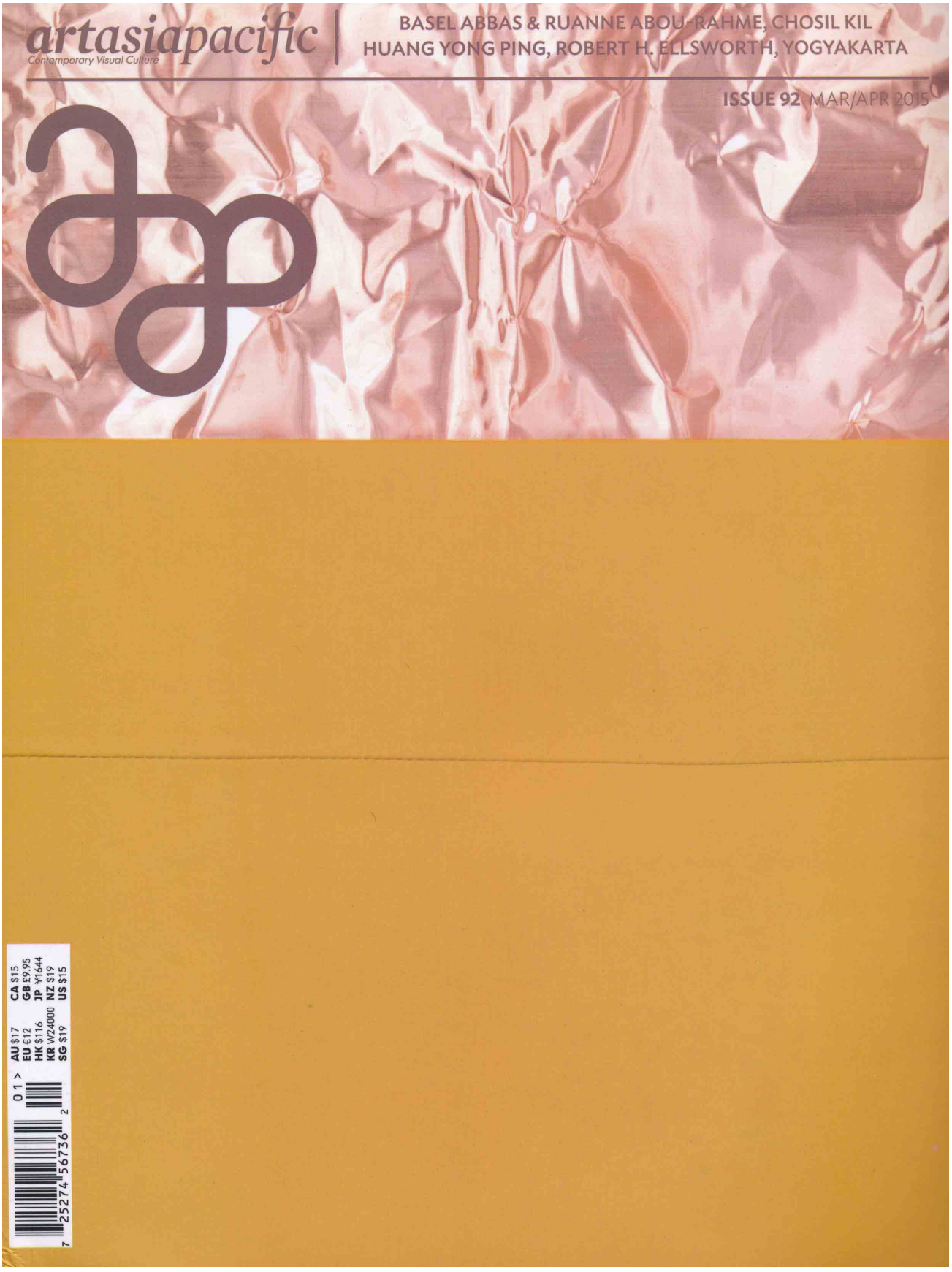
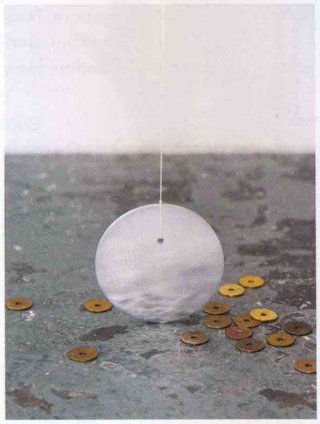
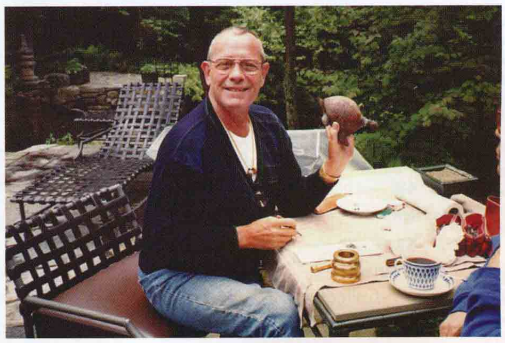
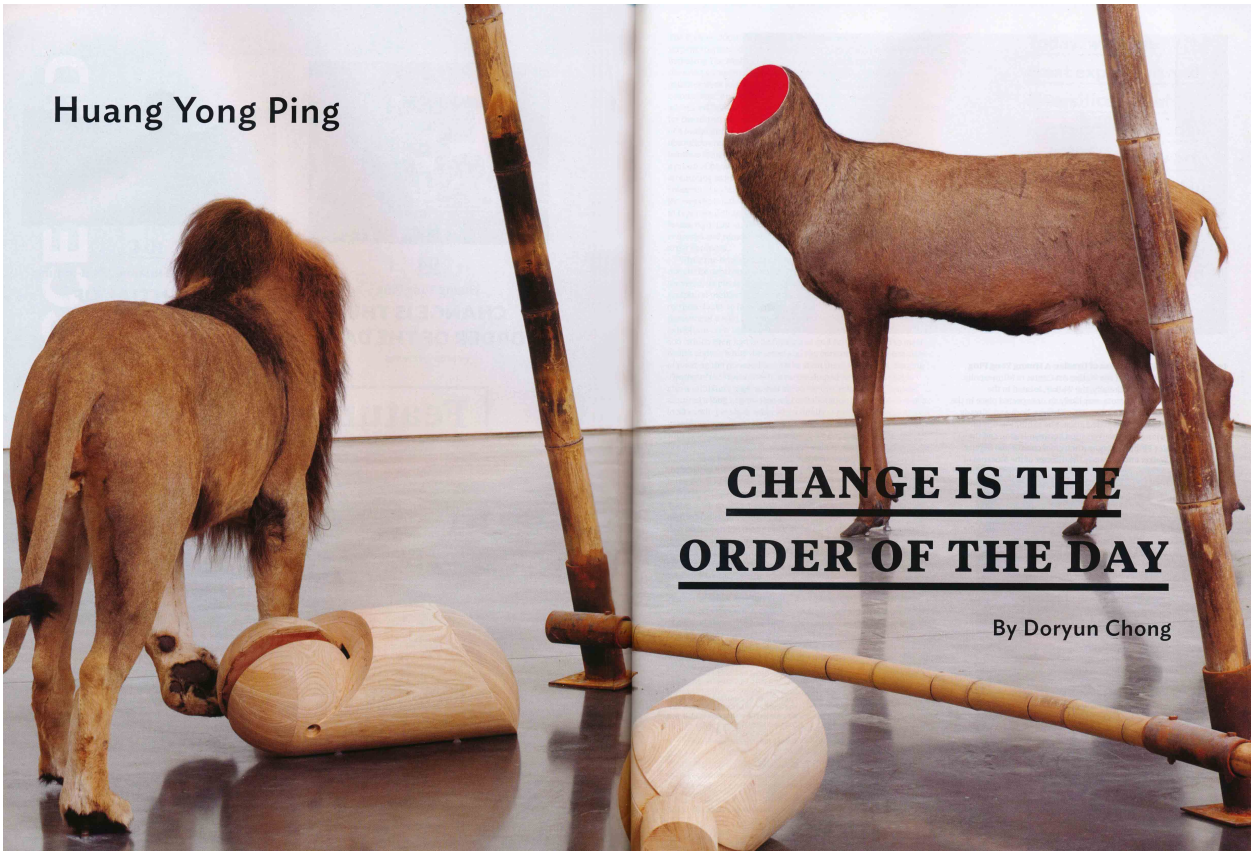

