

## ***Ink Art Week***

**DATE:** 17 – 20 April, 2018

**VENUE:** Ca' Foscari University of Venice, CFZ Ca' Foscari Zattere - Cultural Flow Zone, Dorsoduro 1392, Zattere al Pontelungo, 30123 Venice

### ***驭墨 / Ink Riders Exhibition***

**DATE:** 17 – 27 April, 2018

**VENUE:** Magazzino del Sale n. 3 / Venice Academy of Fine Arts, Dorsoduro 264, Fondamenta Zattere, 30123 Venice

**PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:** Gu Gan 古干, Zhang Dawo 张大我, Fan Bingnan 范炳南, Liu Gang 刘钢, Pu Lieping 濮列平, Zhang Qiang 张强 & Lia Wei 魏离雅, Dunzi Bin 顿子斌, Yu Li 于立, Wang Xiaoming 王晓明, Xie Hai 谢海, Wang Yong 王勇, Ma Kun 马锟, Huang Liang 黄亮.

**UNIVERSITY HOSTS:** Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Confucius Institute at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice Academy of Fine Arts

**PARTNERSHIPS:** China Mount Tai • Taishan Academy Contemporary Visual History Research Centre (中国泰山 • 当代视觉史高等研究院), Sichuan Fine Arts Institute Art Theory and Ink Art Research Centre (四川美院艺术学与水墨高等研究中心), Literati Lab (文人新世代美术馆), Ink Hub, BIMOCHi© Art Center of World Association for Chinese Studies, White Horse Lake Visual Arts, Feimo Contemporary Calligraphy

**INSTITUTIONAL ADVISORS:** Sabrina Rastelli, Giuseppe La Bruna

**ACADEMIC SUPERVISORS:** Lia Wei, Zhang Qiang

**CURATORS:** Elena Macrì, Huang Liang

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## **PROGRAM CALENDAR**

### **1. TUESDAY NOON, 17 April**

#### ***驭墨 / Ink Riders EXHIBITION OPENING***

A collective exhibition with ink artworks by a circle of contemporary Chinese artists. Each had a role to play in the last 30 years in the historical movement of Modern Calligraphy and the development of ink art as a new tradition.

- Ink Performances
- Artists talk to the public in front of the artworks

## **2. WEDNESDAY, 18 April**

### **INK THEORY**

Today we seek to define the new tradition born out of the evolution of Modern Calligraphy. Ink Art responds to an expanded context of production and reception by revisiting spatial possibilities, visual expressions and aesthetic principles.

**Convenor: Zhang Qiang**

**9:00/12:00**

**Zhang Qiang (Professor and calligrapher, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing)**

*Hanzi/Shuxie ("Chinese Characters/Writing"). 30 years of Modern Calligraphy*

In its encounter with modernity, Chinese Calligraphy faced two major challenges. On the one hand, it had to reflect upon the structure of Chinese characters and on the other hand, it had to allow a greater autonomy to the act of writing. While Abstract Expressionism in the West inspired the modernisation of Chinese calligraphy, in turn the experience of Chinese ink art now expands the conceptual and aesthetic field of Western abstract expressionism.

