

Attn: Art Editors



**10 Chancery Lane Gallery Art Projects Presents during ART HK 11
RED, CHINA AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM, 17 perspectives, 1979-2011**

Hong Kong, May 2011—Since the Stars (“XING XING” in Chinese) Exhibition of 1979 there have been many moments of struggle for artists in China. A struggle to express themselves through art during times of open attitude and times of closing, traditional thinking and changing times. The push and pull between artists trying to make works within limits and outside them have led to more than 30 years of creativity that is unsurpassed the world over. The creative thinkers use as their tools social, political or perhaps just personal motifs. And sometimes the intention of the artist is misread completely by the reader. This exhibition brings together 17 artists’ works that contribute to the ongoing discussion on artistic freedom and expression in China and beyond its borders.

The artists and works:

WANG KEPING (b.1949 Beijing, China): Wang Keping is one of China’s pioneering contemporary artists. Wang was a member of the experimental Stars Group (Xing Xing “星星畫會”) of artists that formed in 1979, breaking with China’s propaganda art and setting the stage for avant-garde art in China. In 1979 Wang Keping showed a group of daring and politically critical sculptures that were presented on the gates of National Art Museum of China in a guerrilla exhibition by the Stars Group, one of them was entitled, “Silence.” After officials banned the exhibition, artist-members took to the streets to champion artistic freedom. The sculpture, “Silence”, shows a man with his eye blinded and his mouth plugged representing the feelings of his generation. It appeared in the *New York Times* on the front page in an article written by Fox Butterfield, the first foreign correspondent in Beijing post-Cultural Revolution. This work along with others was a bold statement at the time that led to 10,000 marchers standing with the artists demanding artistic freedom, followed by 100,000 who came to view their victory and works in the museum one year later. Wang’s unique wooden sculptures, including one that featured a Buddha like Mao figure, shocked the art world in Beijing. He later moved to Paris where he now lives and works.

XIAO LU (b. 1962 Hangzhou, China): In February 1989, Xiao Lu raised a gun and shot at her work in the National Art Museum of China immediately closing down the “China Avant-Garde” exhibition. Curator Gao Minglu states in the introduction to her book that the work was later deemed “the first shots of Tiananmen Square”. Her struggle since this first act of performance and installation has led to the series of photographs representing the 15 years that followed, entitled “Dialogue”. Xiao Lu’s book *Dialogue* was recently published in both English and Chinese by Hong Kong University Press epitomizing the struggles of a female artist born in her generation.

CANG XIN (b. 1967 Suihua, China): The performance, "To Add One Metre to an Anonymous Mountain" was realized at 13:00 on May 11, 1995. Surveyors Jin Kui and Xiong Wen stood on the road below where they set up their equipment. They measured the mountain's height at 86.393 meters. Kong Bu was in charge of weighing each participant: Wang Shihua, 80kg; Cang Xin, 70kg; Gao Yang, 68kg; Zu Zhou, 65kg; Ma Zhongren, 65kg; Zhang Huan, 65kg; Ma Liuming, 55kg; Zhang Binbin (female), 55kg; Duan Yingmei (female), 55kg; Zhu Ming, 46kg. "Everyone climbed the mountain, and one by one the artists shed their clothes. The participants divided into four rows by ascending weight and then lay on top of each other in the form of a pyramid. Between 13:26 and 13:38 that afternoon, the surveyors' measurement of the anonymous mountain was 87.393 meters, precisely one meter higher than Miaofengshan Mountain. A breeze suddenly blew across the mountaintop. Looking back on that work today, it seems that the meter that was added to create that anonymous mountain far transcends its initial significance, because with it added a layer of deep cultural significance. At that time I believed this ideal of "adding height" would persist over time." (Written by Kong Bu)

MA LIUMING (b. 1969 Huangshi, China) In 1994 -1995 as part of the East Beijing Village group of "experimental artists" in the Eastern suburbs of Beijing, artist Ma Liuming was one of a number of other practitioners including Zhang Huan, Cang Xin, Rong Rong and others. At the village entrance they erected a black-and-white road sign that marked their presence and resonated with the avant-garde atmosphere of New York's East Village. Ma Liuming was a pioneer of performance art. He is known most of all for his exploration of the power and poetry of public nudity in China, where such behaviour was strictly forbidden. Playing on his androgyny his works were signed Fen-Ma Liuming, a hybrid figure of male and female components. In 1994 Ma Liuming was arrested for a period of two months because of works like this. Many of the artists of the Beijing East Village fled in response to this police action.