artasiapacific
Contemporary Visual Culture
BASEL ABBAS & RUANNE ABOU-RAHME, CHOSIL KIL
HUANG YONG PING, ROBERT H. ELLSWORTH, YOGYAKARTA
ISSUE 92 MAR/APR 2015
01 > AU $17 EU €12 HK $116 KR W24000 SG $19
CA $15 GB £9.95 JP ¥1644 NZ $19 US $15
7 25274 56736 2

artasiapacific | MARCH/APRIL 2015 | ISSUE 92

Features



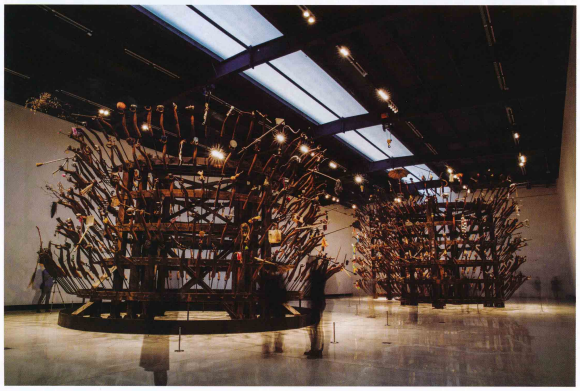




Huang Yong Ping

CHANGE IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY

By Doryun Chong



(Opposite page, top)
CIRCUS, 2012, wood, bamboo, taxidermy animals, resin, steel, cord and cloth, 841.2 × 1000.1 × 1000.1 cm. Photo by Xing Yu. Courtesy Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing.

(Opposite page, bottom)
GUANYIN OF A THOUSAND HANDS, 2012, steel, iron rack, various objects, 1800 × 800 × 800cm. Photo by Xing Yu. Courtesy Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing.

with certain religious or cultural meaning. One critic viewing these works could not but see the arms as "severed" or "amputated," and skewered on "towering torture racks." With nary an acknowledgment of the fact that "Bottle Rack–Guanyin" has been an important motif in the artist's iconography, the critic nonetheless saw the work as a "nauseating indictment of our voluntary blindness, our callous indifference to the mass human suffering that is the cost of so-called progress—those dainty commodities of convenience dangling from the one thousand severed hands."