**Yolaine Escande (Director, Centre de Recherche sur les Arts et le Langage, EHESS, Paris)**

*Praise of the Draft: Ink Art is not "Drawing"*

Usually in Europe, Chinese ink arts, that means Chinese painting as well as Chinese calligraphy, are supposed to belong to the category of "drawings". For instance, an important exhibition has taken place in The Louvre Museum in 1995, called *Tractatus Tractus. The Treatise of the Stroke*, curated by Hubert Damisch, the well-known art historian and philosopher. This exhibition displayed together drawings made by European classical and contemporary artists, and ink art by Chinese artists. This comparison is still very influential. This paper will aim to show the technical, philosophical, and aesthetic difference between "drawing" in European art, and ink art. In ink art, especially in cursive script (*caoshu*), and in suggestive painting, what is appreciated and valued is not a completed drawing considered as such, i.e. a drawing not needing any other interpretation, meaning enough by itself and sufficiently explicit not to occur any confusion or debate. On the contrary, it is a draft or an unfinished sketch or outline, allowing varied interpretations, appreciated according to its capacity to stimulate imagination and to produce an effect on the beholder that connects him or her not only to the creator, but to the cosmic movement of creation. Though, what is appreciated and valued is not the sketch for something that would come later. Especially as these "drafts" can be preceded by their own drafts. The draft is not either believed to express the mind of the artist. This paper will examine, through the Chinese aesthetic categories—that concern the process much more than the accomplished work result—the differences between the meaning of a "drawing" in French and in English on the one hand, and on the other hand the meaning of a "painting", a "sketch", a "draft" in Chinese ink arts. It will try to show contemporary artists' ink artworks,

especially modern calligraphies, are theoretically more related to traditional calligraphy than to modern or contemporary Western art.

**15:00/17:00**

**Riccardo Caldura (Professor, Venice Academy of Fine Arts, Venice)**

***The Visual Nature of Writing. Experiences of Contemporary Poetry***

Poetry that is concrete, that is visual. These kinds of artistic experiments in poetry have challenged the cornerstone of Western culture based on the functional effectiveness of the alphabetic structure. A practice has emerged from these experimentations, considering the text as a material to be seen and not just to be read. A greater attention is emerging for the formal values of the composition of the text, going beyond the typographical framework. These experiments open the doors to other ways of perceiving and communicating our relationship with reality.

**Liu Gang (Director, Taishan Art Institute, Taishan Academy, Tai'an)**

***Mount Tai as a Context for Contemporary Artistic Practice and Scholarly Research***

Liu Gang is the director of the art institute at Taishan Academy. In 2017, he facilitated the establishment of a research centre for the history of contemporary visual culture at the foot of Mount Tai. The mountain is a key location in Chinese political and religious history: it stands as the main gate to the abode of the dead, and as a major site for imperial sacrifices through the ages. Epigraphic traces from the most important literati and political figures of their times, confere an encyclopedic aspect to the sacred mountain. Located in this privileged context, the research centre will be a platform for international and interdisciplinary scholarly collaboration. The focus of collaborations is set on the anthropology of art and antiquarianist practices, while members and invited scholars are encouraged to combine artistic practice and academic research. With a background in Chinese painting and calligraphy, Liu Gang has dedicated himself to investigate cross-cultural and transhistorical aspects in art theory, such as the intersection of abstract expressionism and traditional Chinese Painting.

*30 min Roundtable*

### **3. THURSDAY, 19 April**

#### **INK & GESTURE**

Today we investigate the dialogue between Ink Art and other art forms. Interventions are halfway between speech and act, performance and installation.

**Convenor: Lia Wei**

**9:00/12:00**

**Lia Wei (Member EAst/ULB, Belgium and lecturer, Renmin University of China)**

*Literati Habitus. The Figure of the Scholar/Artist Between Theory and Practice*

Calligraphy is often presented as holding together the spectrum of activities designated here as the 'literati habitus'. Experiments in Modern Calligraphy are located somewhere between the deconstruction of characters and abstract expressionism, caught in a highly individual conception of the artist, and trapped in the de-materializing/de-contextualizing white box dear to Modernism. It is argued here that ink art needs to re-negotiate its relationship with painting, but also with seal carving, rubbing, epigraphy etc, the latter practices having the advantage to bridge the ink line with its material or contextual counterpart. Moreover, the embedding of literati practice into epistolary relationships or festive gatherings needs to be addressed, beyond the individual author, his studio practice and the public display of artistic production. Finally, the immutable Past can be revisited in search for alternative benchmarks, exploiting the toolkit of Chinese Antiquarianism, or the discipline of Metal and Stone Studies. As a response to the above identified needs, a collaborative artistic project is presented in this talk, aimed at solving the divorce between matter and sign and at re-creating an intersubjective notion of authorship.

