branches of a tree.

In each of the four photographs, the man's arm and hand positions change, but the landscape on his body remains the same.

In *Chinese Landscape Series No. 1* (on the upper left), the palms of the man's hands rest on his rib cage, with his arms bent and elbows out to each side.

In *Chinese Landscape Series No. 3* (on the lower left), the man's fingers interlock across the middle of his chest.

In *Chinese Landscape Series No. 6* (on the upper right), the man's hands appear to be in fists facing down and are placed side by side by his navel.

In *Chinese Landscape Series No. 8* (on the lower right), the man's left arm hangs to the side of his body. His right arm is bent across his body, with his hand placed over his left rib cage.

Song Yongping

B. Taiyuan, Shanxi, China, 1961

My Parents (passage 1–8)

1998–2001

8 black and white photographs

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Song Yongping graduated from the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 1983, a time characterized by optimistic intellectual activity among China's avant-garde circles following the announcement of Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy in 1978. Although trained as a painter, Song Yongping devoured European philosophy by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Camus, and Sartre and found himself drawn to Conceptual art, leading him to work across many types of media. The series *My Parents (passage 1–8)* depicts the artist's parents, beginning with an image taken during the Cultural Revolution and ending with a photograph of their belongings assembled in an unruly heap after their deaths. Photographed in the limited space of their bedroom, alternating between wedding clothes and underwear, and accompanied by canes, catheters, and flowers that function as both wedding bouquet and funerary arrangement, these portraits speak of the hardships of growing old in a changing society.

Visual Description:

Eight black-and-white photographs are arranged in a line on a mint-green wall. The far left photograph depicts a young adult couple standing side by side, with a landscape scene in the background. The man wears a military uniform and the woman wears a long-sleeved black shirt and black pants. The remaining photographs were taken in the interior of a bedroom. An elderly couple stands next to each other. Both are partially nude, wearing underwear and dark socks and slippers. The man is holding a urinary catheter bag. Continuing to move from left to right, the next photo depicts two men standing next to each other. One is elderly and the other is the artist. Both hold urinary catheter bags and are partially nude. In the next photograph, the adult man and the elderly woman are side by side, dressed in underwear. Next, the elderly couple are depicted wearing a wedding gown and tuxedo. In the next photograph, the elderly man sits on a bed with a framed picture of the elderly woman next to him. In front of the picture are flowers, and on the floor is an empty vase. The next-to-last photograph depicts two framed pictures propped up on a bed. One is of the elderly woman and the other is of the elderly man. On the floor in front of the pictures are flowers in a vase. The remaining photograph depicts the bedroom in disarray. Blankets are piled high atop the bed. A framed wedding picture is propped in front of the blankets. The floor is littered with an array of trash, letters, cans, and other debris.

Wang Fen

B. Feicui, Hainan, China, 1961

Left to right:

On the Wall Series: Guangzhou 1

2002–2003

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Girls in Hoods No. 4

2004

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Bird's Eye View: Haikou 1

2002

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Weng Fen describes himself as “the only artist—and therefore a lonely artist—residing on Hainan Island,” a formerly rural area that constitutes the southernmost province of China and has undergone dramatic development in recent decades. Since the late 1990s, he has documented this urbanization in photographs that capture it from a distant vantage point, showing the parameters of the city as well as its dramatic rise from the surrounding landscape. He often frames this scene from the viewpoint of a wall on the outskirts of the city, along which he stages young girls, with their school uniforms and backpacks, gazing toward the monumental vista. The awe and precarity that are evoked by the sight of a small girl within the endless landscape is especially palpable in Weng Fen’s *Girls in Hoods* series, which centers on a schoolgirl standing on a precipice with a hood over her head, facing the city and the camera, with the edge of the island dissolving behind her into the infinite expanse of the ocean.

Hong Hao

B. Beijing, China, 1965

My Things: Bookkeeping 2004–05 A

2006

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Sheng Qi

B. Hefei, Anhui, China, 1965

My Left Hand (Mother)

2004

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Following the brutal events that transpired at Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, when government troops opened fire on student protesters, killing hundreds and arresting thousands, crackdowns on avant-garde art activities resumed in China. Sheng Qi was one of many artists who fled the country at this time, living in Italy from 1989 to 1992 before pursuing his MFA at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London.

Heartbroken, he cut off the little finger on his left hand and buried it in a flowerpot that he left behind in Beijing, determined that part of him would remain rooted in his home country while he lived in self-imposed exile. He recalls: “When I cut off my finger, I felt betrayed. It’s like you know someone for 20 years, then one day you discover he’s a total liar. It’s like the church falling down. You don’t know what to believe . . . you feel like killing yourself, because everything you believed before is just worthless. Life feels worthless.” In hindsight, this defiant act has been seen as a precursor to the body-focused performance art scene that developed in China in the early 1990s. After returning to Beijing in 1998, Sheng Qi embarked on a series of photographs called *Memories*, in which he held small images of his family or newspapers in the palm of his mutilated hand, bringing the anguish still present in his body into contact with other versions of the past.

Hong Lei

B. Changzhou, Jiangsu, China, 1960

Left to right:

After Ma Lin's Fragrance with Sparse Shadow (Song Dynasty)

1999

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

After the Dynasty: [Li Anzhong's] Quail and Autumn Chrysanthemum (Song Dynasty)

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Chinese Landscape

(Zhouzheng Gardens and Liu Gardens)

1998

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Chinese Landscape

(Zhouzheng Gardens and Liu Gardens)

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Untitled (after Liang Kai, Sakyamuni coming out of retirement, Song Dynasty)

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Self-described as a Literati, Hong Lei creates artworks that are infused with a deep sense of nostalgia for traditional Chinese culture. Despairing at finding a path forward for painting in the wake of Tiananmen, he was inspired by American artist Joseph Cornell's shadow boxes to create miniature installations, which he documented in photographs. It was only later that Hong Lei realized that the photographs themselves could be considered works of art. A German exhibition in Beijing in 1995 that included work by Bernd and Hilla Becher, Thomas Ruff, Joseph Beuys, Gerhard Richter, and Rebecca Horn furthered his understanding that photography could be an art form on par with painting. In 1997, Hong Lei met Rong Rong, who featured his photographs in the third and fourth issues of *New Photo* magazine. It was around this time that he developed his unique photographic style, using the medium to enhance what he calls the "morbid beauty" of historic works by inserting macabre elements into his compositions, such as the dead birds seen in his *After the Song Dynasty* series, and enhancing the psychological tension of a scene by scratching negatives and hand-painting prints, as seen in the *Chinese Landscape* series.

