

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Vine, Richard, "China's New Normal in Venice," *Art in America*, June 15, 2011

China's New Normal in Venice

by richard vine 06/15/11

For Venice Biennale visitors, 2011 may mark the first time that Chinese artists are presented as something other than Far Eastern tokens. Not only are an exceptionally large number of participants from the People's Republic on hand, but many are seamlessly integrated into international group exhibitions. No longer are Chinese works set apart like mysterious cultural artifacts.

Most strikingly, this year's sampling from the *au courant* François Pinault collection at the Palazzo Grassi includes ash paintings by Zhang Huan, a cavernous installation by Huang Yong Ping, and squiggly oil-on-canvas landscapes by Zeng Fanzhi. In a clever artistic ruse, or perhaps a bit of curatorial prudery, the wall label for Yang Jiechang's seven-panel *Stranger Than Paradise* (2020–11) describes the lush nature scene as an idyll of peaceful coexistence among all earthly species. True enough, if your idea of paradise encompasses a wealth of sex between humans and animals.



VIEW SLIDESHOW Still from Yu-Hsien, Group Java; HUANG YONG PING Caverne 2009, 2009 installation, cave in resin sculptures of Buddha and Taliban, shadow cm 290 x 350 x 550 © H.Y. PING BY SIAE 2011 COURTESY KAMEL MENNOUR PHOTO MARC DOMAGE;

At the entrance to the Arsenale, the first work is Song Dong's *Para-Pavilion* (2011), a meandering, semi-labyrinth of mirrored walls from a 100-year-old house. Farther on, one finds huge grids of photographs by the Shanghai duo Birdhead (Song Tao and Ji Weiyu), who specialize in funky, technically casual shots that eschew both exoticism and politics. Instead, their coy images—urban rubble; young people smoking, drinking and horsing around; a tattooed man's back; stuffed animals seeming to copulate—evoke the anomie induced by China's headlong modernization.

In "Glasstress 2011," at its Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti venue (one of three), Zhang Huan presents *Ten Thousand Year Old Turtle* (2011), a roughly 5-foot-tall paned glass dome filled with ashes, its form in keeping with Zhang's current proclivity for Buddhist and folkloric references. (The turtle is a traditional emblem of longevity.) Liu Jianhua offers a shelf of small, wavy glass skyscrapers that portray China's new cityscapes as both jewel-like and illusory.

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Chosen for a global survey on artistic censorship at the Danish pavilion in the Giardini, Zhang Dali contributes selections from his "Second History" project featuring 20th-century Chinese propaganda images juxtaposed with their un-doctored photographic originals. (Individuals who have fallen out of political favor, for example, simply disappear from group shots.) Yi Zhou, in an official collateral solo in the Arsenale vicinity, shows videos tracing the maturation of a fantasy-prone young woman, as her visions evolve from natural disasters to cities filled with surrealist sculptures to pure abstractions awash in light.

Such nonchalant curatorial inclusiveness implies a kind of full diplomatic recognition of China in the realm of art, and stands in stark contrast to the curiosity factor infusing several earlier appearances of avant-garde Chinese work at the Venice Biennale. In 1993, artistic director Achille Bonito Oliva surprised many Western visitors with a selection of 10 Chinese artists (among them Wang Guangyi, Zhang Peili, Fang Lijun, Li Shan and Xu Bing) who were just going public again after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. In 1999, Harald Szeemann corralled a score of widely diverse Chinese artists (Wang Du, Zhou Tiehai, Yang Shaobin, Yue Minjun, Zhao Bandi, Ma Liuming, Chen Zhen, et al.), treating their work—whose only common factor was its national origin—like the spoils of a daring critical expedition. The same year, the naturalized Huang Yong Ping represented France at its national pavilion, and Cai Guo-Qiang was accused of plagiarism back in China for remaking the 1966 Socialist Realist sculpture group *Rent Collection Courtyard*. In 2007, curator Hou Hanrou defied expectations both in the PRC and abroad by choosing four women artists (Cao Fei, Kan Xuan, Shen Yuan and Yin Xiuzhen) to represent China.

Like most nations, China also has a more expressly nationalist presence at the current Biennale. "Cracked Culture? / The Quest for Identity in Contemporary Chinese Art," mounted in two locations in the Dosoduro area, comes across as a rather self-defeating attempt to capitalize on now-outdated Western notions of contemporary Chinese art. Works by the nearly 20 lesser-known artists tend toward the bright and garish, suggesting an escalating bid for attention in China's crowded and volatile art scene.

That desperate strategy is also evident in the Hong Kong pavilion just outside the Arsenale exit. Here Kwok Mang-ho (a.k.a. Frog King) sometimes prowls his slapdash multimedia installation in wildly patterned costumes and concentric-circle eyeglasses. Our minds, presumably, are to be blown.

Taiwan—part of China or not, depending on your politics—this year devotes its pavilion near San Marco square to "The Heard and the Unheard." Featuring videos and sound-works by Hong-Kai Wang and Yu-Hsien Su, the show focuses on the aural environment of poor immigrants, factory workers and others who normally lack a strong social voice.

The Biennale first granted China pavilion status in 2005, though the temporary quarters provided consist of a ghastly section at the rear of the Arsenale. Narrow, dark, filled with rusting storage tanks still redolent of oil, the space differs in every imaginable way from the airy ramble of the adjacent Italian pavilion.