**Jan Schacher (Institute for Computer Music and Sound Technology, Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland)**

*Musical Strokes: Calligraphic Performance as Gesture and Sound*

Coming from a background of 'enactive' experimentation with technological music performance, this inquiry attempts to address the questions of musicality in calligraphic gestures. To investigate this, a first pilot study was carried out that evaluated the usability of motion-capture techniques, and serves to develop a form of staging and musical composition. The link between calligraphy gesture and sound is established by capturing stroke movements technically and connecting them to digital sound processes. The sounds follow and express directly the brushing gestures of the performers; the calligraphers take on a double role as musical performers. How can we come to understand the calligraphic gesture as a manifestation of universal movement and gesture prototypes? How can we understand calligraphy from a different perspective than the traditional art of writing in a culturally anchored practice?

**Rosalie Fabre (Curator, Garage Cosmos, Belgium)**

*Modern and Contemporary Calligraphy Beyond Borders*

As seen in the exhibition 'Calligraphy as Process' held at Garage Cosmos in Brussels, Belgium, from February to March 2018, which showcased works from founding members of avant-garde movements and contemporary artists from East Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and the Americas, modern and contemporary artists have reintroduced painting into calligraphy, others poetry, in a conceptual or even destructive way, engaging with certain aspects to rediscover beautiful writing, the Greek etymology of calligraphy. Their artistic choices reflect aesthetic, literary, social, political and philosophical considerations that are specific to each of the cultural traditions of which they are the heirs.

Because calligraphy has lost its immediate use as a means of communication, the rules which presided over it have become outdated and its artistic potential takes on new and unprecedented directions: plural, multiple forms of writing, graphic as well as symbolic modes of communication, the appearance of pictorial languages without meaning or pseudo-scriptural under the appearance of pseudo-writing, or unreadable writing; in any case several possible readings, preventing one linear or singular reading. The surpassing as such of the limitations of a system of signs generates contemplative reflection. The new procedures established by such artists allow for the narrow framework of the autochthonous spectator, who belongs to the same culture as the producer, to be enlarged, and thus they open the works to an audience beyond the borders marked by the difference in languages of the transmitter (the artist) and the receiver (the audience). Their works signal an interest for a universal language and transcend the dichotomy between the local and the global, allowing that which was only tradition to take place in contemporary art. A culture of contemporary calligraphic art is thereby constructed and put forth.

**15:00/17:00**

**Simone Schuiten (Professor of Philosophy at ESA, School of Art St-Luc, Brussels)**

***Intercultural practices. Transfer process between Chinese and Western aesthetics***

This talk will consider the quest for alterity and mutual borrowings between Western and Chinese artists from the beginning of the XXth century. Distance and incomprehension form a fertile ground for parallel experiments on both sides, for which modernity provides a common loose context. Simone Schuiten teaches comparative philosophy at the ESA, School of Art and curates shows in her own gallery in Brussels – ODRADEK – where she also welcomes Asian artists for three-months long residencies. She often practices the format of duo exhibits combining artists and artworks from contrasting cultural backgrounds. Since the years 2000, she travels to China frequently with her students, who are encouraged to think interculturality in both theoretical and creative terms.