GALLERY 4

Wall Text:

Responding to Profound Transformations

The 1990s were a decade of great economic and cultural transformation in China. Following Deng Xiaoping's 1978 announcement of the Open Door Policy, the country had begun to participate more fully in global markets. Foreign investors were encouraged through the establishment of Special Economic Zones offering tax and business incentives—ultimately leading to the rise of megacities driven by industry and technology, which feature significantly in the work of Chen Shaoxiong and Xing Danwen. Foreign business had tremendous impact on Chinese artists, as it connected them to the international art world: many artists began to travel and exhibit abroad, and by the mid-'90s, international art galleries had established a presence in major Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai. The rise of commerce also created new forms of employment and thus new lifestyles for many Chinese citizens, reflected here in parodies of the newly affluent business class by Qiu Zhijie and Hong Hao. Urban centers were in a constant state of upheaval, with populations moving in from rural areas and construction transforming the built landscape in ways once unimaginable, as seen in the work of Zhang Dali and Wang Jinsong.

Wang Jinsong

B. Heilongjiang, China, 1963

Left to right:

One Hundred Signs of the Demolition #1995

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

One Hundred Signs of the Demolition #1997

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

One Hundred Signs of the Demolition #1968

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Chen Shaoxiong

B. Shantou, Guangdong, China, 1962–2016

Left to right:

Street Scene Series: The Third Street—Potsdamer Platz

2001

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Street Scene Series: The Third Street— Gedächtniskirche Berlin

2001

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Chen Shaoxiong was a founding member of Big Tail Elephants, an artist group that staged underground performances and exhibitions in ad hoc spaces such as bars, basements, and outdoor venues throughout the 1990s in Guangzhou, a southern port city that is the third-largest city in China after Shanghai and Beijing. As Guangzhou underwent rapid development, Chen Shaoxiong began to extensively photograph the city, cutting out individual elements and layering them into miniature three-dimensional street scenes that collapse time and space to represent the complexity of reality. He later expanded his subject beyond Guangzhou, writing: “I hope to be able to photograph every street in every city, every person and every single thing in the streets. And then I can blow them up in proportion, creating many streets that make up a ‘pocket kingdom.’ The city of Guangzhou would then become something portable. This could satisfy Westerners’ touristic mentality and desire for exoticism, and also tally with the slogan of the Guangzhou Municipal Government: ‘Connecting Guangzhou, Connecting the World!’”

Visual Description:*Street Scene Series: The Third Street—Potsdamer Platz*

In the background of a large photograph is a cityscape with tall skyscrapers and construction cranes in front of a gray sky. To the left is an out-of-focus woman holding a bright red umbrella. In the foreground are two hands holding up a white board. The board holds a model of a busy city scene filled with miniature figures positioned among buses, trucks, and signs. The nearly realistic model in the foreground appears to blend almost seamlessly with the real city scene in the background, with the hands holding the cardboard model giving away the truth.

Xing Danwen

B. Xi'an, Shaanxi, China, 1967

Left to right:

disCONNEXION series A3

2002

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

disCONNEXION series B12

2003

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

disCONNEXION series A13

2003

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

After graduating with a degree in oil painting from Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1992, Xing Danwen taught herself photography. Early works documented communities such as Tibetan villagers, Chinese coal miners, and the performance artists living in Beijing's East Village. Concerned about the effects of China's rapid modernization on its people and natural environment, Xing Danwen traveled to its southern reaches to explore the impact of technological waste on villages where electronics were sent for recycling. The resulting works in the *disCONNEXION* series, three of which are on view here, show the detritus of consumption in photographs of discarded heaps of items such as cell phones, charging cords, and circuit boards. She explains, "In my country, I have experienced the changes that have taken place under the influence of Western modernity. These changes, driven in large measure by the United States, have contributed to a strong and powerful push for development in China. At the same time, however, they have led to an environmental and social nightmare in remote corners of the country."

Hong Hao

B. Beijing, China, 1965

Left to right:

Yes, I'm Gnoh

1997

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Mr. Gnoh No. 4

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Mr. Hong Please Come In

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

In 1987, Hong Hao formed the Central Academy of Fine Arts Student Photography Group with Bi Jianfeng and Chen Shuxia. Their manifesto, printed in the student paper, declared their intent to “use our unique perspective to examine objective reality, and through our arrangements give expression to the abundance of our feelings.” Hong Hao’s work often explores notions of wealth and privilege.

In 1997, he collaborated with fellow artist Yan Lei to send bogus letters to one hundred Chinese artists inviting them to participate in Documenta 10, a prestigious international art exhibition that takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany. Just as this satirical stunt pointed out the glaring absence of Chinese artists at international art fairs, his photographic works regularly parodied China’s wealthy new business class by staging the artist, often as the affluent and stylish Mr. Gnoh (“Hong” spelled backward), in opulent scenes that mimic the pervasive magazine advertisements promoting an extravagant lifestyle to China’s elite.