For this year's exhibition, Beijing University aesthetics professor Peng Feng has brought together installations by five artists (Cai Zhisong, Liang Yuanwei, Pan Gongkai, Yang Maoyuan and Yuan Gong). Each work is purportedly accompanied by a fragrance (tea, baijiu, lotus, herbal medicine or incense) representative of Chinese tradition.

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Unfortunately, the scents are usually too faint to detect, and the show's hint of resurgent nationalism may discomfort some viewers—especially those who showed up at the inauguration ceremony carrying "Free Ai Weiwei" shoulder bags. But for visitors willing to enter imaginatively into another cultural sensibility, the Chinese pavilion offers a mental respite from the visual overload of the Biennale as a whole and the frenetic stridency (way too many bad works, way too spectacularly displayed) of its Italian neighbor in particular.

Perhaps the most memorable work in this year's Chinese pavilion was the least material. Yuan Gong's dry-ice fog, periodically arising on the lawn and simultaneously filling the interior, recalls the misty space of traditional *shan shui* (mountain water) painting. But it also evokes the subtlety, pliability and, finally, enveloping pervasiveness with which Chinese culture has for millennia absorbed its would-be conquerors.

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“Oceanographic Museum”, E-Flux, Feb. 5, 2011

e-flux

Oceanographic Museum / Nouveau Musée National de Monaco



"Méditerranée"

20 November 2010 – 20 May 2012

www.oceano.mc

The Oceanographic Museum unveils a site-specific commission by Huang Yong Ping as part of a major exhibition dedicated to the Mediterranean Sea

The Oceanographic Museum in Monaco hosts a unique exhibition dedicated to the Mediterranean Sea, bringing together contemporary art and science. The exhibition presents a monumental installation by the celebrated Sino-French artist Huang Yong Ping and features an exceptional collection of maritime objects that illustrate the rich biodiversity of the Sea. The exhibition, which is on view from 20 November 2010 to 20 May 2012, is presented with the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco.

Huang Yong Ping's 25 metre installation, "Wu Zei", is a site specific commission for the Museum's Salon d'honneur and alludes to the 9 metre octopus from the Museum's collection that is exhibited on the floor above (1st Floor).

"Wu Zei", a gigantic hybrid animal—an octopus and a cuttlefish—is inspired by the sea and refers to the maritime disasters caused by man. While its head is suspended around the Medusa chandelier, designed by the German biologist, philosopher and free thinker Ernst Haeckel, its tentacles invade the gallery space. One of the tentacles circles around the column, another stretches out towards the first room of the exhibition, and others reach out towards the sea and the statue of Prince Albert I.

The hybrid animal's head is red like that of an octopus; its tentacles are black like those of a cuttlefish. One of the tentacles looks set to suck in, like a vacuum cleaner, the different objects and blackened animals lying on the floor.

Wu Zei's body and tentacles are made of a flexible material around a metal frame. The bulb-like head is slightly transparent to allow for the light of the chandelier to shine through in the evening.

By calling his installation "Wu Zei", Huang Yong Ping creates ambiguity in the meaning of his work. The title "Wu Zei" (乌贼) is the Chinese name for a cuttlefish. "Wu" (乌) is the character for the colour black and "Zei" (贼) is the symbol for stealing. Huang Yong Ping plays with language and semiology juxtaposing cuttlefish ink to oil spill and corruption to regeneration.

The Mediterranean is a major reservoir for the world's biodiversity. The increasing urbanization of the coast, overfishing, exploitation of the natural resources, proliferation of invasive species, maritime transport and pollution of different kinds such as toxic waste are daily dangers facing the Mediterranean Sea and can lead to biodiversity impoverishment, with irredeemable cultural, economic and ecological consequences.

"Méditerranée" is accompanied by an illustrated book, produced by the Oceanographic Institute, Albert 1st Foundation, Prince of Monaco and published by Les Editions Rocher.

An artist's book is co-edited by Galerie kamel mennour and the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco including a text by Jessica Morgan, Daskalopoulos Curator International Art at the Tate.

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“Oceanographic Museum”, E-Flux, Feb. 5, 2011

Huang Yong Ping: Biography

Born in 1954, Huang Yong Ping participated in the seminal exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" at Centre Pompidou, Paris in 1989, and represented France at the 1999 Venice Biennale. In 2006, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis organized and premiered his retrospective "House of Oracles," which travelled to Mass MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts; Vancouver Art Gallery; and Ullens Center, Beijing. Other solo exhibitions include: CCA Kitakyushu, Japan; De Appel, Amsterdam; Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris; Atelier d'Artistes de la Ville de Marseille; Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo; Barbican Art Gallery, London; New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; and Musée des Beaux Arts, Paris. In 2007, Huang Yong Ping participated in the exhibition "Why Sculpture, Why Here?" at the Tate Modern, London.

Huang Yong Ping is represented by Galerie kamel mennour, Paris, and Gladstone Gallery, New York.