KO SIU LAN (b. 1977 Xiamen, China): In 2010 Ko displayed a work at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The work was a play on words from a slogan by President Sarkozy. The work was censored and removed but unbeknownst exactly by whom or why. After much press, the Minister of Culture Mr. Mitterand called her himself by telephone to tell her to put her work back up. "Don't Ask Me Why", a lighting piece created for her recent solo exhibition "Don't Think Too Much", consists of words created with suspended T5 lights on a support steel substructure. The floating words act as a perceptual play of inverse logic, creating an element of pending fear. An elegantly crafted nostalgia for fear, the image of words and language co-exists as carbon copy. She plays with the misunderstandings and contradictions as a result of the co-existence of different cultures, languages and social systems that stem from her China East and/vs China West cultural experiences.

CAI YUAN (b. 1956, China) and **JIAN JUN XI** (b. 1962, China): Also known as "Mad For Real" are Chinese performance team dating back to the 1980s. They emigrated to the UK in the 1980s and continued to work together on many performances including "Soya Sauce and Ketchup Fight" and their highly publicized work "Two Artists Jump on Tracey Emin's Bed" (1999) at Tate Britain's Turner Prize Exhibition, as well as "Two Artists Piss on Duchamp's Urinal," (2000) at Tate Modern, London. Mad For Real (Cai Yuan and Jian Jun Xi)'s oeuvre has continually questioned the relationship of power to the individual. Using a position of resistance Cai and Xi have consistently produced work which is necessarily oppositional yet the warmth and humour of their work also acts to draw viewers in. Their performances have taken place as radical gestures calling to mind notorious artists of earlier radical art movements but the historical, linguistic and political context of their practice is often related specifically to their origins: China. In "Knell" (2010), an installation work by Jian Jun Xi, a sculpture of Andy Warhol lays upon the Chinese National flag with his hand tied to a rope and bell as if calling all artists to run to his school bell. Inspired by the film *Andy Warhol: Made in China*, the work investigates the impact of Warhol upon Chinese contemporary art both in imagery and its bonanza. A second work, "Tiannamen" (2008), Duchamp's urinal lays curiously in Tiannamen Square.

HUANG RUI (b. 1952, Beijing) An original founder of the avant-garde Stars Group (Xing Xing) in 1979 and now vocal advocate for the 798 Art District, Huang Rui is a diverse and thought provoking artist. Over the years his works have taken on many forms - painting, performance, installation and sculpture. Most of them are characterized by a spirit of rebelliousness and an interest in exploring how the human condition faces up to the impenetrable walls of authority. Huang Rui's work is characterized by symmetry and simplicity of form, as well as by the use of primary colors. His work stands alone as aesthetically pleasing; however, he is

recognized as a socially minded, and thus often controversial, artist. Throughout his career, he has continued to be vocal about his belief in the importance of free expression—and as a result, he has faced a large amount of censorship from the government. Huang Rui also often plays with the relationship between English and Chinese words, most notably in his piece “Chai-na/China” where he relates the Chinese characters “chai” and “na” (which mean “destroy here” 拆那) to images from the demolition that occurred in Beijing in preparation for the Olympics. This is a theme that Huang Rui has explored in many of his works, including performance pieces. Chinese history is riddled with this idea of “Chai-na/China,” as each dynasty would begin with building and creating, only to be destroyed and rebuilt by the next dynasty. One of his most powerful pieces is “Charmain Mao 10,000 RMB” where he uses 10,000 RMB worth of banknotes to spell out the political slogan “Mao Zhuxi Wan Sui” which translates to “10,000 years for Chairman Mao.” This work in effect links the politics of Mao with the economic efforts of Deng Xiaoping, and acknowledges the contradiction that lies in the use of Chairman Mao’s image on money. While Mao used his image to push the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping used Mao’s image to push his own economic revolution.