The profundity that the critic discovers in the artistic conjuring of carnage was perhaps felt even more sharply in light of the recent injunctions from the political summit of the People's Republic of China vis-à-vis what art and culture should do and cannot do. How this revived authoritarian (or, as some might call it, *retardataire*) aesthetic program will manifest itself is yet to be seen, but the title of Huang's exhibition could not be any more allusive, if not intentional. The Taiping rebellion in Southern China (1850–64) invoked in the title used to be interpreted and taught in China as an example of a people's movement, but in recent years, the topic has been seen as an example of antiauthoritarian dissent and thus banned. In that sense, it may not be much of a stretch to interpret another word in the title, "Circus," in terms of the ancient Roman circus, a site of popular entertainment and appeasement for its oft-unruly citizenry. "Bread and circuses," one may cautiously conjecture, then, is precisely what is fed to the populace in the China of the early 21st century.

In addition to zoomorphism, the second strand of Huang's double helix of creative reference has been world religions. He has conjured images of destruction (and regeneration) with the Tower of Babel and Noah's Ark from the Bible. Other religions have been equally subject to Huang's alternately humorous and perverse sculptural-philosophical molding: for instance, an enormous Tibetan prayer wheel inside the 17th-century Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière in Paris (*Om Mani Padme Hum*, 2000); a colossal aluminum-cast sculpture of a minaret laid down and propped up on metal scaffolding like a missile (*Construction Site*, 2007); and a wolf-headed and fish-tailed leviathan about to bite on a lure in the shape of a crucifix dangling from a rosary of fat Buddhas at the end of a fishing rod held by a walking Buddha (*La Pêche*, "The Catch," 2006). The artist's methods of mélange and desacralization of long-held symbolisms have proven to be prophetic, as religiously motivated violence has grown apace over the last decade, and nations and regions align and entrench themselves along the fault lines of old faiths and cultures. In fact, Huang's work over the last decade has taken on an increasing resonance of eschatology, be it in reflection of the world we live in or in prophecy of it.

As I am writing the final words of this essay, the appalling massacres have just taken place in Paris at the headquarters of the satirical journal *Charlie Hebdo* and at a kosher supermarket. Transpiring almost simultaneously are frenetic opinings in the mass and social media, the grandstanding of politicians and sharply divergent views and critiques by writers and public intellectuals as to how the collective embrace of #jesuischarlie reinforces the binaries of religion and tradition versus democracy and freedom of expression. If 2014 was an annus horribilis filled with seemingly endless news of decapitations, tortures, abductions and massacres, 2015 could not have begun in a more ominous way.

When he set up a military-style tent inside the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain in 1990, and surrounded himself with various tools of divination and used the *I-Ching* ("Book of Changes") as a guide for art-making in a work titled *House of Oracles*, Master Huang might have been contemplating the meaning of "avant garde," recast via Chinese classics. Or, like an oracle, maybe he was using these materials to experience a vision of the world we would be living in, a quarter century later—a world that was on a path to a place profoundly darker and increasingly unknowable. Perhaps we would do well to hope that this oracle still believes that "imposing limits forces an impulsion toward creation."

In mid-October 2005, "House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective" premiered at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Though respected internationally, the Walker, located in the Midwestern state of Minnesota, was likely an unexpected place in the minds of many for a retrospective of the Chinese-born and, already for a decade and a half, Paris-based artist. The exhibition was the culmination of a long-term conversation between Huang and the exhibition curator Philippe Vergne (then chief curator and deputy director at the Walker and currently the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) and of the commitment the Walker made to the artist. In a visionary move just a few years prior in 2001, the curator had already acquired for the museum's collection an iconic early work by Huang, also one of the "textbook" works in Chinese contemporary art: *The History of Chinese Painting and the History of Modern Western Art Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987/1993). For me, having acted as assistant curator for the exhibition and later having managed its tour to three additional venues, "House of Oracles" was a critical curatorial training ground, a source of endless wonders (the artist could solve any spatial problem!) as well as a journey of learning with the artist whom I came to fondly call—and still do—"Master Huang."

Unfolding in three connected galleries of nearly 1,000 square meters, plus the soaring entrance atrium of the museum, the exhibition awed—and confounded—the usually unflappable Minnesota audience. Even before entering the galleries, viewers were greeted by a large, scaled-down replica of the neoclassical facade of the original Shanghai branch of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation on the Bund (now home to the Shanghai Pudong Development Bank) made with a mixture of sand and cement, entitled *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank* (2000/2005), which slowly disintegrated through the run of the exhibition. Once inside the first gallery, viewers were immediately confronted by the second mammoth piece: a sculpture of an elephant mounted by a tiger, *The Nightmare of George V* (2002). Next, they needed to choose whether to squeeze through one steel cage with a light-box above it reading "National," or another emblazoned with a "Foreigner" sign (*Passage*, 1993). The floors of both cages were strewn with cow bones, bloodstains and lion droppings. The second gallery—what we called "the spine" of the exhibition—literally had one, in the form of

(Previous spread)
CIRCUS (detail), 2012, wood, bamboo, taxidermy animals, resin, steel, cord and cloth, 841.1 × 1000.1 × 1000.1 cm. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.

(This page)
THE HISTORY OF CHINESE PAINTING AND THE HISTORY OF MODERN WESTERN ART WASHED IN THE WASHING MACHINE FOR TWO MINUTES, 1987/1993, Chinese tea box, paper pulp, glass, 76.8 x 48.3 x 69.9 cm. Courtesy Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

(Opposite page)
BAT PROJECT IV (detail), 2004–05, airplane, cockpit, bamboo scaffolding, plastic construction fence, taxidermy bats, documents, 1500 x 300 x 300 cm. Installed for "House of Oracles" at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2005. Courtesy Walker Art Center.

