



OCTOBER 26–DECEMBER 11, 2011

SELECTED CONTEMPORARY
CHINESE AMERICAN ART

**I N T E R
M E D I A T E**

藝 界 跨 間 媒

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M E D I A T E

艺术界跨间媒

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FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TCNJ Art Gallery is pleased to present *Inter-Mediate: Selected Contemporary Chinese American Art*, the first ever exhibition at the college concerned with contemporary Chinese art. As the title of the exhibition suggests the works of art reflect the cultural influences of both the East and West. The exhibition has been developed and guided by Jiayan Mi, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, English, and World Languages and Cultures at the College. In February, Professor Mi hosted a lecture at the college by Ou Ning, a leading curator of contemporary Chinese art and an acclaimed documentary filmmaker. During post-lecture discussions, Mi proposed the idea of an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art to John Laughton, Dean of the School of Arts and Communication. Dean Laughton has enthusiastically supported the project ever since.

Professor Mi began research and development of the exhibition last spring with the gallery's former director, Sarah Cunningham. I began as director in July, and even before this time I had the pleasure of accompanying Mi on visits to artists' studios and galleries to help gather a cohesive, yet diverse assemblage of works of art for this exhibition. Our criteria included selection of artists who had been born and trained in China (or in the case of one artist, Hong Kong), but who now live and work primarily in the New York area. In addition, we were interested in artists whose work either combined or crossed boundaries of media (in keeping with the theme of "inter-mediate") as a means of exploring and expressing their cross-cultural identities.

We are tremendously grateful to the eight artists in the exhibition who have generously shared their art and creative visions with the College. We also want to thank gallerist Cheryl McGinnis, who helped with the exhibition's early formulation. Along with funding from the School of Arts and Communication, the exhibition has received special support through a grant from the Mercer County Cultural and Historical Commission. Numerous faculty, staff, and students at TCNJ have also helped make this exhibition possible, including graphic design student Kyle McKernan, research assistant Jazia Hammoudi, and gallery assistants Trista Chui, Jane Howell, Mariah McLaughlin, Matt Pembleton, Danielle Reilly, Jason Wong, and Hyuna Yong. Additionally, we are indebted to Jerome Silbergeld, Professor of Chinese Art History at Princeton University, who lectured on contemporary Chinese art at TCNJ prior to the opening of the show and whose scholarship in the field has been an inspiration for everyone working on the exhibition. Emily Croll, Director, TCNJ Art Gallery and Sarnoff Museum

Emily Croll
Director
TCNJ Art Gallery and Sarnoff Museum
The College of New Jersey

REMAPPING INTER-MEDIACY IN THE CHINESE AMERICAN ART SCENE

To curate an exhibition of art that is both stylistically diverse as well as artistically creative, I considered two groundbreaking North American exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art to engage with: *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, curated by Gao Minglu, which opened in New York in 1998 and toured around the country until 2000, and *Outside In: Chinese x American x Contemporary Art*, curated by Jerome Silbergeld, which opened at the Princeton University Museum in 2009. The curatorial philosophies of these two exhibitions are as revealing as their titles. The former focused on the new art waves that erupted in the mid-1980s in post-Mao mainland China, artworks that were often labeled with Western cultural clichés such as “avant-garde,” “postmodern” “new art,” or “experimental art,” so as to show the assimilation of the more progressive artistic theories and practices from the West into China. The latter highlighted questions about what is “Chinese,” what is “American,” and what is “contemporary art,” foregrounding boundary-crossing artworks that question and challenge conventional perceptions of ethnic identity and artistic contemporaneity. Undoubtedly, from “inside out” to “outside in” a topographical as well as an epistemic circle is hence formulated.

From the outset, in this exhibition we seek to break this essentializing “outside-inside” circle by cutting apart its knot and inserting a medium that suspends the completion of its circularity: hence the title *Inter-Mediate*. This exhibition focuses on the medium, revamping Marshall McLuhan’s axiom that “the medium is the message” in a formidable context of Chinese American diaspora. *Inter-Mediate* attempts to raise a multitude of questions: How does the medium shape Chinese American identities? How do these Chinese American artists use different media to construct their identities? How are the messages (both residual and emergent) transformed, translated, or transplanted by the medium into a different social and cultural context? How do the Chinese American artists’ diasporic experiences change or reconfigure the medium of their artistic practices?