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Nickas, Bob, "Looking Back: Solo Shows," Frieze, January-February 2010, p. 88-89



Bob Nickas

Huang Yong Ping's incredible menagerie, *Arche* (2009) – some of which had been burned in a fire at the famous Parisian taxidermist, Deyrolle – was shown to great effect in the Chapelle des Petits-Augustins of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Surrounded by the architecture, the paintings and, most suggestively, the marble statues of animals, this Noah's Ark of an installation was an eerie still life. In New York, the conceptual dandy Guy de Cointet lived on at Greene Naftali. The level of craftsmanship and strangeness in the work of Barry X Ball (at Salon 94, New York), is always high, but the recent stone sculptures based on two Baroque masterpieces, Antonio Corradini's *La Purià* (Purity, or the Veiled Girl, 1720–5) and Crazio Marinali's *La Invidia* (Envy, c.1700), are unlike anything being done today. Next up is his transformation of the Roman-era Hermaphrodite sculpture in the collection of the Louvre. William Eggleston at Fondation Cartier, Paris: he takes a picture in Paris and it might as well be Memphis. Many of the French visitors were not amused. Huma Bhabha and Jason Fox at Andrea Rosen, New York: the poetic/politics of the macabre. Dan Graham at MoCA, Los Angeles. Lutz Bacher, 'My Secret Life' at P.S.1, New York. Josh Smith: masterful, improvisatory wall paintings at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva. Basil Wolverton's insane drawings, mostly from the 1950s and '60s, many of which were for *Mad* magazine, at Gladstone Gallery, New York, organized by Cameron Jamie; a small side room of drawings filled with apocalyptic visions was superb. 'Emory Douglas: Black Panther' at New York's New Museum, organized by Sam Durant. Verne Dawson, one of our finest time-travelling storytellers, at Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. Unica Zürn at The Drawing Center, New York, organized by João Ribas. Gustav Metzger, the pioneer of auto-destructive art, at the Serpentine Gallery, London, if only for the installation *Kill The Cars* (1996),

and the chance to hear the piping voices of little kids as they chant: 'Kill – the – cars! Kill – the – cars!' I can't believe I missed Isa Genzken at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, and John Miller at Kunsthalle Zürich.

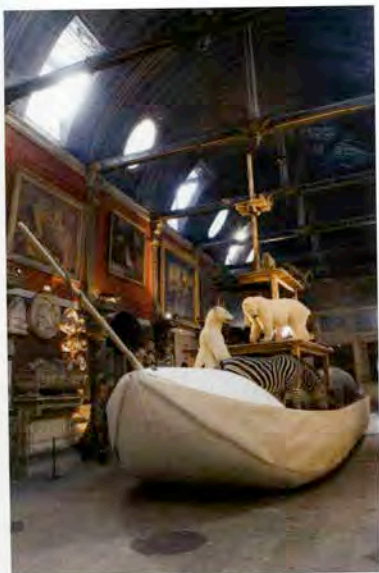
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Beausse, Pascal, "Huang Yong Ping: Kamel Mennour/ École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts-Paris" Flash Art, January – February 2010, pg.96

REVIEWS

HUANG YONG PING

KAMEL MENNOUR/ÉCOLE NATIONALE SUPÉRIEURE DES BEAUX-ARTS- PARIS



For this double exhibition, Huang Yong Ping developed a syncretism of myths belonging to cultures that are radically different from each other. Pursuing confrontation between East and West, human and animal, religion and politics, art and life, creation and dismantling, the artist finds narrative inspiration in both religion and philosophy, drawing up the allegories of our times.

Arche (2009) is exhibited inside the chapel of l'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, a Christian place filled with copies of Italian Renaissance masterpieces, and is the artist's contemporary version of the biblical episode of the Flood and Noah's Ark. In a big Chinese paper sampan, pairs of taxidermic animals belonging to an impressive number of different species are gathered. The representation is not completely faithful to the text, but rather affirms the permanence of violence. In a time of environmental consensus, Huang Yong Ping chooses to dissociate the flood/ark and to suggest imminent destruction caused by its own victims. The danger comes from within, as in the Théâtre du Monde. Placed in front of a

copy of Michelangelo's *Doomsday*, this work becomes a mirror: "The animal becomes the man, or the man becomes the animal," says the artist.

At Kamel Mennour Gallery, *Caverne* (2009) stands out like a big rock obstructing the space. It is necessary to move around it to get to the next room and be able to see its interior through a hole in the wall. Opposing figures are sitting in it, looking at the entrance of the cave, giving their back to a magical lantern casting shadows of bats. Buddhist monks and Talibans are prisoners of this neo-platonic cave in times of iconoclasm.

Huang Yong Ping invites us to move away from the obsession of the contemporary crisis to outline the break between dream and reality. It is a subtle critique of beliefs.

Pascal Beausse

HUANG YONG PING, *Arche* 2009. Wood, paper and taxidermized animals, 18 x 4 x 8 m. Installation view at the Chapelle des Perits-Augustins, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris. © Huang Yong Ping. Photo: Marc Domage.

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Bagley, Christopher, "After the Flood," W Magazine, November 2009, pg 96-98

Art Flash

After the Flood

In a new Paris installation, artist Huang Yong Ping reimagines the tale of Noah's ark—minus the happy ending.

Portrait by CHARLES FREGER

Years from now, when a rational history of this decade's irrational art market is finally written, some of the most baffling tales of excessive hype and inflated prices will likely center on the work of Chinese-born artists. The frenzy began around 2005, when prices for works by Beijing painter Yue Minjun and others skyrocketed into the millions, sometimes increasing tenfold or more. Before long it seemed as though a whole generation of Chinese "stars" couldn't resist cashing in by churning out art to feed the market; when that market hit the skids last year, so did many of their careers.