JOHN YOUNG ZERUNGE (b. 1956, Hong Kong): John Young Zerunge is a Hong Kong-born Australian artist. During the time of the Cultural Revolution in China, he was sent to Australia to live. His first performance-action works were made in Chengchun, Manchuria in 1979, entitled “Manchurian Snow Walk”; this work started from an arbitrary point in a virgin snow forest, analogous to the cultural position of Hong Kong to the rest of the world at that time. The subsequent constant return to this arbitrary point from different parts of the forest made this point significant over time. Over three decades, he has made works in Antarctica, the Australian Central desert, as well as the West Coast of Ireland, contrasting these remote conditions with the density of Hong Kong - thus the works are intimately related to travel, the diaspora and transculturality. Young interplays and layers philosophical notions upon technologically crafted conceptual paintings. In 2008 he created a series of works with regard to the year 1967 - a tumultuous year in Hong Kong at the height of the Cultural Revolution in China and the backlashes and riots that were led across its border into Hong Kong. With workers rioting in the streets impassioned with communist zeal and at the same time refugees escaping China by sea on sinking rafts, Young’s work pushes and pulls at the East and West perceptions and reactions on China’s border in that year. His work “Wishforce” shows a crowd of smiling faces looking up to the skies with hope, a red bucket symbolizing modern manufacturing in China and the hope of a better life.

WANG SHUGANG (b. 1960, Beijing) Wang Shugang, a Beijing-born artist who keeps studios in Berlin and Beijing, is known for creating clusters of figures mostly in red. Wang Shugang’s Sweeper figures again present Tibetan monk figures, and critically reflect on ritualistic practices. While sweeping symbolizes the motion of continually performing rites, it also suggests that such rites happen over and over without reflection on the act. Frequently using the color red, the artist hopes to elicit the multiple symbologies associated with the color. While historically it is a color representing happiness, it also became a symbol of terror during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Today, monks of Tibetan Buddhism wear red-hued robes. However, while Wang wishes to draw connection to symbols of traditional China through a humorous tone, he also warns against the potential pitfalls of contemporary Chinese art into superficial symbolism. “Apartment Block Life” shows a red man inside many bamboo birdcages symbolizing life in Beijing today. The cages are really an interior cityscape that encompasses not only the urban terrain of contemporary life, but also the psychological spaces and forms of power that citizens must navigate in performing everyday tasks.

CHEN WEI (b. 1980 Zhejiang province) Chen Wei creates situational installations that he photographs. The works are heavy with despair, isolation and repression. These room installations suggest an unsettling claustrophobic feeling from within, a feeling of instability, nervousness and danger. A room is a closed space in which the artist feels both security and boundary. Through various installation settings, he presents a dilemma of living under some controlling authority who at the same time brings him hope and dreams for a better future. The installation that Chen Wei creates for the RED exhibition presents a quiet room corner with a chair whose whittled legs weigh on light bulbs, and a telephone that will never ring. The red colour on the back wall is eye-catching, bright and strong. Yet it signals us to stop pending some foreboding danger. Beautiful and untouchable. The chair, as well, on the light bulbs seem so wonderful from afar but can be

neither touched nor sat in. Along the wall, three photographs of enclosed rooms with means of escape are incorporated.

MAP OFFICE is a multidisciplinary platform devised by Laurent Gutierrez (b. 1966, Casablanca, Morocco) and Valérie Portefaix (b. 1969, Saint-Etienne, France). This duo of artists/architects has been based in Hong Kong since 1996. Their entire project forms a critique of spatio-temporal anomalies and documents how human beings subvert and appropriate space, humour, games and fiction are usually part of their approach. "To fight with Crossed Arms" is a series of 4 photographs and one of the many collaborations between **AI WEI WEI** (b.1957, Beijing) and the MAP Office. The work is signed both by MAP OFFICE and Ai Wei Wei. With this work the collective intended to engage Ai Wei Wei in a conversation about one of his architectural projects by challenging him to pick up a brick and pose "holding a brick", "showing a brick", "throwing a brick" and "putting a brick on the head". Four positions assumed by Wei Wei: the architect, the curator, the critic, the artist and presented as an allegory of the master of all masters.