The Python (2000). It is an enormous wooden skeleton of a cosmic serpent suspended from the ceiling over a host of historical works, including *The House of Oracles* (1989–2002), one of the first pieces the artist completed upon moving to Paris. If the first and second galleries were loosely grouped around the subjects of "Otherness/colonialism" and "avant garde," respectively, the third gallery addressed "global politics." *Bat Project IV* (2004–05), commissioned for the retrospective, dominated this final space. The work consists of a found airplane cockpit and a wood platform covered with a ubiquitous red-white-blue-patterned tarpaulin stretched over a bamboo structure mimicking a fuselage. Inside the structure was a group of photos and documents recording the artist's saga of attempting to produce, on multiple occasions, a work about the 2002 collision of a United States Navy spy plane with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea. Previously, Huang had endeavored to replicate different parts of the work for exhibitions at various locations in China. These shows, however, had been repeatedly censored and removed by China's Ministry of Culture without the artist's consent.

While the retrospective required a lengthy research effort to match the depth and complexity of the artist's philosophical universe, its physical production required solving a number of sculptural problems, engendering fascinating episodes to be savored by those lucky to have worked on it. In order to simulate the past presence of a wild cat inside the cages of *Passage*, for example, the exhibition crew had to procure the animal's droppings from a local zoo (which then had to be fumigated and further treated to meet health codes), while the artist and the curators rubbed fresh slabs of meat on the plywood boards to stain them with blood. Staging *Theater of the World* (1993), a turtle-shaped panopticon that is also a miniature gladiatorial arena for live animals and insects, required a long negotiation and collaboration with the owner of a local exotic-pet shop, who, when finally convinced that the artist's intentions were genuine, took on the task of curating his own fauna with great care and gusto. Procuring for *Bat Project IV* the cockpit of a decommissioned Lockheed EP-3 plane, the same model as the American spy plane of the 2002 incident, entailed a road trip with the artist to the Mojave Desert in central California and a quick, intensive lesson in the shadowy world of junk airplane dealing.

Facilitating the realization of an artist's vision is the curator's job. Today, with the great expansion and diversification of forms and methods in contemporary art, curators often end up doing things that lie far outside the climate-controlled office and white cube. But what the curators took on to realize "House of Oracles" was of a different order altogether, and for that reason, the exhibition proved far more memorable than anything this curator has done since then. While such processes ultimately should not take the attention away from the artist's work and intentions—and they did not in Huang's case—the result may have gone over the heads of many of the exhibition's viewers. A critic's review, of course, is not representative of general views, but one that appeared in a local newspaper following the premiere was telling: "The much ballyhooed retrospective by Chinese artist Huang Yong Ping is conceptually worthy but psychologically arid and mystifyingly obscure. Too much lost in translation."

In the subsequent two and a half years, "House of Oracles" traveled to three venues: the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing. At each venue, Huang deftly demonstrated his mastery of space, creating each time a unique diorama composed of selections from his two-decade-long output. Continuing to pose a challenge was *Theater of the World*, which obviously required new batches of live animals and insects with each new staging. After the MASS MoCA presentation that passed with no difficulty, despite its almost yearlong run, the work sparked the ire of local animal rights activists in Vancouver, and the piece was shut down soon after the opening of the exhibition.

Today, with the great expansion and diversification of forms and methods in contemporary art, curators often end up doing things that lie far outside the climate-controlled office and white cube.

In response, Huang penned an eloquent statement in defense of the project and exhibited it with the sculpture-cum-cage unoccupied, and thus incomplete. The same work caused no significant concern at its last presentation in China, and in its own way, the experience was a revelation. On the day of the exhibition's Beijing opening, I was astonished, and even cowered a bit, at the sight of an animal wrangler who showed up with toads and spiders and other creatures that were many times larger than their American and Canadian counterparts in the previous venues. Quite active interactions, some obviously violent, ensued between the suddenly freed animals. It did not take much imagination to read the experience not only in terms of highlighting divergent cultural attitudes toward the treatment of animals, but also as a metaphor for the China of our age. In China, pitting animals against one another causes little concern, but commenting on a potentially sensitive political topic by building a sculptural replica of an airplane, even when the nation is seen to be in the right on the issue, can be a highly risky proposition.

Is Huang a provocateur? In my mind, the answer is an easy no. He is hardly driven by a desire to shock for shock's sake; but he certainly belongs to the hallowed roster of contemporary artists who have risked and faced censure, a badge that must be taken seriously in our anything-goes, promiscuously permissive world of contemporary art. Huang is no provocateur, but he is a polemicist.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the premiere of "House of Oracles." Very few full-scale retrospectives of this magnitude for a Chinese artist have been staged before or since, in China or elsewhere. Yet Huang has not rested on the laurels of this significant achievement. Since then, the artist has continued to present new works in various venues, most often in Europe, but also in China, the United States, Japan and Australia. Solo exhibitions have been organized by Nottingham Contemporary in 2011, the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon in 2013, and HAB Galerie in Nantes in 2014, in addition to representations at Gladstone Gallery, New York, and Kamel Mennour, Paris. Other project exhibitions include those at the Barbican Art Gallery in London in 2008 as well as many venues in France and environs such as Lille, Aix-en-Provence, Monaco and Paris.