Visual Description:

Hung on a bright blue wall, a large, glossy color photograph, four feet tall and five feet wide, shows a close-up of a man on a black mobile phone with an antenna held to his right ear. The man wears a black jacket, a tie, and a collared shirt. He is shown from the shoulders up, and the top of his head is slightly cut off by the top of the frame. He has sandy brown hair, green eyes, and round glasses and is centered within the frame looking straight at the camera. Small Chinese characters and “Gnoh,” written in English characters, are superimposed over the man’s left shoulder, and the words “Yes, I’m Gnoh” are in the upper left corner.

Qiu Zhijie

B. Zhangzhou, Fujian, China, 1969

Left to right, top to bottom:

Fine Series A

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series F

1997

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series B

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series C

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series D

1997

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series E

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series G

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series H

1997

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Fine Series I

1997

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Visual Description:

A series of nine color photographs depict people in various dramatic and performative poses. Each photograph is approximately two feet square, with a sepia-toned background. The descriptions below are from left to right, top row to bottom row.

In *Fine Series A* are three smiling people facing forward in a row. They wear trousers, white shirts, and ties. Their hands are placed horizontally in front of their chests, with the right hand slightly above the left, giving the appearance of being midclap.

In *Fine Series F*, two men in suits, dark pants, white shirts, and ties stand side by side, lunging with opposite legs forward; the man on the left has his left leg forward, while the man on the right stretches out his right leg. Each man has the same arms as legs bent across their chests and touching at the elbows. Their outer arms are stretched behind them.

In *Fine Series B*, two men in suits with white shirts and ties are in the foreground with their right arms stretched forward and upward, with their hands in a cuplike shape, as if they are reaching for a handshake. In the background, a woman in shadow makes the same gesture. In *Fine Series C*, three people stand side by side with their arms interlocked. On either side is a man in a suit with a white shirt and tie. In the middle is a woman wearing a dark skirt, dark blazer, and plaid button-down shirt.

In *Fine Series D*, two men wearing dark trousers, white shirts, and ties kneel next to each other, each with one leg raised and bent at the knee. Their arms are outstretched as if they are holding trays. Behind and between them, a woman in a dark blazer and plaid shirt stands with her right arm raised. They all smile.

In *Fine Series E*, three men stand at the center of the image. To the left in front, a man wearing a dark suit and tie holds an long umbrella with a curved handle across his right shoulder with both hands. He looks to the left. To the right, a man with a tan suit lunges with an umbrella at his side in his right hand. His left arm reaches above his body, with his hand positioned as if to block a light. A man behind the other two raises his right arm in a fist.

In *Fine Series G*, one man in black trousers, white shirt, and a tie stands in the foreground on the left side of the image. His arms are at his sides, and he looks up toward the top left of the photograph. Behind him and to his left, a woman and man lunge forward in matching poses, with their right arms bent at the elbow and stretching forward.

Fine Series H shows three people. One man in front smiles and wears a white shirt, dark trousers, and a tie. He sits with his arms raised in fists, his left in front of his chest and his right in front of his face. On the left, a man in a suit leans back with his right arm straight out in front of him, his palm facing away from himself. Behind and to the right of the men, a woman in a plaid shirt and dark blazer stands with her left arm down and her right arm out to the side.

In *Fine Series I*, two men in dark suits stand and lean forward, each with an arm stretched in front of them. They each hold a white egg in one hand.

Zhang Dali

B. Harbin, China, 1963

Left to right, top to bottom:

2003 82B

2003

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

1998 122A

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

1998 127C

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

1999 11

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

2001 42A

2001

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

1999 17

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Zhang Dali

B. Harbin, China, 1963

Left to right, top to bottom:

1999 31

1999

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

1998 11A

1998

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

2002 53

2002

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

2002 31A

2002

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Drawn to art from a young age, Zhang Dali recalls watching with awe as potters painted traditional motifs on wet clay pots prior to firing them at open-air kilns in Jingdezhen, a remote town known for producing high-quality porcelain. The survival of traditional arts despite strict regulations during the Cultural Revolution made a lasting impression on him, and he began to study Western-style figure drawing by the age of twelve, emulating the scenes of everyday workers that he saw in the *Journal of Yanquan Workers Sketches*. Looking back, he has mused, “I suppose my work has always depicted the common laborer.”

From 1990 to 1994, Zhang Dali lived in self-imposed exile in Italy, a transformational experience as he came into contact with Arte Povera, an art movement whose name translates to “poor art,” which was based on the use of nontraditional processes and everyday materials. There he shifted his practice from ink painting to graffiti and photography, both of which he viewed as a weapon against the restrictions of mainstream culture. The silhouette of a bald man became his trademark motif, and, after returning to China in 1995, he spray-painted it more than two thousand times across abandoned sites in Beijing, generating widespread public speculation over the source of these enigmatic images. Revealing his identity in 1998, he explained, “This head is a condensation of my own likeness as an individual. It serves as my stand-in in communication with this city. I want to know everything about this city—its state of being, its transformation, its structure. I called this project *Dialogue*.”

Visual Description:

1999 31

A large color photograph shows a person in shadow at the center of an irregularly shaped opening in a wall. Painted on the white wall around the opening is a head with a thick black outline. The head is in profile, facing to the left, with exaggerated nose, lips, and chin. The wall opening has rough edges, with pieces of rebar poking out of gray concrete. The person balances on some of this rebar with outstretched legs and arms in an X shape. Clad in a black hooded sweatshirt, light-colored jeans, and black boots, the figure holds onto a dangling piece of rebar with his left hand and a spray can with his right. Behind the figure and beyond the opening, a bright yellow wall with pink and blue graffiti bubble letters serves as a backdrop, with debris covering the ground below.

INNER RING

Visual Description:

Entered through a large opening from the escalator bay, where the exhibition main entrance is located, the Inner Ring gallery space forms a complete circle around the large circular opening at the center of the donut-shaped Museum building. The gallery has curved walls. The exhibition space is wider toward the entrance and grows narrower as one moves around the circle toward the opposite side.