In this sense, “medium” is not treated as a noun but as a verb that always functions to mediate a multiplicity of boundaries, identities, limits, zones, and routes. The eight artists selected for this exhibition (five female and three male)—Hu Bing, Cui Fei, Sinying Ho, Song Xin, LiQin Tan, Zhang Hongtu, O Zhang, and Zheng Lianjie—are all what Zhang Hongtu has humorously called “CIAs,” Chinese immigrant artists. They were born, grew up, and received their undergraduate educations in China (including Hong Kong). Working in mixed media, including oil painting, glass, ceramic sculpture, installations, digital prints, photography, film, computer generated images, animation, paper collages, found objects, and organic materials, these Chinese American artists create works that negotiate both different art forms and styles and the differing cultures of China and the United States. Through their creative use of a *mélange* of new media, these artists reflect on their alienated routes to becoming an “other” in America as they critically engage with their Chinese cultural roots, subsequently giving rise to a dynamic in-between space that is more fluid, open, and flexible, ultimately denying any possibility of “outside-inside” closure.

In Zhang Hongtu’s three recreations of masterpieces by both classical Chinese and Western masters (Wang Yuanqi-Cézanne, Ma Yuan, and Bada Sanren), the artist powerfully intermediates between the brushworks of traditional Chinese scroll painting and Western European oil painting and destabilizes the boundary between the original/real and the copy/unreal. Through the strategy of intertextual mimicry (almost the same, but not quite), Zhang reaffirms his “CIA” identity as a diasporic hybrid. More important, it is exactly this boundary crossing sensibility that empowers Zhang to launch an acute engagement with China’s deteriorating environment in his remaking of classical Chinese landscape paintings. As Hongtu has remarked, “Where those masters saw

raging waters, I see dry riverbeds. Where they painted clean water, now I am painting the polluted water.” In a subversively playful manner, Zhang’s artworks will surely raise people’s ecological consciousness about protecting and preserving China’s *shanshui* (mountains and waters).

Likewise, in Sin-ying Ho’s four ceramic works, she has created a unique sculptural hybrid by digitally transferring popular cultural icons (dragons, Mao, Marilyn Monroe, the Mona Lisa, and bodhisattva Guanyin) and cultish corporate logos (Walmart, KFC, MacDonald’s and the Dow Jones indexes) from both Chinese and Western cultures onto quintessential Chinese porcelain. Kitschy and theatrically humorous, these semiotically collaged ceramic sculptures intend to subvert a monolingual, homogenous cultural identity, giving rise to an intersecting zone in which the tensions between new versus old, technology versus tradition, communication versus language, aesthetics versus cultural identity, and economy versus power are mediated.

In Hu Bing’s visually provocative mixed-media installation—an assemblage of abandoned objects from daily life (stockings, empty bottles, clothes hangers)—the artist reveals the intimate human aura of these quotidian objects, thus rejuvenating the inner life of their existence. In an attempt to de-familiarize these disposable objects, Hu Bing seeks to alter the audience’s perception of vulnerability, trauma, violence, sexuality, and gender inequality, all of which are often invisible or repressed in an immigrant society.

O Zhang’s large-scale photographs wrestle with the issues of estrangement, alienation, dislocation, and identity loss symptomatic of children in post-socialist China. The three photographs from Zhang’s twenty-one-part series *Horizon* (2004) were completed during the artist’s return to the rural village of her childhood in Western Hunan province. The photographs depict young girls crouching on the edge of a field. They look , a bit frightened but also stare directly and aggressively at the camera as if asking, “What is on the horizon for our future?” In a semi-documentary style of *cinéma vérité*, Zhang rejects a self-orientalizing gaze at these innocent, yet confused young rural girls; instead, she captures them with deep compassion and ingenuity. The two photos, selected from Zhang’s 2008 series *The World Is Yours (But Also Ours)*, reveals the superficiality and estrangement of urban youth encroached upon by the materialism and consumerism in contemporary Chinese society. The ironic disjunction between the text/caption, image, (on the figures’ t-shirts), and cultural monuments (as backdrop) shows Zhang’s position of sharp critique.