Then there's Huang Yong Ping. Although he has long been revered by Western curators and his fellow Chinese artists, Huang, 55, who emigrated from China to Paris in 1989, has a way of dissociating himself from such mundane things as booms and busts. Talk to people around him and you'll hear about how he kept megacollector François Pinault waiting for years before finally agreeing to sell a sculpture that's now on view at Pinault's new Punta della Dogana museum in Venice, Italy, or about how he rebuffed PaceWildenstein, the blue-chip New York gallery, when it opened a branch in Beijing last year. Huang not only turned down Pace's offer to show his work in China (citing his loyalty to Gladstone Gallery in New York) but also politely mentioned that he had barely heard of Pace, which has a stable of artists that includes Chuck Close and Robert Ryman.

When it comes to money and marketing, says the artist's Paris dealer, Kamel Mennour, "Huang doesn't give a damn. Sometimes I'll point out important clients to him, but it makes no difference. He never goes to openings or parties, never reads magazines. He wears the same pants and shoes every day. He's just obsessively focused on his work."

Of course, one has to wonder whether Huang's apparent lack of commercial instinct is a kind of calculation in itself, a game of

highbrow hard-to-get. But that seems unlikely, given that his attitude has barely changed since he began creating art in China during the Eighties, when there was no art market to speak of. Huang's works tend to be highly conceptual yet deeply of the moment, often dealing with the conflicts and clashes sparked by globalization. He favors materials that aren't particularly suited to collectors' living rooms, such as live insects or lion feces. One of his key early pieces, *The History of Chinese Painting and the History of Modern Western Art Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987), was basically a mound of soaked pulp—the unreadable remnants of two iconic reference books he had put through the wash. Since relocating to France, Huang has increasingly moved toward large-scale sculptures and monumental installations, though they still reference everything from European immigration policy to the I Ching. And even in the West, the artist hasn't escaped occasional clashes with the authorities (or with animal rights groups, due to an installation in which caged reptiles and insects devoured one another).

"The work of an artist is to go beyond the standard thinking, to go beyond common human comprehension," says Huang in Chinese,

"The work of an artist is to go beyond the standard thinking, to go beyond common human comprehension," says Huang.

Above: Huang Yong Ping's miniature model of *Arche* 2009. Below: Huang Yong Ping at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts chapel, with some of the damaged animals he's using in the installation.



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Bagley, Christopher, "After the Flood," *W Magazine*, November 2009, pg 96-98



From top: Elephant sculptures from *Arche 2009*; Huang's *Bat Project IV*, 2004-05.

After the Flood

speaking through a translator during an interview in Paris. "So naturally there will always be people who aren't able to understand."

Grand pronouncements like that stand in stark contrast to Huang's self-effacing personal manner. With his slight frame, thick glasses, oversize denim shirt and soft voice (occasionally punctuated by a high-pitched guffaw), the artist comes across as humility itself. But his uncompromising intellect is evident in his work, which deconstructs the Eastern and Western cultural canons while advancing a wholly modern and rather pessimistic worldview.

To judge by his latest installation—which opens in late October at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, along with a show at Galerie Kamel Mennour—Huang's outlook isn't getting any cheerier. Set in the art school's stunningly atmospheric 17th-century chapel, a repository for copies of Renaissance artworks, the sculpture presents an apocalyptic take on Noah's ark, with a 50-foot paper boat full of burned animals. Huang got the idea in 2008 during a visit to Paris's famed taxidermy shop Deyrolle, just after the notorious fire that destroyed most of its stock. Seeing the charred ostriches, lions and elk, Huang recalls, he immediately thought of the Old Testament fable: "It was as if the animals had survived the flood but not the fire afterwards." He bought a few of the animals from Deyrolle and went on to acquire or construct dozens more: tigers, turtles, birds, elephants.

The piece, titled *Arche 2009* (it contains no sign of Noah or his family), can be seen as a commentary on the various cataclysms now threatening the world and on man's role in them. "In the Bible, Noah's ark is protected by God," Huang says. "It is safe, and even the lions are well behaved. In my boat the animals are burned, and they are fighting each other." He doesn't specify what might have caused the fire. "I don't want to know, exactly," says Huang. "In any case, the fire comes from within, not from the outside." Violence and savagery, he adds, are innate characteristics of living beings and lie at the root of society's problems: "The current economic crisis is a reflection of human qualities. It's a result of the mad, depraved side of human beings."

Huang grew up in the coastal city of Xiamen and in the late Seventies went to art school, where he learned to paint in the officially sanctioned style, akin to Soviet realism. After Mao died and censorship policies eased, Huang played cultural catch-up, devouring works by Westerners from Duchamp to Foucault, and in the mid-Eighties he cofounded Xiamen Dada, an avant-garde collective that took inspiration from conceptualists such as John Cage and Joseph Beuys. One of Huang's works from that period, *Four Paintings Created According to Random Instructions* (1985), used a roulette wheel to determine the colors and shapes of the images on the canvases. At the

time, he says, "I was asking if there was any originality in the act of creating. I wanted to show that you could use chance to replace the role of the person."

Invited to Paris in 1989 for "Magicians of the Earth," a landmark international exhibit at the Centre Pompidou, Huang decided to stay, since the show coincided with the crackdown in Tiananmen Square. Curator Jean de Loisy, then at the Fondation Cartier, which provided housing and studio space for Huang during his first months in France, recalls meeting "a philosopher—a little man with incredible courage and a stupefying degree of culture." De Loisy (who worked with Huang on *Arche 2009*) also saw signs of the acute political consciousness that continues to mark Huang's work. "Bat Project" (2001-05), a series of life-size fuselage sculptures inspired by the U.S. spy plane that collided with a Chinese aircraft, sparked its own international incident when French, Chinese and American officials, eager to see the episode forgotten, managed to get it withdrawn from two separate exhibits.