**Monique Arnaud (Nō actress and licensed instructor Kongō school, IUAV University, Venice)**

***Common ground. Nō theatre and sigillography in dialogue***

This intervention will comment upon a duo performance combining gestures and movements of Nō theatre and of sigillography (seal carving) by Monique Arnaud and Lia Wei on April 17th, 2018, in the occasion of the « Ink Riders » exhibit opening. The correspondance is made between the structure of the stage – a magic space composed of 9 squares- and the inscribed face of nine assembled seals, which provide a temporal and spatial frame for the performance. Moreover, the distribution of roles in Nō, between the shite and the waki will be recreated according to the structure of Nō pieces as a dialogue between the actress and the carver, with the carver (waki) as a receptive presence or medium who first activates the shite, then enters in a non-verbal

dialog with him. Finally, the action of “grinding” the ground, produced by the Nō actress’ gliding footsteps resonates with the sound of stone as it is being carved. The performance concludes on memories of an ephemeral movement confronted to chiselmarks from nine sealstones printed in cinnabar red sealpaste on paper. The fragmentary nature of relationships between disciplines, the way they point at commonalities in gesture, composition, rhythm, as well as the novel eye such experiments bring for the practitioners will be discussed.

### ***Ink Artists Roundtable***

Three questions will be asked to the artists exhibited at the *Ink Riders* exhibit.

- 1) Why did you choose this medium (why not sculpture, oil painting....)?
- 2) How did the medium impact your life?
- 3) How do you see your contribution to the field of contemporary ink art?

- **Zhang Da Wo (Beijing and Tasmania)**
- **Yu Li (Beijing)**
- **Huang Liang (Hangzhou)**
- **Zhang Qiang (Chongqing)**
- **Liu Gang (Tai’an)**
- **Fan Bingnan (Xi’an)**

## **4. FRIDAY, 20 April**

### **INK ART MARKET & CURATORSHIP**

Over the past decade, Ink Art has experienced a noteworthy revival, inspiring exhibitions, specialized art fairs, galleries, auctions and symposiums. This day revolves around the role of contemporary ink art in the contemporary art system, outlining its challenges and opportunities.

**Convenor: Elena Macrì**

**9:00/12:00**

**Elena Macrì (Scholar and curator, Ink Hub, Italy)**

*Curating Chinese Ink Art in the West. Recent Developments and Future Perspectives*

Chinese contemporary ink art is not yet a mainstream art form in the West, but is achieving a stronger recognition in both the art market and curatorial communities, attracting interest from many collectors and curators. This expansion is particularly evident in the development of Christie’s and Sotheby’s contemporary ink art sales, in the growing number of galleries dealing in contemporary ink art and in the birth of Ink Asia, the world’s first art fair dedicated to contemporary ink. Moreover, the number of exhibitions focused on contemporary ink art has increased and they are helping to generate a more aesthetically aware art public. Examining the phenomenon from a Western perspective, we are an art public still in the process of formation and need to understand when and how

this international promotion was initiated and who are ink art collectors. The answers to these questions will lead us to outline the way the Chinese scene works and who is driving the ink-trend in the West.

**Martina Gambillara (Director, MAGMA Gallery, Bologna)**

*Chinese Ink Art Market. Focus on auctions*

Recent auction sales have demonstrated strong market potential for Chinese ink art, and this attention is growing also for the contemporary segment. From the 1980s, groundbreaking dealers started to present ink artists in Hong Kong, London and New York, and auction houses offered these works in Asian contemporary art sales. Later in the 1990s, ink art was increasingly undervalued in relation to the new wave of the Chinese realist painters. In the turn of the millennium, Chinese private art collecting has developed in large scale, motivated by a stable development of the economy and the continued growth of social and individual wealth. Thanks also to experimental ink art biennials and major international museum shows, the attention to the market of contemporary ink grew up, and Sotheby's Hong Kong started its dedicated sales in this category in 2013, while Christie's launched a Chinese contemporary ink sale in 2014. Poly Auction Hong Kong established the Chinese Contemporary Ink Paintings Department in 2013. China Guardian in 2012 launched a "New World of Contemporary Ink Painting" sale that even included the work of new ink painters born in the 1970s. Examining sell-through rates and hammer prices, we will define the healthy state of this growing art market.