The artworks listed below are in counterclockwise order around the circle.

Lin Tianmiao

B. Taiyuan, Shanxi, China, 1961

Left to right:

Focus No. 13

2003

Mixed media

Collection of Larry Warsh

Focus No. 9

2003

Mixed media

Collection of Larry Warsh

Focus No. 50

2003

Mixed media

Collection of Larry Warsh

Visual Description:

Three large, human-size canvases are hung in a row on a white wall. Each artwork has a white background with a similarly shaped floating heads and necks at their center.

The artwork on the left, *Focus No. 13*, shows a blurred head. Dark tan shadows on a light tan face suggest the shapes of eyes, a nose, and mouth on a blurred face. Long, thin black hairs hang from the canvas in thick clumps over the shadows of the face, and more are spaced out over lighter areas. The hairs can be seen only when one stands close to the canvas.

In the artwork in the middle, *Focus No. 9*, the head is outlined and filled with balls of thin, coarse, white hairlike string. The balls are larger, roughly the size of a softball, at the bottom of the neck and head, and grow progressively smaller until they are tiny, about the size of a marble, at the top of the head. No facial features are outlined.

The artwork on the right, *Focus No. 50*, shows a blurred head in gray tones with dark shadows that imply the shapes of eyes, a nose, and a mouth. The image is darker and slightly less blurry than the first image, but no details are in focus. As in the first image, long, thin, black hairlike strings hang from the canvas in thick clumps over the shadows of the face and are spaced farther out over its lighter areas. The hairs can be seen only when close to the canvas.

Lin Tianmiao

B. Taiyuan, Shanxi, China, 1961

Bound/Unbound Series (bicycles)

1996

Mixed media, bicycles, and twine

Collection of Larry Warsh

Visual Description:

Bound/Unbound is a series of five adult-sized bicycles. With the kickstands engaged, each bicycle sculpture stands upright on a white platform. Each bicycle is meticulously and entirely wrapped in cream-colored thread, and each has slightly differently shaped wheels and seats or handlebars.

At the entrance of the Inner Ring, across from the three works on the baffle wall, a bike with square wheels sits on a platform in a corner. There is no seat, and the handlebars are situated over the bike's back wheel.

Moving around the circle, the next bike to the right of the gallery is actually two bikes, fixed together and facing opposite directions. They share a back wheel and have two seats and two sets of handlebars facing away from each other.

The next bike to the left of the gallery has an oversized seat that is rounded and bulging. The seat is as long as the back wheel and is nearly a foot high. It is shaped like a large cocoon or nest. The back wheel is twice as large as the front wheel.

The next bike on the left is shaped like a regular bicycle, with the handlebars and seat a normal size and in the correct placement for riding. The back wheel is slightly compressed, as though something had been placed on it and slightly squashed it.

The last bicycle, on a platform to the right of the gallery space, has two seats but no handlebars. The second seat is placed where the handlebars would be. There are two sets of pedals underneath both seats, but only one chain.

Lin Tianmiao

B. Taiyuan, Shanxi, China, 1961

Go?

2001

Black and white photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Lin Tianmiao

B. Taiyuan, Shanxi, China, 1961

Growing

2003

Black and white photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Wang Qingsong

B. Daqing, Heilongjiang, China, 1966

Romantique

2003

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Forced to support his family after his father passed away, Wang Qingsong worked as a driller for an oil company for many years before his mother encouraged him to pursue an art degree in his mid-twenties. This was quite unusual at the time—most of his peers in the painting department at the Sichuan Art Academy had parents who were traditional artists, not manual laborers like his own parents were. Instead of returning to the oil fields after graduation, he moved to Beijing, where he incorporated photography into his work, first printing images scanned from magazines on silk velvet before adopting Photoshop to create digitally layered works around 1996. After growing frustrated with digital technology, he began working with a Beijing film studio in 2000, casting and staging models in elaborate tableaux that he photographed in sprawling panoramic scenes. In some works, such as *Sentry Post*, seen in this exhibition, Wang Qingsong inserts himself as a protagonist in the action, posing as a border guard holding a Coca-Cola can as a grenade. Other panoramic works, such as *Romantique* and *China Mansion*, are strewn with references to canonical works of Western art history, ranging from Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (c. 1484–1486) to Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and Man Ray's *Ingres's Violin* (1924). These works coalesce an overabundance of foreign elements into sweeping, sometimes ostentatious visions of the new China.

Wang Qingsong

B. Daqing, Heilongjiang, China, 1966

Left to right:

Requesting Buddha Series No. 1

1999

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

China Mansion

2003

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Visual Description:

Requesting Buddha Series No. 1

Requesting Buddha Series No. 1 is a large color photograph, about six feet tall and four feet wide. A thin bald man with almond-colored skin sits in a cross-legged position at the center of the photo. The background is dark and streaked with vertical lines of gold light. The man appears float in his seated position, hovering atop an upside-down red bucket with a Coca-Cola logo. The bucket is surrounded by a circle of bright rainbow-colored bows— including some Skittles candy wrappers—which together create a type of seat. The man's torso and legs are unclothed. He wears a black bow tie around his neck. An elaborate gold beaded necklace covers much of his chest. Two arms rest naturally at his sides, one holding a large beer bottle, which the other hand points to. Nine additional arms extend around the man's body and over his head, giving the feeling of tentacles. Each hand grasps an object, including a package of Marlboro cigarettes, a CD, a fistful of American and Chinese paper money, a trophy, a small Chinese flag, a handheld phone, a golden bowl, a postcard-sized photograph of the artwork described here, and a yellow box of camera film.