By 2005 Huang had represented France at the Venice Biennale and scored a major retrospective at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Although he doesn't have a whole lot to say about the contemporary art world, he calls the recent Chinese bubble "dangerous for art." He adds, "You have to distinguish the value of a work of art from its price—it's not the same thing." Still, producing artworks does take money, particularly in Huang's case. Mennour, who financed the ark and had the idea to install it in the Beaux-Arts chapel, estimates the exhibit will cost roughly \$500,000, a huge chunk of his gallery's budget. (The piece will be for sale, and Mennour jokes that Pinault would be welcome to buy it.)

Money is just one of many worldly considerations from which Huang prefers to shield himself. He has lived in Paris for two decades but barely speaks French, and he hasn't seen a movie in almost 10 years. "Music, film and those kinds of things don't really interest me," he says, "at least not in theaters. All noises can be music, and daily life is a bit like cinema."

Huang's home in the suburb of Ivry-sur-Seine, which he shares with his wife, artist Shen Yuan, and their 14-year-old daughter, is pristine and sparsely furnished, with no art except a piece by the utopian architect Yona Friedman. There are three pets, however: a dog, cat and hamster. How do the animals get along? "Not well," says Huang with a slight smile. "The dog doesn't like the cat, and the cat doesn't like the hamster. They all don't like each other." In fact, a few weeks after our interview, Huang decides to give the dog away. Further proof, perhaps, of his conviction that harmony is an elusive prospect for all beings. That includes people who make art. "It doesn't matter whether you're in China or in Europe," Huang says. "For artists, there is no paradise anywhere." —CHRISTOPHER BAGLEY

"Dangerous" is what Huang calls the recent market bubble in contemporary Chinese art.



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JOUANNO, EVELYNE, "HUANG YONG PING," FLASH ART, SUMMER 1999, pp. 114-115

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HUANG YONG PING

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND NEGOTIATION

Evelyne Jouanno

HUANG YONG PING (along with Jean-Pierre Bertrand) is representing France at this year's Venice Biennale. Having remained in Paris after his participation in the "Magiciens de la Terre" exhibition in June 1989, this Chinese artist has rapidly become one of the most influential figures in the reconstruction of the international art scene. The selection policy for this French Pavilion is significant as it seems to break away from the promotion of a "national art" and encourage a multicultural understanding of contemporary artistic creation in France.

Reforming artistic and cultural structures so as to invent a new cultural identity was the principal motivation for all the Chinese avant-garde groups. Huang Yong Ping (and his Xiamen Dada group) best represents this movement as he was the first to introduce Dada-inspired avant-garde notions to the Chinese context. This led him to develop alternative "anti-art" strategies and to free himself from the ideological and linguistic constraints that had deeply marked the ways of thinking, working, and even existing of Chinese generations. At the same time, he was aware of Western hegemony in contemporary art and culture, and

soon began looking for solutions that would allow him to find specific, strategic meditations between Chinese cultural heritage and the rational, conventional artistic expressions of Western contemporary art.

In the West his work focuses on criticizing the culturally, economically, and politically dominant reality in which he now finds himself. By introducing ancient systems of Chinese divination — including the *I Ching* (*The Book of Changes*) — into his work, he not only suggests that the universe, the world, and human cultures are constantly changing, but he also provides a strategic alternative to rationalist ideology and challenges Western definitions of truth as well as its hold on the world. The result was his *Four-wheeled roulette wheel* (1987) which enabled him to produce works using all kinds of different objects without having to account for his actions or control the results.

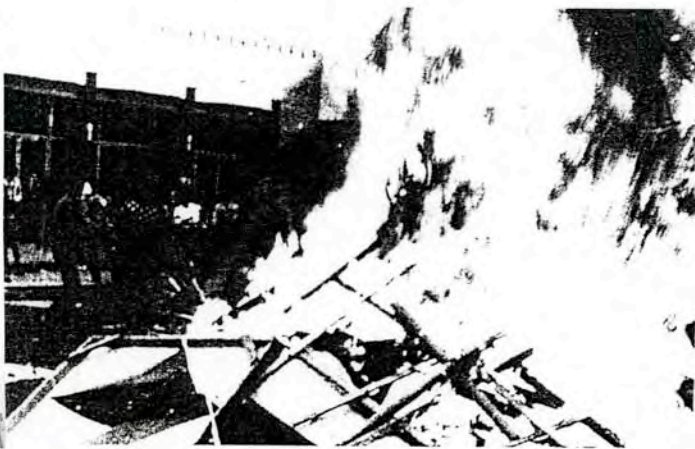
If the West has always been modern, and the Orient, by definition, traditional or pre-modern, then any re-reading of these two cultures implies a critical analysis of Western discourse and, simultaneously, an enunciation of the different relations and contradictions be-

tween tradition and reality. This insightful awareness, along with the *Great Roulette Wheel's* guidelines, is what in 1987 led Huang Yong Ping to put Wang Bomin's *History of Chinese Painting* and Herbert Read's *History of Modern Painting* in a washing machine for two minutes, to end up a dirty block of pulp. This process, which one again implies transformation, allows him to act physically and symbolically at the very root of culture and historic logic in order to break down the forms of classification and categorization based on Eurocentric ideology.