Song Xin engages with her diasporic identity by transforming an ancient Chinese folk art form—paper cut—into a contemporary American context. By using the cutting technique, she creates the illusion of three-dimensionality using visual images found in recycled fashion and entertainment magazines, advertisements, and pornography. This multiplicity of discordant cultural materials reassembled through montage and collage suggests an immigrant identity that is as both fragmented and reconstructed. Song Xin thus remaps an alter/native space of migrant routes and identity.

In counterpoint to Song Xin’s paper cut handiwork, which boldly retranslates the cultural roots of an indigenous China into a deterritorialized immigrant world, are Tan LiQin’s digital installations. By combining digital prints on wood with video animation technology, Tan has transformed the five primal elements of wood, fire, water, earth, and metal from ancient Chinese philosophy and cosmology into an interactive postmodern 3-D installation artwork. The vivid animation not only renders the five mystic elements alive and immediate, but also engages the audience so that the vital primordial energy appears to burst forth from nature. In this vein, Tan appropriates cutting-edge digital technology to create a new “inter-mediate” art form, which he terms “Digital-Natural Art” to articulate the transcendent symbiosis of the great Dao and human life.

The interconnectedness between the transcending Dao and humanity can also be experienced in performance and video artist Zheng Lianjie's video installation *Mountain Hua Project—An Ode to Mountain* (2008) and his large-scale photographic prints *Vines* (2005). In the video, the mesmerizing lyricism of bamboo leaves thrown into the air and their slow-motion falling into a deep valley emits an aura of the ephemerality of life and the divine energy that encompasses the natural world. In *Vines*, the natural forms captured in black and white photographs evoke the magical power of Chinese splash brushwork in which the pure visual beauty of the mystic Dao is revealed and experienced. An additional photographic print in the exhibition is from a series that document performances by Zheng on a crumbling portion of the Great Wall in 1993, often considered one of the most important performance works in post-Tiananmen China. These photos, which include images of 10,000 broken bricks wrapped in red cloth, are not only visually provocative, but also culturally and politically subversive. The Great Wall, the monument that most symbolizes China's national identity, is subject to deconstruction, decomposition, and dissemination.

The line that demarcates art and medium is extremely elusive in Cui Fei's installations. By combining found materials from nature such as thorns, tendrils, twigs, leaves, and vines, Cui creates calligraphic installation works that mediate between nature and culture. She treats these natural objects as scriptic or ideogrammatic, as if they were already intimate traces of writing in nature waiting to be read and interfused. Cui is confident in dismantling this representational duality by simply presenting nature as art and art as nature.

To mediate or not to mediate? To inter-mediate or not to inter-mediate? Let us listen to Zhuangzi (369 BCE-286 BCE), the ancient Chinese sage-philosopher of Daoism:

荃者所以在鱼，得鱼忘荃；
蹄者所以兔，得兔忘蹄；
言者所以在意，得意而忘言。
吾安得忘言之人而与之哉？

Fishing stakes are employed to catch fish; but when the fish are got, the men forget the stakes.

Snares are employed to catch hares, but when the hares are got, men forget the snares.

Words are employed to convey ideas; but when the ideas are apprehended, men forget the words.

Fain would I talk with such a man who has forgotten the words?
(Trans. James Legge)

We should free the medium from its bondage once its mediation is completed. It is after all the freedom of art that prevails! The artworks selected in this exhibition will speak to you for themselves.

Jiayan Mi
Associate Professor
Comparative Literature, English, and World Languages and Cultures
The College of New Jersey

CUI FEI

born JINAN, CHINA ; resides NEW YORK



Not Yet Titled (detail), 2009
Installation, thorns and thread
Dimensions variable

Tracing the Origin VI_I, 2008
Pigment print
76 x 35 in.

Tracing the Origin VII, 2011
Installation with graphite
Dimensions variable

SIN-YING HO

born HONG KONG ; resides NEW YORK



Walmart, KFC, 2007–09

Porcelain with hand painting and decal transfers
16 x 10 in. diameter

In a Dream of Hope No.1, 2011

Porcelain with hand painting and decal transfers
69 x 18 ½ in. diameter

Made in the Postmodern Era, Series no.4, 2007–09

Porcelain with hand painting and decal transfers
15 ½ x 11 ¼ x 8 ½ in.