Wang Qingsong

B. Daqing, Heilongjiang, China, 1966

Left to right:

Another Battle Series No. 1

2001

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Sentry Post

2000

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Cui Xiuwen

B. Harbin, Heilongjiang, China, 1967–2018

Left to right:

One Day in 2004 No. 1

2004

Color photograph

Collection of Larry Warsh

Sanjie

2003

Color photograph

Promised gift. Collection of Larry Warsh

Wall Text:

Cui Xiuwen was a strong voice in the feminist movement in China from the very start of her career in the mid-1990s. As an art student at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, she stirred controversy with a series of paintings that depict male nudity, disregarding cultural inhibitions around the female gaze and traditional preferences for the female nude. After graduation, she and three friends—Li Hong, Feng Jiali, and Yuan Yaomin—formed Sirens, a group dedicated to creating exhibition opportunities for women in a male-dominated scene. Her entry into video art was prompted by a visit to a nightclub, where she became fascinated by the dynamic environment of the ladies' room, which men could not access, and decided that video was the only medium that could capture the vibrant reality of that space. Later bodies of work, such as those represented in this exhibition, made use of a female actress who resembled Cui Xiuwen to explore themes from the artist's childhood, investigating topics such as puberty and sexuality. Both *Sanjie* and *One Day in 2004 No. 1* show how young girls are, in the artist's words, forced to carry "the weight of the consequences of history." Wearing a Young Pioneers red scarf, signifying allegiance to the Communist Party through the symbolic blood of its martyrs, the young woman is posed as all of the actors in *Sanjie's* Last Supper scene (Cui Xiuwen believed that "Judas is all of us"), and as a bruised, battered, and discarded figure in *One Day in 2004 No. 1*.

Wall Text:

Envisioning New Possibilities

As technological advances have enabled artists to move from darkrooms to computers and into virtual realms, the technology of photography has pushed beyond the limits of reality, opening up novel windows of insight and experience. The Internet grew quickly once it was established in China, skyrocketing from 3,000 users in early 1995 to 111 million ten years later. Around the same time, digital photography became more prevalent with the introduction of the first available camera phone, the Nokia 7650, in 2002 and the iPhone in 2009. By 2021, China was estimated to have 971 million smartphone users as well as accounting for over half of the global virtual reality market. Although the Chinese government's use of technology to enforce censorship and control over its population is well documented—its highly sophisticated Internet censorship system, known colloquially as the Great Firewall, has existed since 2000—new technological tools continually emerge to help people get around the wall. Contemporary artists, such as Cao Fei and LuYang, whose work is seen here, have embraced and explored virtual space as a site full of potential, where identity can be freed from societal constraints and the world can be reimagined.

Cao Fei

B. Guangzhou, Guangdong, China, 1978

Rabid Dogs

2002

Single-channel video; color; sound; 08:52 min.

Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space

Wall Text:

An integral member of the “new generation” of avant-garde artists in China, Cao Fei was born in China’s southern Pearl River Delta, one of the most densely urbanized regions on earth, which is often referred to as the “factory of the world.” Many of her artworks address the work culture that such factories have given rise to, such as *Rabid Dogs*, which parodies white-collar office workers as “a pack of miserable dogs . . . summoned or dismissed at the bidding of our master.” Two other seminal works, *Cosplayers Series* (2004) and *RMB City: A Second Life City Planning* (2007), both represented in this exhibition, delve into the imaginative worlds that accompanied the rise of the Internet and video game technology, offering younger generations a means of escape from everyday reality. Whereas *Cosplayers*, an eight-minute video work, shows youth moving through the city dressed and interacting as their online avatars, *RMB City* reveals an entire world created by the artist in the virtual platform *Second Life*. Incorporating iconic architectural structures from contemporary China, such as Beijing’s futuristic-looking CCTV headquarters building, which hangs precariously over the city from a construction crane, and Beijing National Stadium (a.k.a. the “Bird’s Nest”), which was created for the 2008 Olympics, *RMB City* depicts Beijing as a virtual amusement park where the old and the new haphazardly converge.

Visual Description:

A wide, flat monitor affixed to a white wall plays an 8-minute and 52-second video. Throughout the video, adult humans wearing dog masks, suits, and yellow and red plaid clothing act like dogs in an office setting.

The video opens with a handwritten time stamp, “8 am,” that fills a black screen. Pop music starts, with a person singing in Chinese over drums and symbols. Red arrows and numbers flash across the screen before elevator doors open and humans in dog masks crawl into and through an office space. They crawl through desks and sort through papers, type on keyboards, and make phone calls. They periodically make barking and panting noises. After two minutes, another timestamp appears: “9:30 am.” The music changes to a disco-inflected song.

The human-dogs now work at a conference table covered with papers and computers. They stamp and bang folders on the table and bark and clap together. A handwritten timestamp appears: “10:30 am.” The music stops briefly and then changes to a wild-sounding jazz instrumental.

The human-dogs start barking, and two jump on the conference table and paw and claw at each other. They bark at each other, and one pulls at the other’s clothing with their teeth. A handwritten timestamp appears: “11:30 am.” The music changes to a quieter and calmer instrumental tune. The human-dogs stop fighting and start to crawl around the office again.

A handwritten timestamp appears: “2:00 pm.” The music changes to a pop song with Chinese lyrics. A person walking on two legs arrives and throws a binder on the ground. It is retrieved by a human-dog, who is given a bone.

A handwritten timestamp appears: “4:00 pm.” The music changes to a song with a female-sounding voice. The human-dog with a bone is approached by a female human-dog, who starts to rub her body against him. She takes the bone away from him.

A handwritten timestamp appears: “5:00 pm.” The music changes to an upbeat instrumental song. The human-dog who lost his bone makes whining noises and faces between segments of music, then poops on the binder on the floor.

A handwritten timestamp appears: “6:00 pm.” The music changes to a folk song with a male-sounding singer. Female human-dogs are petted by the human. They bring the binder to him, finding the poop.

A handwritten timestamp appears: “12:00 pm.” The music shifts to another folk song, this one with a female singer. Imagery repeats video footage of the poop on the binder before switching to the poop sitting in a dog bowl that is knocked over. The male human-dog is shown in a muzzle, interspersed with imagery of him rubbing against the female human-dog.