At the same time, rather strangely, Huang has been somewhat under the radar. This state of things may change quite soon with the recent announcement that he will take on the majestic nave of the Grand Palais in Paris for the next edition of Monumenta, the French capital's rejoinder to the Turbine Hall commission at London's Tate Modern. The list of alums of the (bi)annual event that began in 2007 makes for an impressive who's who of contemporary "masters": Anselm Kiefer (2007), Richard Serra (2008), Christian Boltanski (2010), Anish Kapoor (2011), Daniel Buren (2012) and Emilia and Ilya Kabakov (2014). Announcing Huang's appointment with breathless commendation, Aurélie Filippetti, then-minister of culture, stated: "His art, of astounding reverie, is capable of stirring imagination." Reporting the minister's words, the French newspaper *Le Monde* added that Filippetti "anticipates that the sensuality, darkness, as well as wit of the artist's work will attract large crowds in 2016." Huang's selection as the first non-European or American artist for this nationally significant event may very well score as much for the cultural policy of the French state as for the artist's standing in the contemporary art world and in art history, where the economy of reputation does matter greatly.

But it is equally important to remember that this commission should not be seen as a proverbial "breakthrough" for this artist, for there have already been many breakthroughs for him in the past. Ten years after his arrival in Paris, Huang (with Jean-Pierre Bertrand) represented France at the 1999 Venice Biennale in what should still be a notable recognition even though his adopted nation suffers no lack of contemporary art institutions and events. And yet Huang continues to be portrayed as "still unknown to the larger public" in the media there. In fact, almost all the press coverage on him to date customarily refers to the 1999 exhibition, as well as what brought

(This page)
REPTILES, 1989, papier mâché and washing machines, 7 x 4 x 3 m, installed for "Magiciens de la Terre" at Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, 1989. Copyright and courtesy the artist.

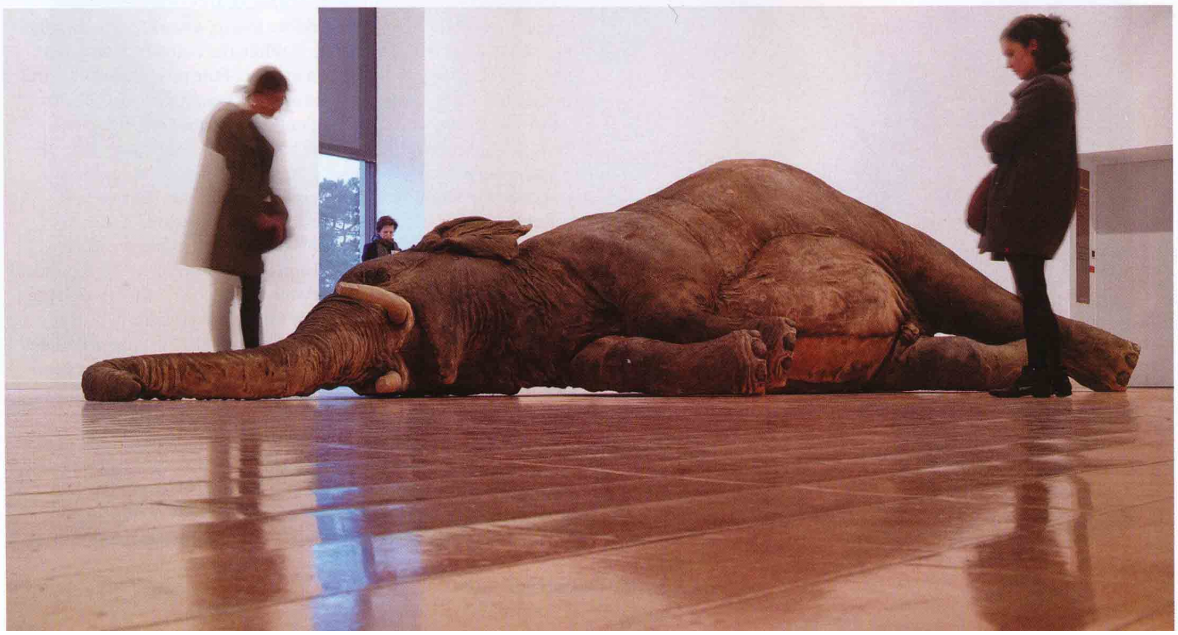
(Opposite page, top)
ONE MAN, NINE ANIMALS, 1999, wood, aluminum, 23 x 17 x 8 m, presented at the 48th Venice Biennale, French Pavilion, 1999. Copyright and courtesy the artist.