In 1990 he used paper paste made from books and newspapers to "bandage" the "wounds" of an uprooted tree; the following year, he "washed" a whole section of books at the Carnegie Museum of Art library, Pittsburgh; he even turned twenty-odd volumes of Beuys, Kounellis, Cucchi, and Kiefer's *Ein Gespräch*, along with their catalogues into "vomitings" as a means of questioning the political power of such art world superstars.

In the West, Huang Yong Ping took his direct attacks on daily and political reality a step further by adding even more surprising materials to his artistic vocabulary, including cooked rice, Chinese medicine, and even live animals and insects as metaphors for different ethnic groups. Rice, animals, and insects constitute an essential part of the everyday Chinese reality where they have been used to formulate an entire system of languages, symbols, beliefs, social and moral codes emphasizing the non-difference between Man and Nature, or between the World and the Elements. On the contrary, Western thought has viewed Nature as "other" compared to Culture (or to "civilized humanity") ever since the ancient Greeks. Therefore, introducing "Nature" (rice, animals) with its traditional and cultural connotations as the incarnation of art in the Western institutional context becomes a radically subversive, even inconceivable act of provocation.

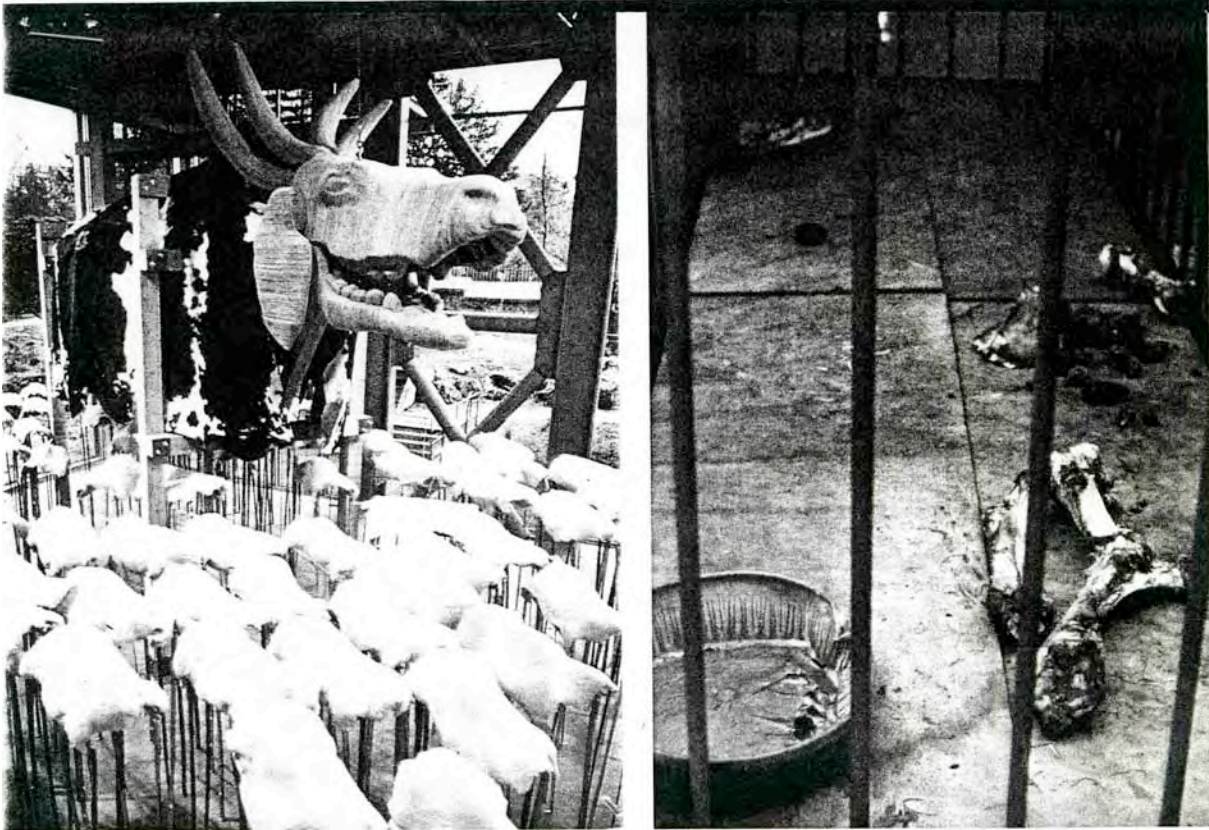
One of the characteristic strategies of Huang Yong Ping's works resides in their mutability: actually, most of them are continually changing mainly due to the passing of time (the rice slowly begins to decompose during the exhibition, the insects fly around and eat each other up, etc.). This strategy of mutation reveals a highly provocative dialectic: a subversive action



Xiamen Dada — To Destroy The Works, 1986.

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Left: *Péril de Mouton*, 1997. Right: *Passage*, 1993.

against contemporary art and its established definitions.

Over the last few years, Huang Yong Ping's exploration has "naturally" turned towards current events involving intercultural conflicts and cultural repression. In this regard *Passage* (1993) remains highly significant and marks the beginning of this trend. For this installation, the artist "rebuilt" the passport checkpoints at Glasgow Airport, complete with their "E.C. NATIONAL" and "OTHERS" signs, in order to question the meaning of national and cultural borders in today's world. Huang Yong Ping had actually planned to put a pair of lions in cages located under each of these entrances. They would have been both real guards and symbols of the powers that hinder and control the freedom of the "other."