The video ends with a black slide with the handwritten word “Fin” and then scrolls through credits in Chinese and then English:

Director / Photographer

Cao Fei

Actresses:

Wu Ying

Zhang Xiaochuan

Zhang Xinqi

Actors:

Lin Yusi

Ou Guorui

Song Jiaqi

Zhong Ligo

Lighting:

Lu Yi Gang

Costume:

Mr. Zhou

Editor and Music Editing by:

Cao Fei

Special thanks to:

Shao Zhong

Ou Ning Hou Hanru

Chen Tong

2002 3.26

Cao Fei

B. Guangzhou, Guangdong, China, 1978

Cosplayers Series (stills)

2004

Inkjet prints on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space

Left to right, top to bottom:

King Kong at Home

Deep Breathing

She Wish She Knew

Yanmy at Home

Diversionist

Nada at Home

Cao Fei

B. Guangzhou, Guangdong, China, 1978

RMB City: A Second Life City Planning No. 7 (still)

2007

Inkjet print on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space

Visual Description:

In a poster-sized image, oriented horizontally, what appears to be a computer-generated island city floats on pixelated blue water. Identifiable landmarks from Beijing are scattered throughout the landscape, interspersed with computer-fabricated buildings and a large green hill. To the far left of the city is a large round building: the “Bird’s Nest” stadium designed by Ai Weiwei for the 2008 Summer Olympics. A large stream of fire shoots up from the center of the city. Floating in front of the fire is the CCTV building, made of glass, with a unique central cut-out so that viewers can see through it. An enormous bicycle wheel floats in the sky behind the city.

LuYang

B. Shanghai, China, 1984

DOKU the self

2020–ongoing

Single-channel video; color; sound; 36:00 min.

Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery

Wall Text:

Working primarily in the virtual realm, where choices are bound only by the limits of one's imagination, LuYang creates videos, lightboxes, and installations that are grounded in a philosophical investigation of what it means to be alive in an era when much of our time is spent online. LuYang embraces the freedom that this brings through the creation of alter egos who are characterized by multiplicity, such as DOKU, a nonbinary avatar whom we follow on a journey of reincarnation through six realms: the Asura (a class of Hindu deities), animals, heaven, hell, humans, and hungry ghosts. A frenetic mash-up of Buddhist cosmology, scientific research, popular culture—especially tech-influenced music, dance, and fashion—and personal contemplation, the ongoing project, here titled *DOKU the self*, offers a thought-provoking glimpse of how life in the digital realm might come to exist independently of and perhaps even supplant life on earth.

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Subtitles

DOKU the self

渡過因輪迴的痛苦而流淌的眼泪匯聚成的大海
travelled across the ocean formed by tears shed for painful reincarnations

爬過因輪迴中所獲身體死亡後的骸骨堆積而成的山脈
climbed the mountains piled up by skeletons of dead bodies from
reincarnations

曾經有一個世人眼中的命運悲苦者
he who was perceived by the people as a man of miserable fate

為了復仇於那些傷害過自己的鄰人
who sought revenge against the neighbours once hurt him

經歷千辛萬苦求得報復世人的咒術
went through great troubles to learn the mantra for seeking his revenge

成為了一名咒師
he became a **caster**

他的嗔恨之心力量無窮
strong powers sprung from his heart which filled with anger and hate

他的仇恨如黑色大海翻滾的巨浪一般吞噬一切
like huge waves roaring on the black sea water, his hatred devours
everything

人們驚恐萬分的奔逃
shocked and terrified, people were running and trying to escape

這突如其來看似天災的人禍
it seems that a natural disaster suddenly came upon the people, but it is a
man who caused all these

呼風
calling for the wind to blow

喚雨
summoning the rain to fall

興風作浪
the wind and waves were rising

暴雨驟降
heavy rains fell

電閃雷鳴
lightning flashed and thunder was rumbling

天崩地裂
the sky was falling and the earth was shattering

人們被自己建造的屋舍坍塌壓垮
people crashed by the houses built out of their own hands

他們的肉身是多麼的脆弱
how fragile are their bodies in flesh

如此易於摧毀
how easy for them to be destroyed

他們的意識在肉體毀滅的剎那被摧滅
their conciseness end at the moment when bodies perished

傷害他人者成為受傷害者
people who once hurt others have become victims

在這樣的二元交替輪回流轉中
during the binary transformations and reincarnations

咒師完成了他的復仇大計
the caster completed his plan for revenge

在夢中死去，於現實中醒來
died in the dream, and woke up to the reality

我即是夢中之人，也是做夢的人
I am the person in my dream, and I am also the person who had the dream

在夢境與夢醒之上，是否有真正的覺醒
will there be a true enlightenment after experiencing all these dreams and realities

讓我再也無需穿梭這死生虛實真假之門
which spares me from traveling back and forth between life and death, reality
and virtuality, truth and false

我們經驗過的快樂和痛苦都在思維內存档
the happiness and pain we experienced were saved and archived in our
minds

當遇到類似的經驗，我們的思維就開始識別
when we were facing similar situations, our minds would start identifying
process

所以我現在體驗到的恐懼是思維經驗的存档帶來的麼
so whether the fear I am experiencing now comes from the archive of
thinking processes?