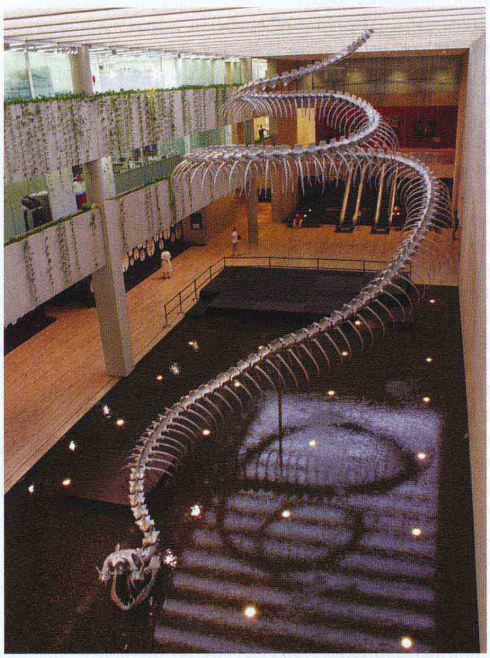
(Opposite page, bottom)
MARCHÉ DE PUNYA (detail), 2007, wood, iron, paper, fiberglass, buffalo skin, various objects, 300 x 800 x 1200 cm, installed for "Amoy/Xiamen" at Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, 2013. Copyright the artist. Photo by Blaise Adilon. Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris.

him to France in the first place—the legendary 1989 "Magiciens de la Terre" ("Magicians of the World") exhibition, in which Huang was one of three Chinese artists, along with Gu Dexin and Yang Jiechang. At this landmark event, Huang showed his first work in Europe: *Reptiles* (1989), a large site-specific sculpture of turtle-shaped tombs made with pulp from Chinese newspapers macerated in washing machines. *Magiciens de la Terre, Retour sur une Exposition Légendaire* ("Magicians of the World: Return to a Legendary Exhibition"), a tome recently published to mark the 25th anniversary of the exhibition, includes the artist's recollection: "Participating in 'Magiciens de la Terre' was the biggest turning point in my artistic career. Coming from China, I arrived in France with only a 'Project' to implement and realize on site for the exhibition. Since the 1990s, this has been my method of working as I travel regularly all over the world to participate in all kinds of exhibitions. It also allowed me to fight against the international scene of contemporary art while being accepted by it . . . The name of 'magician' is in my opinion more important than that of 'artist' because it includes and exceeds the definition of art itself, especially now, since the concepts of art and artist died time and time again. 'Magiciens' is a prophecy of the future and the artist becomes an oracle."

One notable development in the iconography of Huang's oeuvre in recent years is the proliferation of animals, which began to feature in his work as reference, or even medium, as early as 1993, the year of *Passage* and *Theater of the World*. In *Wise Man Learns from the Spider How to Spin a Web* (1994), he featured a sole tarantula inside a lampshade-cum-cage hanging over a table displaying photocopied pages from a Chinese translation of Pierre Cabanne's 1967 book *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*—the arachnid casting a moving shadow suggestive of Duchamp's readymade, *Hat Rack* (1917/1964). The work is the most explicit homage he has ever made to the French master, who served as a crucial guidepost in Huang's early artistic years in the 1980s in Fujian province.

A few years later, in a spectacular installation at the French Pavilion in the aforementioned 1999 Venice Biennale exhibition, Huang unleashed not one but nine sculptures of imaginary, mythological animals sitting atop wood pillars, piercing the midsection of the pavilion and presiding over the neoclassical building like sentinels. The monsters were derived from a bestiary of fantastical creatures from *Shan Hai Jing* ("Book of Mountains and Seas"), which served as an inspiration for Huang and also, subsequently, for younger artists such as Qiu Anxiong. The multiyear, multipart *Bat Project* revolved around another symbolic—





(This page)
RESSORT, 2012, aluminum, stainless steel, length: 53 m, installed for the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2012. Copyright and courtesy the artist.

(Opposite page)
ARCHE, 2009, wood, paper, taxidermy animals, 18.1 x 4.1 x 8 m, installed at Chapelle des Petits-Augustins, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Copyright the artist. Photo by Marc Domage. Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris.

and literal, in the form of taxidermy—animal, this one derived from the insignia on the American spy plane and also from traditional Chinese symbolism, for which the bat is a cipher of prosperity.

But it has been two mammoth creatures that Huang has repeatedly returned to in the new millenium. The elephant, a noble animal both in real life and symbolically, first appeared in an imperturbable guise in *The Nightmare of George V* (2002); and later seen prostrate—perhaps asleep, perhaps gunned down—in front of a market stall chock-full of religious paraphernalia, including printed prayers and incense (*Marché de Punya*, "The Market of Merits and Virtues," 2007); and then more recently seen sloughing off its pachydermic skin as if it were a snake (*Ombre Blanche*, "White Shadow," 2009). This impossible zoological behavior has been matched by Huang's increasingly fantastical evolution of the python, a gargantuan cosmic serpent that manifested itself first in wood (*Python's Tail*, 2000) in an outdoor installation in Hannoversch Münden, Germany, and more recently in aluminum: as a coiled serpent resembling the Tower of Babel in *Tower Snake* (2009), now in the collection of the Yuz Museum, Shanghai; as a breathtaking site-specific permanent work, *Serpent d'Océan* ("Ocean Serpent," 2012) in the Loire estuary at Saint-Brevin-les-Pins near Nantes; and hovering over a water pool inside the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane (*Ressort*, "Spring," 2012).