Seeing Eve, 2007–09

Porcelain with hand painting and decal transfers
20 ½ x 11 x 11 in.

HU BING

born SHANGHAI, CHINA ; resides NEW JERSEY



Sake, Sake (detail), 2011
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

SONG XIN

born BEIJING CHINA ; resides NEW YORK



Here and Now, 2008

Papercut with magazine collage on photo paper
96 x 68 in.

Tree of Life, Part II, 2010

Papercut with magazine collage on Mylar
76 x 56 in.

Still Life—Flower, 2011

Papercut with photo collage on Mylar
40 in. diameter

LIQIN TAN

born HUNAN, CHINA ; resides NEW JERSEY



BurlStumpArm + 4 (detail), 2005
Digital prints on wood with 3D animation and four LCD screens
Four pieces, each 32 x 48 in.

ZHANG HONGTU

born PINGLIAND, CHINA ; resides NEW YORK



Bada! Bada!-11 #2, 2011

Oil and mixed media on paper on panel
74 X 68 in.

Wang Yuanqi-Cézanne, Fang, 2009

Oil on canvas
51 X 78 in.

Re-Make of Ma Yuan's Water Album H (780 Years Later), 2008

Oil on canvas
50 x 72 in.

O ZHANG

born GUANGZHOU, CHINA ; resides NEW YORK



时刻准备着

Always be Ready from *The World is Yours (But Also Ours)*, 2008

C-print

40 x 50 in.

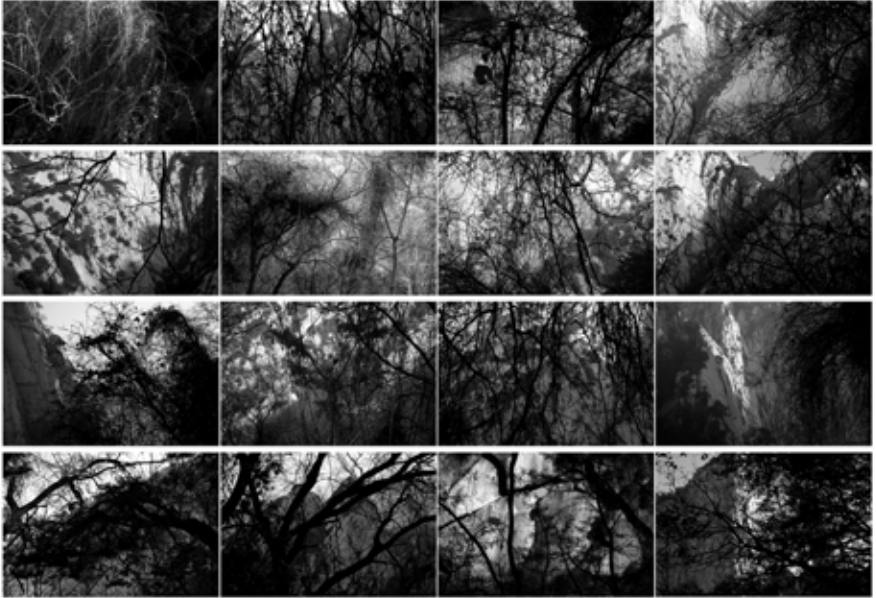
Horizon, 2004

C-print installation

Three photographs, each 40 x 40 in.

ZHENG LIANJIE

born BEIJING, CHINA ; resides NEW YORK



Vines, 2005
C-print photographs
96 x 60 in.

Binding the Lost Souls: Huge Explosion, 1993
C-print photograph of performance and installation
30 x 42 in.

Hua Mountain Project—Shan Song, 2008
Single channel video



Title calligraphy: Zheng Lianjie

Cover image: Song Xin, *Here and Now* (detail), 2008, papercut with magazine collage on photo paper, 96 x 68 in.

Back image: Cui Fei, *Not Yet Titled* (detail), 2009, installation with thorns and thread, dimensions variable