“自我”在何處
where can “the self” be found

任何地方都找尋不到“自我”便在人群中亂尋，不斷將他人當作自己
we cannot find “the self”, so we mindlessly search for “the self” among the
people, and keep treating others as “the self”

將物質看作是“自我”
treat material goods as “the self”

在各種外界參照物的對應下，強化自我
and reinforce “the self” based on the comparisons with external references

把自我局限於自己的身體之內
limiting “the self” within physical body

讓自我變得如此堅固
solidify “the self” to such a degree

並執著的將瞬息萬變的事物據為己有
and persistently taking possession of transient things and beings

時間在何處
where is the time

所有的未來都是必將發生的過去
the future will also be part of the history someday

我和我的屍體生活在一起
I am living with my dead body

生死並非對立
life and death are not on the opposite sides

生死無二無別
life and death are the same concepts

生與死是同時發生的
life and death happen simultaneously

物質摧毀物質
material destroys material

以“自我”的立場樹立的物質概念讓“自我”極易被摧毀
“the self” would be extremely vulnerable
if the concept of material is formed based on the perspective of “the self”

無論更換多少個身體
no matter how many bodies have been changed into

經驗多少遍輪迴
how many reincarnations have been experienced by

“自我”在這場摧毀與被摧毀的遊戲中樂此不疲
“the self” enjoys the game of destruction and being destroyed

自由是什麼？
what is freedom?

自由是讓身體在物理層面隨意移動麼？
is freedom about letting body moving freely in the physical space?

自由是讓頭腦在思維層面隨意思索麼？
is freedom about allowing thoughts wondering freely in our minds?

世界不限於“自我”存在的此地
the world is not limited by where the “the self” exists

尋找自我
searching for "the self"

山川美景沒有好壞的屬性
beautiful sceneries consisted of mountains and rivers, their nature cannot be defined as good or bad

原子彈核武器沒有好壞的屬性
the nature of nuclear weapons cannot be defined as good or bad

外境沒有好壞的屬性
the physical beings out there cannot be defined by good or bad

使用這些物質以及建立好壞概念的是我自己
it is me who use these materials, and form the concepts of good and bad

控制我的是我執著的心
it is my stubborn mind that controls me

而不是執著的物質本體
not the physical beings I am fixed upon

存在的真相都是我肉眼可見的麼？
will my naked eyes be able to see all the existing truths?

這個轉動輪迴巨輪的死主背後是怎樣的景象？
this yamantaka is spinning the giant wheel of reincarnations - what is the world look like behind him?

在任何一個狹小的點之外
outside of every tiny spot

都是廣闊無限綿延的世界
there is an infinite world stretching beyond the reach

宇宙中所有當下與我同時存在的事物
at this moment, all the beings that coexisting with me in the universe

都被劃分成單一緯度上不同地域和世界
were categorised into various regions and worlds by using single-dimensional standard

此世界與彼世界的界線在何處？
where to draw the line between this and that world?

是“自我”的思維做出的反應和選擇？
is this a reaction and a choice made by the mind of “the self”?

抑或是一場隨機的賭博遊戲？
or a gambling which bet on the chances?

這個輪迴的遊戲是如此真實
this reincarnation game is so real

遊戲和現實的區別在何處
what is the difference between the game and the reality

隨意切換著各種身體型態
switching among various body forms at will

將自我投射於遊戲之中
reflecting the self into the game

遊戲是現實世界的投射麼？
can the game be considered as the reflection of real world?

我即是遊戲中的角色
I am a role in the game

也是玩遊戲的玩家
and I am also the player of the game

模擬我們有一個身體
the simulation of having a physical body

模擬慾望得到滿足時的體驗建立快樂經驗的存档
the simulation of archiving experiences of happiness when desires were satisfied

模擬遭遇各種痛苦的感覺從而建立痛苦經驗的存档
the simulation of being hurt to archive the experiences of pain

模擬死亡以激發對時間的感知及對“自我”不存在的恐懼

the simulation of death to trigger the sense of time and the fear for the annihilation of “the self”

有了存档后，在經驗類似的情況時，思維就開始識別

with all these archived records, the mind will start to figure out how to feel when experience similar situation

未經痛苦，就已識別滋生痛苦的預期感受

the pain is yet to be experienced, but the mind already figured out that we need to expect getting hurt

未經快樂，已識別並對未來滋生幻想和期待

the happiness is yet to be experienced, but the mind starts to have fantasies and expectations for future

遭受痛苦時立刻想回到快樂經驗的存档点

when suffering pain, I feel the urge to go back to the point where happy experience was archived

到底是嚮往或恐懼經驗記憶的存档

am I longing for or fearing archived empirical experiences

還是當下發生以及感受的一切

or everything I am feeling and happening now

舍棄存档

abandon archives

舍棄經驗

get rid of experiences

舍棄參照物

let go of references

舍棄概念

abandon concepts

舍棄時間

abandon the concept of time

過去無際
the past has no boundary

現在無住
the present is constantly changing

未來無邊
the future is beyond reach

渡過因輪迴的痛苦而流淌的眼泪匯聚成的大海
travelling across the ocean formed by tears shed for painful reincarnations

掌控者與被掌控的對象
the commander and the subject being commanded

觀察者與被觀察的對象
the observer and the subject being observed

經驗者與被經驗的對象
the experiencer and the subject being experienced

选择者与被选择的对象
the chooser and the one being chosen

思想者與所思所想
the thinker and the thoughts

爬過因輪迴中所獲身體死亡後的骸骨堆積而成的山脈
climbing the mountains piled up by skeletons of dead bodies from
reincarnations

掌控者也是被掌控者
the commander is also the subject being commanded

觀察者也是被觀察者
the observer is also the subject being observed

經驗者也是被經驗者
the experiencer is also the subject being experienced

选择者也是被选择者
the chooser is also the one being chosen

思想者也是他者所思所想的主體
the thinker is also the subject of others' thoughts

對象是本體，本體也是對象
the object is the subject, the subject is also the object

這是屍陀林麼？
is this sitavana?

天上盤旋著禿鷲
where vultures circling in the sky

地上遍滿著白骨
skeletons laid everywhere on the ground

在這累生累世積累的骸骨中找得到自我麼？
can "the self" be found in bones accumulated after rounds and rounds of reincarnations ?

我失去了一條手臂，所以我失去了“自我”的一部分麼？
I lost an arm, so does that mean that I lost part of "the self"?