By installing a tent at the MOMA in Oxford in which visitors were obliged to witness a battle between thousands of crickets and a handful of scorpions, he directly challenged colonialist attitudes toward the Asian people (Huang means "cricket" in Chinese). But the most emblematic work in this regard is certainly his *Théâtre du Monde* (Theater of the World, 1993). In an arena shaped like a tortoise — an animal which Chinese tradition

associates with harmony and balance — he brought together thousands of insects and animals from different species and origins in a metaphoric representation of inter-ethnic conflicts. "For me, conflict is more important than harmony. Conflict brings freshness and this attests to the fact that history is moving on and the world is changing." This work provoked real politico-cultural conflicts which led to its censorship at the "Hors Limites" exhibition at the Pompidou (1994).

In this critical period of changes and politico-cultural conflicts, Huang Yong Ping's strategies for transforming and even transcending a setting in order to reveal its reality appear all the more effective and important. For instance, in New York in 1994, he transformed the entrance of the New Museum into an automatic car-wash, recalling the history of the first Chinese immigrants in the United States and the racist discourse that accompanied them (*Chinese Hand Laundry*). *Da Xian, The Doomsday* (1997) with its three over-sized bowls exotically decorated with images of old European concessions in the Far East and full of all sorts of foods products that had to be consumed before "July 1997," is a direct reminder of the historical context of a culture that at the time

was preparing to lose its last great colony.

Huang Yong Ping confronts territories with their own history; he reinvents their mythologies (such as of the "mad-cow crisis" in *Péril de Mouton* at Fondation Cartier, 1997), and he analyses and deconstructs their cultural foundations. This is where we can effectively call to mind issues of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, of cultural differences and negotiation, of exclusion and co-existence, of Man and Nature, etc. They have become the fundamental issues of contemporary, globally-oriented reality. ■

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Huang Yong Ping was born in 1954 in Xiamen, Fujian province, China. He lives and works in Paris. Selected solo shows: 1994: New MoCA, New York; 1995: Froment & Putman, Paris; 1998/99: Jack Tilton, New York; De Appel, Amsterdam; Art & Public, Geneva. Selected group shows: 1989: "Magiciens de la Terre," Pompidou, Paris; 1992: "Small, Medium, Large, Lifesize," Museo Pecci, Prato (Italy); 1994: "Hors-Limites," Pompidou, Paris; 1995: "Ripple Across the Water," Watari-um, Tokyo; 1997: Johannesburg Biennale; Kwangju Biennale; "Truce," Site Santa Fe; Skulptur Projekte, Münster; "Manifesta 1," Rotterdam; 1998/99: Venice Biennale; "Unfinished History," MoMA, Chicago; "Cities on the Move," Louisiana Museum (Denmark); "Inside Out," PSI and Asia Society, New York; "Unfinished History," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; "Etre Nature," Fondation Cartier, Paris; "Cities on the Move 2," Capc, Bordeaux.

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Ryan Holmberg

The Snake and the Duck: On Huang Yong Ping



Play sculpture is a term now used to describe an idea Isamu Noguchi began experimenting with in the late 1930s: to use the modernist vocabulary of sculptural form within the context of leisure, recreation, and purposeless play. Most of what he designed was for children's playgrounds and included angular swing sets in primary colors, cubistic climbing blocks, and biomorphic landscaping. At the same time, a fair number of these projects, none of which were realized in full before the 1970s, have an atavistic subtext, from references to monuments of the ancient world to almost protozoan biological structures. As if to suggest that to play like a child is to reincarnate the most archaic forms of human civilization and the most primordial forms of life on earth.

The same conceit resonates strongly in *Tower Snake* (2009), the newest work by Huang Yong Ping. First exhibited at Gladstone Gallery in New York in the summer of 2009, *Tower Snake* can be seen as a kind of "play sculpture" that links interactive amusement to ultimately atavistic fantasies. As an object, it is as much a pavilion as a sculpture. It measures approximately six and a half meters high and twelve by eleven at its base, and is constructed of green and beige bamboo upon iron scaffolding. One ascends the tower upon a spiral walkway of bamboo slats that narrows toward the top before ending abruptly

Huang Yong Ping, *Tower Snake*, 2009, aluminum, bamboo, steel, 660 x 1189 x 1128 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.

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Left: Isamu Noguchi, *Slide Mantra*, circa 1986, marble, 3.10 x 3.10 m. Photo: Shigeo Anzai. Courtesy of The Noguchi Museum, New York.

Right: Huang Yong Ping, *Tower Snake*, 2009, aluminum, bamboo, steel, 660 x 1189 x 1128 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.



at a chained-off precipice above the tower's centre. The entire walkway is roofed with an aluminum armature in the shape of a giant reptilian skeleton that is Jurassic in scale, the eponymous "snake" of the tower. Ascending the tower thus doubles as passage through the entrails of the beast. One enters through its rear, then traverses its guts, emerging at the tower's pinnacle below the snake's mouth before having to backtrack to exit. The walkway creaks for the entire climb and descent, and, for safety, a gallery attendant allows no more than three people on it at a time; missing and splintered flooring slats are there to confirm the hazard. *Tower Snake* is like an old amusement park ride; the effect is one of faux trepidation, like a rickety ruin threatening to collapse at any moment and swallow the traveler whole, or an ancient and neglected suspension bridge splintering and swaying (as *Tower Snake* does just a tiny bit) above a bottomless maw. One almost expects the roar of the beast to reverberate over-loudly through the gallery and strobe flashes of lightning to illuminate the chilling mountain climb. But Huang pulls back, keeping his sculpture of kitsch sublime at a rudimentary level of seemingly vulnerable materials and beastly iconography.