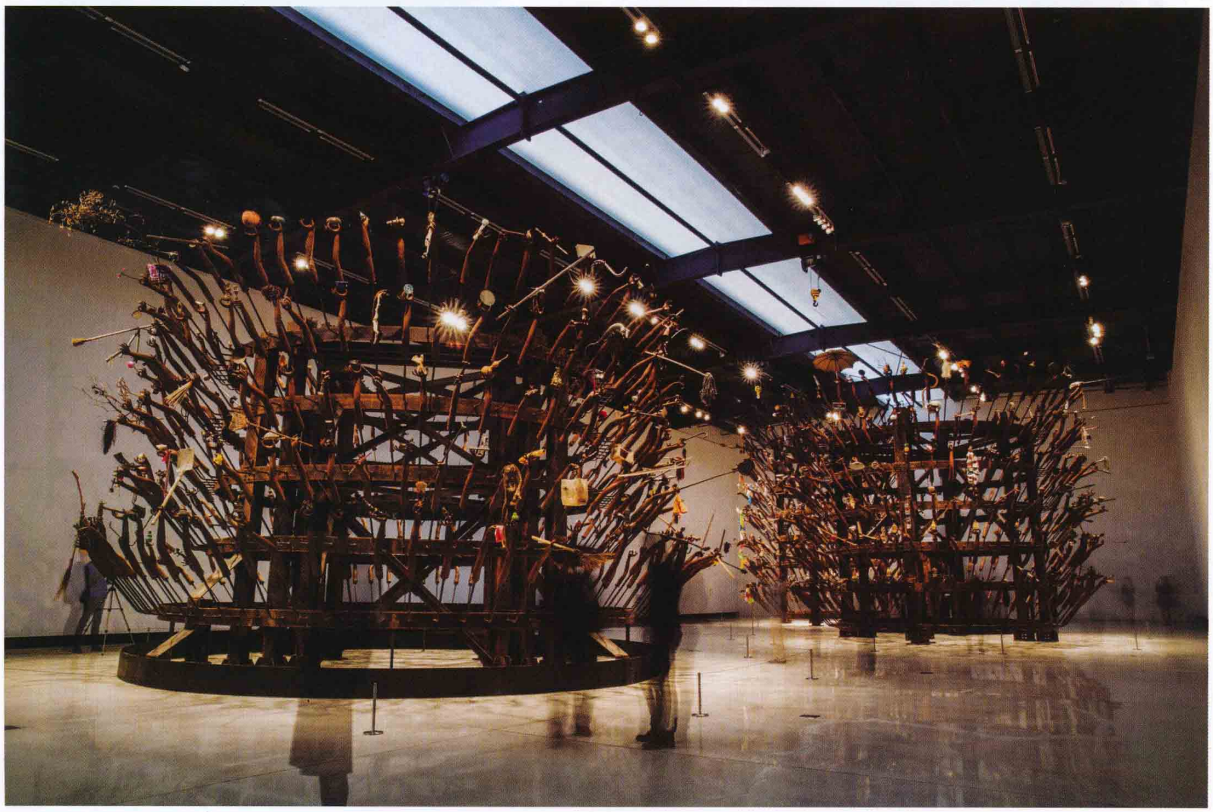
As is the case with most of Huang's symbolic leitmotifs, the serpent is as Christian as it is Chinese. Biblical references are something Huang has regularly tapped in his work and, to date, their most spectacular realization has been in *Arche* ("Ark," 2009). Installed inside Chapelle des Petits-Augustins at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, a teaching gallery of sorts complete with replicas of historical artworks, including Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, Huang's latter-day Noah's Ark held a menagerie of taxidermy animals. Drawing in viewers by appealing to their natural human fascination with uncanny lifelikeness, some of the animals possessed startling, tragic burn scars from a fire that destroyed Deyrolle, a well-known Parisian shop that had been their previous residence. In subsequent installations, Huang has conjured one veritable jungle after another, operating as allegorical dioramas. In two successive solo exhibitions in 2012, first in Paris and then in New York, Huang let new packs of taxidermy animals roam in the exhibition spaces, but their heads were absent, distressingly and somewhat hilariously, until they were found in different parts of the exhibition, served up on a giant saucer or pierced on a skewer.

Recalling an even earlier instance of censorship of *Theater of the World*, this time from an 1994 exhibition at the Pompidou, Huang said, "Some sensitive souls were outraged. However, [the work] was only a metaphor for the world we live in, a world permanently governed by the law of the jungle." While the animals in Huang's oeuvre in recent years have been mostly of the taxidermy kind, and thus appear more allegorical, the artist's thoughts about "the law of the jungle" have likely held, if not become more pronounced. Though his newer works may not have received the same level of opprobrium as his earlier ones, Huang's feelings on the subject of censorship remain ever relevant. He continued, "Censorship presents itself in all forms. It is impossible to imagine a society without censorship. This is not necessarily a negative element. Imposing limits forces an impulsion toward creation. And if political censorship is less present in the West, it exists anyway through the corresponding issues of security or humanitarianism."