“自我”的一部分會跟著那條離去的手臂一起離去麼？
will a part of "the self" leave with my fallen arm?

手臂以物質的形式離我而去
the arm left me in its physical form

但我依然能感受他的存在
but I can feel its existence

所以手臂這部分的“自我”並沒有因為物質型態的瓦解而瓦解麼？
so this part of "the self" in my arm did not collapse due to the disintegration of the physical form?

人們告知這只是幻覺而已
people were told this is just the illusion

物質的瓦解既是鐵證
the disintegration of physical beings is irrefutable evidence

對著鏡子撫摸斷臂，在頭腦中建立“自我”缺失的定解
caressing broken arms in front of the mirror, coming up with an explanation
of the loss of “the self” in mind

如果關閉觸摸斷臂的手以及斷臂處的感受器
if sensors on the caressing hand and where the arm broke off were turned off

我還能觸摸到那部分的“自我”麼
can I still touch that part of “the self”?

互有反饋的感受器讓“自我”更為堅固
the sensors respond to each other will make “the self” stronger

區分“自我”與“他者”
to distinguish between “the self” and “the other”

是誰在觀察？
who is observing?

是誰在照鏡子？
who is looking into the mirror?

鏡中的我是“自我”麼？
is “the self” the same as the reflection of myself in the mirror?

這是經驗概念的入口，是記憶存档的路徑
this is the entry of empirical concepts, the path towards memory archives

是確定自我的參照物
this is the references for reaffirming the self

我即是鏡中之人，又是鏡子本身
I am the man in the mirror, and I am also the mirror itself

鏡子破碎！
The mirror shattered!

鏡中的參照物破碎！
the reference in the mirror fractured!

記憶存档破碎！
the memory archives tattered!

所有反射與反射的關係破碎
all the reflections and the relationships of reflections are broken into pieces

沒有鏡子再來反射“自我”，這時“自我”在何處？
there is no mirror to reflect “the self” now, so where can “the self” be found?

不站在生去看待死
do not think of death from the perspective of life

不站在無去想望有
do not think of status of being from the perspective of void

飛出二元概念的思維牢籠
break free from the mind trap formed by binary concepts

將”自我“劃分成億萬個粒子
split “the self” into millions of particles

融入我所處的任何時空之中
and blend them into whatever space and time I am in

感受到疼痛麼？
can the pain be felt?

這身體是五蘊和合的結果，不可能永存於世
this body comes from the Five Aggregates, it cannot last forever

所以這疼痛也不可能永存於身
hence the pain cannot reside in the body forever

我想要剔除身上的痛苦
I want to be separated from this pain

但這痛苦似乎會激發我更深層的領悟
but it seems that the pain makes me gain deeper understanding of things

所以痛苦必須要被剔除麼？
so must the pain be removed?

當我知曉痛苦是覺醒的必經之路

when I know that experiencing pain is indispensable on the path to enlightenment

痛苦還是痛苦麼？

will this pain still be hurtful?

一切“自我”的感受，知覺，判斷，意識，觀念等

all the feelings, perceptions, judgments, conciseness and concepts from “the self”

都是因為站在“自我”的立場而誕生

they exist because I think from the perspective of “the self”

生，死，美，醜，多，少，等二元概念都是出自於“自我”的立場

binary concepts like life and death, beauty and ugliness, abundance and scarcity

they all derived from the standing of “the self”

不具“自我”的立場通過“眼，耳，鼻，舌，身，心”去偵測一切

a perspective without considering “the self” detects everything through “eyes, ears, nose, body and heart”

就不會生成這些感官所看，所聽，所聞，所嘗，所觸，所感受的一切偏曲資訊

the senses of what I see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and all the distorted information will not be formed

如果思維和頭腦可以模擬我的苦樂感受

if the body and the mind can simulate the pain and happiness I experienced

那我就不需要肉體，成為一個缸中之腦

then I do not need my body in flesh, I can become a brain in a vat

但這也是“自我”的心靈偵測

but this also comes from the mind detection of “the self”

額葉卸載

unload the frontal lobe

切斷時間參照

cut off references for the time

頂葉卸載
unload the parietal lobe

切斷空間參照
cut off references for the space

顳葉卸載
unload the temporal lobe

切斷記憶參照
cut off references for the memory

邊緣系統卸載
unload the limbic system

切斷苦樂參照
cut off references for happiness and pain

枕葉卸載
unload the occipital lobe

切斷一切信息概念輸入
cut off all the inputs of information and concepts

神經系統卸載
unload the nerve system

停止製造幻覺
stop creating illusions

如果時間是線性的
if time is linear

生命就是整個宇宙時間軸上的一小段
life is just a short phase on the entire timeline of the universe

注定會有結束的時刻
and is destined to end at some time

但我為何會為他者遭遇的苦難感到悲傷？
but why I still feel sad for others' suffering?

為何會為早我離去的生命感到悲傷？
why I feel sad for the lives lost before me?

這悲傷的感受證明自身的生命與宇宙中其他生命是一體的麼？
does this sadness proves that my life and others in the universe are in one entity?

我在人類的整體中麼？
am I in the entity of the human kind?

我在地球的整體中麼？
am I in the entity of the earth?

我在宇宙的整體中麼？
am I in the entity of the universe?

我在無限的整體中
I am in infinite entities

組成這枚硬幣的粒子
the particles that formed this coin

組成我身體的粒子
the particles that formed my body

組成整個宇宙的粒子
the particles that formed the whole universe

他們的本質是一樣的麼？
are they the same in nature?

攤開手心
open the palm

掌中的硬幣以及硬幣周圍的一切，就在那
the coin in my hand and everything around the coin, there they lay

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Huang Yan
Chinese Landscape Series No. 3 (detail)
1999
Color photograph

Promised Gift

HIRSHHORN

 Smithsonian

