

BARBARA GLADSTONE GALLERY

515 West 24th Street  
New York, New York 10011  
Telephone 212 206 9300  
Fax 212 206 9301

MARSEILLE

HUANG YONG PING

ATELIERS D'ARTISTES DE  
LA VILLE DE MARSEILLE

Huang Yong Ping's site-specific installation, entitled *Trois pas, neuf traces* (Three steps, nine paths, 1995-96) reflected on the differences between various Chinese traditions and those of other cultures. In the past, Huang's work often consisted of intricate networks of disparate elements that include references to Chinese culture, but many of those works remained somewhat hermetic. In this installation, however, the references to Chinese culture served above all as a textured, resonant background to the work.

Upon entering the space, the spectator was forced to step onto a "continent" formed out of plaster that displayed three sets of extremely large footprints. Collectively, the footprints referred to Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity—one mark in each set representing the foot of Muhammad, one that of Christ, and the other that of Buddha. The pattern in which they were arranged derived from Huang's personal interpretation of "Yu," the legendary ritual dance described in Taoist writings as a ceremony during which a monk celebrates the passage from man to spirit. In this ritual a dancing monk imitates the gait of the Chinese emperor Yu, the founder of the Xia



Huang Yong Ping, *Trois pas, neuf traces*  
(Three steps, nine paths),  
1995-96, mixed media. Installation view.

dynasty in the 21st century B. C. One interpretation has it that this emperor walked with the aid of a cane, hence the dance's peculiar steps and the sets of three footprints in *Trois pas, neuf traces*.

Spectators who followed the path marked out by the footsteps in the plaster traveled across an undulating relief, an uneven surface that could be seen as a metaphor for the conflicts that are encountered as civilizations cross each other's paths but never really meet. The white plaster also inevitably revealed the dusty traces of the visitors' steps, and while this material, which is often used in construction, suggests the impulse to mark or to occupy territory, it is also, of course, extremely fragile. The viewer was thus required to walk with great care, not only because of the awkwardness of treading on the bumpy surface, but also to avoid obliterating the footprints that had already been inscribed.

The installation also contained seven sealed trash cans that recalled the spate of terrorist activities in Paris last summer, during which trash cans became receptacles for bombs; they have since been sealed shut. The precarious sense of safety suggested by the sealed containers paralleled the unevenness of the plaster "continent." Two of the cans were sealed by trays, one by a mirror, and two by a manhole cover, while on top of another the artist placed a lid from a pressure cooker—recalling those bombs that were placed inside pressure cookers in 1995. The seventh can was covered with crêpes, suggesting that people had continued to leave their garbage there, perhaps in unconscious resistance to a situation of extreme crisis, or perhaps merely as a result of their inability to adapt to change.

Hanging in one corner of the space above the continent of plaster was a

structure of steel tubes supporting three feet made out of cast iron—a primitive "machine" that the artist had used to mark the footprints in the expanse of plaster. This device suggested a traditional agricultural tool used to tattoo the earth with the effigies of belief systems, around which conflicts or misunderstandings are continually reborn, despite the world's supposed "evolution."

—Jérôme Sans

Translated from the French by Jeanne Herman.