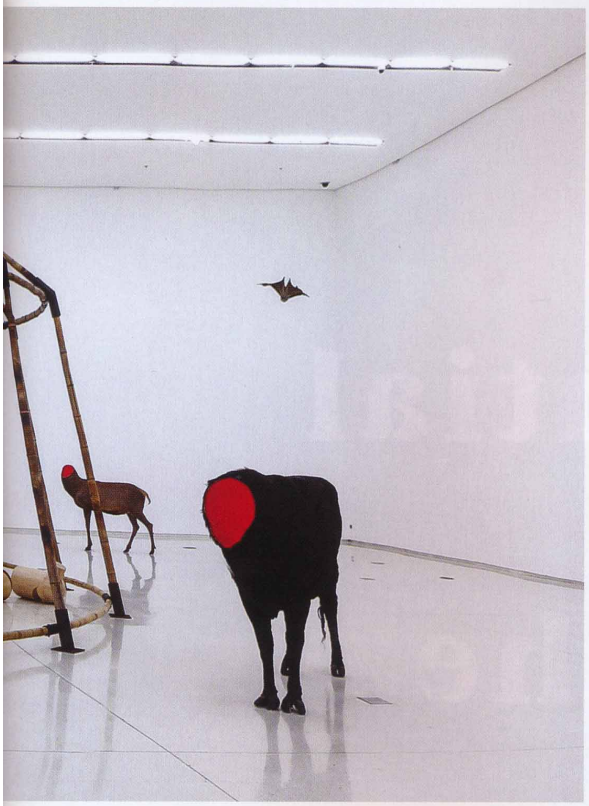
In his most recent exhibition in China, "The Conclusion of Tales from the Taiping Era – The Arrival of the Circus" (2014–15) at the Red Brick Contemporary Art Museum in Beijing, Huang showed *Circus* (2012), the safari of decapitated animals he had premiered at Gladstone Gallery in New York, along with three gargantuan pieces composing *Guanyin of a Thousand Hands* (2012), the artist's update on Duchamp's classic readymade *Bottle Rack* (1914/1963) turned into a multiarmed bodhisattva. Numbering 1,000 across three racks, the arms hold sundry objects, some totally mundane, others

515 WEST 24 STREET NEW YORK NY 10011 212 206 9300 FAX 212 206 9301 GLADSTONEGALLERY.COM

GLADSTONE GALLERY



515 WEST 24 STREET NEW YORK NY 10011 212 206 9300 FAX 212 206 9301 GLADSTONEGALLERY.COM



(Opposite page, top)
CIRCUS, 2012, wood, bamboo, taxidermy animals, resin, steel, cord and cloth, 841.1 × 1000.1 × 1000.1 cm. Photo by Xing Yu. Courtesy Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing.

(Opposite page, bottom)
GUANYIN OF A THOUSAND HANDS, 2012, steel, iron rack, various objects, 1800 × 800 × 800cm. Photo by Xing Yu. Courtesy Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing.

with certain religious or cultural meaning. One critic viewing these works could not but see the arms as "severed" or "amputated," and skewered on "towering torture racks." With nary an acknowledgment of the fact that "Bottle Rack–Guanyin" has been an important motif in the artist's iconography, the critic nonetheless saw the work as a "nauseating indictment of our voluntary blindness, our callous indifference to the mass human suffering that is the cost of so-called progress—those dainty commodities of convenience dangling from the one thousand severed hands."

The profundity that the critic discovers in the artistic conjuring of carnage was perhaps felt even more sharply in light of the recent injunctions from the political summit of the People's Republic of China vis-à-vis what art and culture should do and cannot do. How this revived authoritarian (or, as some might call it, *retardataire*) aesthetic program will manifest itself is yet to be seen, but the title of Huang's exhibition could not be any more allusive, if not intentional. The Taiping rebellion in Southern China (1850–64) invoked in the title used to be interpreted and taught in China as an example of a people's movement, but in recent years, the topic has been seen as an example of antiauthoritarian dissent and thus banned. In that sense, it may not be much of a stretch to interpret another word in the title, "Circus," in terms of the ancient Roman circus, a site of popular entertainment and appeasement for its oft-unruly citizenry. "Bread and circuses," one may cautiously conjecture, then, is precisely what is fed to the populace in the China of the early 21st century.

In addition to zoomorphism, the second strand of Huang's double helix of creative reference has been world religions. He has conjured images of destruction (and regeneration) with the Tower of Babel and Noah's Ark from the Bible. Other religions have been equally subject to Huang's alternately humorous and perverse sculptural-philosophical molding; for instance, an enormous Tibetan prayer wheel inside the 17th-century Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière in Paris (*Om Mani Padme Hum*, 2000); a colossal aluminum-cast sculpture of a minaret laid down and propped up on metal scaffolding like a missile (*Construction Site*, 2007); and a wolf-headed and fish-tailed leviathan about to bite on a lure in the shape of a crucifix dangling from a rosary of fat Buddhas at the end of a fishing rod held by a walking Buddha (*La Pêche*, "The Catch," 2006). The artist's methods of mélange and desacralization of long-held symbolisms have proven to be prophetic, as religiously motivated violence has grown apace over the last decade, and nations and regions align and entrench themselves along the fault lines of old faiths and cultures. In fact, Huang's work over the last decade has taken on an increasing resonance of eschatology, be it in reflection of the world we live in or in prophecy of it.

As I am writing the final words of this essay, the appalling massacres have just taken place in Paris at the headquarters of the satirical journal *Charlie Hebdo* and at a kosher supermarket. Transpiring almost simultaneously are frenetic opinings in the mass and social media, the grandstanding of politicians and sharply divergent views and critiques by writers and public intellectuals as to how the collective embrace of #jesuischarlie reinforces the binaries of religion and tradition versus democracy and freedom of expression. If 2014 was an annus horribilis filled with seemingly endless news of decapitations, tortures, abductions and massacres, 2015 could not have begun in a more ominous way.

When he set up a military-style tent inside the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain in 1990, and surrounded himself with various tools of divination and used the *I-Ching* ("Book of Changes") as a guide for art-making in a work titled *House of Oracles*, Master Huang might have been contemplating the meaning of "avant garde," recast via Chinese classics. Or, like an oracle, maybe he was using these materials to experience a vision of the world we would be living in, a quarter century later—a world that was on a path to a place profoundly darker and increasingly unknowable. Perhaps we would do well to hope that this oracle still believes that "imposing limits forces an impulsion toward creation."