**Nicola Piccioli (Calligrapher, President of Feimo Contemporary Calligraphy, Florence)**

*Locus and vision. Philology of Chinese Ink Art*

Chinese contemporary artists who revisit literati practice (calligraphy, seal carving and painting) are heirs of a two-thousand-years tradition managed by the literati, holders of a range of humanistic knowledge and techniques. Calligraphy, seal carving and painting are known as "Literati Art", the Chinese version of "Fine Arts". These three disciplines are determined by a skillful use of brush and ink, and belong to a world unrelated to Western aesthetic experiences. They developed their own conceptions, ideals, techniques and vocabulary, which remain difficult to penetrate. Together with Paola Billi, Nicola Piccioli founded "Feimo Contemporary Calligraphy", a platform active in Florence-Milan-Bologna, which promotes the understanding of contemporary calligraphy and literati art through educational, curatorial and mediatic activities (<http://feimo.it/>). Piccioli will talk about the aims of the enterprise, to demonstrate the universality of the experience of Chinese ink art, and to encourage its appreciation and practice in Western countries. Feimo uses teaching methods built on classical bases and is particularly attentive to the philologically correct rendering of concepts. Their original meaning and the values they convey should emerge in a clear and shareable way, in order to provide the public with an adequate interpretation of Chinese ink art. This talk proposes a synthetic exposition of these concepts, with philological and etymological means that show in an accessible way their unique nature and the historical path that has determined their success.

15:00/17:00

**Fan Bingnan (Artist and curator, Xi'an)**

*Curating Ink Art in China*

Fan Bingnan combines his practice as an artist, involved since the eighties with the Xi'an school of landscape painting, with curatorial activities. In 2003, after a few years spent in the US, Fan Bingnan collaborated with a circle of Korean modern calligraphers to organize a pioneering international ink art exhibit in the Xi'an museum, Shaanxi province. The show gathered dozens of artists, including performers Zhang Qiang and Wang Dongling. For the first time, contemporary ink art experiments stirred controversy in traditional Chinese calligraphy circles and media.

**Huang Liang (Director, Literati Lab, Hangzhou)**

*Literati Lab. Genesis of a Private Museum in Hangzhou*

This talk considers the challenges and possibilities for curating ink art in China today, from the point of view of infrastructure and architecture. Indeed, contemporary art and urbanisation walk hand in hand, and new spaces must be designed for ink art to unfold. Back in 2014, Huang Liang collaborated with BOA Architects (重庆博建设计中心) to combine the inauguration of an architectural experiment, "Chongqing House", with an ephemeral ink art exhibit. The building, located on the banks of the Yangzi River and connected to the riverside by a maze-like concrete bridge, was inspired by traditional architecture on piles, and BOA Architects sought to promote art forms revisiting core concepts traditional Chinese visual culture. From 2013, Dong Shi, a young student of architect Wang Shu (China Academy of Art), was chosen to design a museum dedicated to ink art, basing herself on two core concepts: to the Daoist idea of 'grotto-heaven' (*dongtian* 洞天) and to the eight literati activities (*baya* 八雅, litt. "eight elegances"). The designer reworked an existing concrete shell to create a labyrinthic circulation path recalling an indoor mountain. Nested in this concrete matrix, eight wooden modules correlated eight traditional Chinese architectural shapes (pavilion 亭, platform 台, storied building 楼-阁, terrace 榭, gallery 廊, hut 斋 and hall 堂) to the eight literati activities (playing the musical instrument *qin* 琴, playing chess 棋, reading books 书, painting 画, writing poetry 诗, drinking wine 酒, cultivating flowers 花, drinking tea 茶). The museum is based on a private fund, but collaborates with local cultural and political institutions. The space was inaugurated in September 2017 as "Literati Lab" (新文人世代美术馆, lit. New Literati Era Museum), with an exhibit gathering dozens of contemporary ink painters.

**Yan Weihong (Research professor at Beijing Foreign Study University; CEO of the World Association for Chinese Studies, Beijing)**

*Chinese Contemporary Ink Art: Opportunity, Challenge and Strategy*