SHAO YINONG (B. 1961, Qinghai, China) and **MUCHEN** (b. 1970 in Liaoning, China) are one of China's most vibrant artist duos. Starting from their "Family Register" series to their well-known photographic series "The Assembly Halls", the artists attempt to recollect memories by way of incorporating their present-day physical existence. Exhibiting at RED their "Colour Exercise" series, the artists enlarge newsprint images, which were collected during their childhood – the most accessible memory objects from the days during the Cultural Revolution. The enlarged images become pixelated creating a clearly documented scene that becomes blurred into pure colour patterns. They then carefully paint on each of the squares the vibrant colours of their memories. Red is nostalgic to many people and exists within people's subconscious everywhere. Even today, the colour red causes an emotional rush within them when seeing a red flag, or a propaganda poster, or the memorial badges of the late Chairman. The work entitled, "Red Ocean" portrays a typical festive celebration in the days of Mao, a passionate moment when all existence was red hot. The artists have been hand-painting on different photographic images in an enduring conquest to capture these forgotten moments. The laborious process is mesmerizing in that it contrasts both the original colour of the objects with the imagined colours of their emotional memories. It internalizes and personalizes the objects, interlacing reality with history, while displacing the real and unreal.

RONGRONG (b. 1968, Zhangzhou, China) and **INRI** (b. 1973, Kanagawa pre. Japan) met in 1999 when, by the time, they did not speak a common language and photography was their only means of communication. Falling in love at first sight ignited a long-lasting relationship between the two photographers who together create significant bodies of work speaking of love and passion, humanity and nature, as well as, mortality and eternity. The collaboration began in 2000 when the two staged a series of photos in the magnificent Great Wall in China, shown here at the RED exhibition. Counter to current-day trends, the couple does not alter their works with digital modification. Instead, the persistence to hand-paint on the original black and white photos gives rise to a very unique ambience and texture to the work that transforms the physical presence to immortality. The naked bodies running, in the Mt. Fuji series, or making love in the ink-painting-like landscape are almost invisible, absorbed in the mist of dawn, inspire a sublime passion hidden in the tranquillity of nature. The triptych, together with their other works that follow, do not pose a criticism on the current state. Their purity and the untouched beauty bring us back to the simplicity of life and the fundamental of being. The scene is airy but at the same time overwhelmed with the love and connection bonding the creators that speak to the hearts of many.

MENG JIN (b. 1973, Chongqing, China) represents a generation of Chinese photographers whose creation departs from the criticism and confusion of social lives and focuses on the connection with the past, still too close to the present, and its relations with the present-future. With his ongoing interest in urban life, architecture, memory and found objects, and the inter-relationship between physical

buildings, objects and their social context, Meng Jin came to a memory recollection experiment to challenge a perceived reality through distortion of a tangible space with, literally, graphic handling. A school is strongly related to a society. It represents the system, the moral belief and it carries the responsibility to tackle questions of today and pose a question for our future. In the classrooms of an abandoned school, the artist spray-painted colours in the real space then photographed it as is. The interesting composition of colours was free from intention, but somehow recalls the tri-tone colouring on black and white television films in the old days. All the surreal and extravagant colours were "painted" before the shutter was pressed. The physical existence of the material and its interaction with the space, as described by the artist, has replaced any post-production that may otherwise be needed, sketching a space as a completely different object for memory recollection.

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Works can be viewed on our website: www.10chancerylanegallery.com

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CANG XIN
CHEN WEI
HUANG RUI
KO SIU LAN
MA LIUMING
MAP OFFICE
MENG JIN
RONG RONG AND INRI
SHAO YINONG AND MUCHEN
WANG SHUGANG
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