Tower Snake is essentially a "duck," architects Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi's famous epithet for a type of symbolic or iconic architecture, not necessarily zoomorphic, in which structure is subordinate to the signification of the building's intended function. "The duck," they wrote in their influential *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), "is the special building that is a symbol . . . where the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form."¹ The name came from the Big Duck in Long Island, New York. Built in 1931, this giant, twenty-foot-high, white ferroconcrete duck was shaped as it was as an advertising gambit for the poultry store it housed, which specialized in duck and duck eggs. *Tower Snake* has a similar character. It is, first of all, an architectural folly: it can be entered but is not meant to be inhabited, and its restricted interior space and questionable structural integrity dictate limited if not mono-functionality. Its symbolic form is not, like the original Duck, for retail commerce, but still it functions as a kind of advertisement. A good advanced capitalist work, *Tower Snake* trades in images and experiences rather than material goods, and what it has on offer is a certain very conventional idea of China.

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Much of Huang's art deals with Daoism—not Daoism as a moral philosophy, but Daoism as an adaptation of earlier epistemological and ritual systems of divination and alchemy and populated with fantastic cosmological beasts.² Most writers take Huang at his word and hold that his Daoist appropriations serve the dual purpose of cultural decentering vis-à-vis the West and finding Chinese vernacular analogues for historical and neo-avant-garde aesthetic strategies of chance and non-intentionality. But as Huang's embattled Xiamen Dada years recede into distant history, and as he now basks in the wealth of international patronage, this position of oppositionality is really no longer tenable. Critic and curator Robin Laurence put it well in a review of Huang's *Oracle of Bones* retrospective: "It is difficult to reconcile the monumentality, materiality, and spectacularity that have increasingly characterized his art with his stated determination to confound or refute the ego-driven Western myth of the artist."³ Add to this the fact that his figuration of China has become more and more fossilized in cliché. It serves little as inquiry into Chinese thought or culture as a viable alternative to Western intellectual or aesthetic paradigms, and fully in the maintenance of an exotic national identity for the ends of ethnic self-marketing in a global art market. It is important to remember the occasion of Huang's break into the Western art world: the *Magiciens de la terre* exhibition in Paris in 1989. This show, widely recognized as a watershed in global art exhibitions, has also been roundly criticized for its reinforcement of discredited stereotypes regarding the non-Western artist. "The discourse of *Magiciens*," explained Okwui Enwezor in a roundtable for *Artforum International* in 2003, "was still very much dependent on an opposition within the historical tendencies of modernism in Europe—namely, its antipathy to the 'primitive' and his functional objects of ritual, and, along with this process of dissociation of the 'primitive' from the modern, its attempt to construct exotic non-Western aesthetic systems on the margins of modernism."⁴ I think Huang's success can in large part be attributed to how well his work has fit into the shoes readied for the non-Western artist by European modernism. Not only does his work not problematize this primitivist discourse, but, since *Magiciens*, has revealed in it evermore.

Tower Snake is a strong case in point. Given the Daoist derivation of similar creatures in other works, one assumes the snake here should be understood in that context. Note how the structure resembles the legendary Dark Warrior (*xuanwu*), the Guardian of the North in traditional Daoist cosmology and a figure that appears elsewhere in Huang's work. Though later rendered as human, the *xuanwu* was originally zoomorphic, a compound animal with a tortoise body and the head and tail of a snake, or, in other cases, a snake coiled upon the back of a tortoise. A green structure domed with a serpent, *Tower Snake* is not the first Huang work to make an architectural analogy out of the *xuanwu*. Take, for example, *Theater of the World—The Bridge* (1995), with its overlapping turtle and snake-shaped terrariums. In ancient Daoist thought, the configuration also represents the creation of the universe, suggesting an atavistic dimension to Huang's "play sculpture," though articulated in strongly nationalistic terms alien to Noguchi's worldview.

The image of China offered here is patently essentialist. Huang is often upheld for his critique of the West and especially its colonial history, his



Big Duck, Long Island, New York.

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open engagement with cultural hybridity, and his promotion of religious ecumenicalism. But, with one or two exceptions, he turns no such political eye toward China, which is figured instead through Daoism as a place rooted in an archaic and magical past, with no imperial history, no historical discontinuities, and no cultural or ideological heterogeneities of its own. I think the structure of *Tower Snake* is designed to replicate these notions at the level of form, at least in a general way: it spirals up and then tapers off as if into infinity or the heavens—a typical symbolical conceit in sacred geometries or (more apposite) in old science fiction programs, where the psychedelic swirl of a worm hole transports the unsuspecting to a land before time. *Tower Snake* is thus a “duck” of an ideological kind. It is no doubt “a building that is a symbol.” The atavistic and essentialist notion of China that it symbolizes is not just supposed to be seen in its external iconography and spiral plan but also to be experienced bodily by traversing its interior. In this, it has much in common with a playground pavilion or a theme park ride.

The turn to “play sculpture” marks a departure for Huang, but its advent is fully continuous with his earlier work. It stems from his wide-ranging and longstanding investment in the amusement theme park and its historical antecedents. I think the case can be made that two different phases of Huang’s career—his early localization of the strategies of the avant-garde and his later adoption of a postcolonialist critical mode—were informed if not led by an interest in the history of amusement spectacles. The earliest such references are fast and loose. They involve popular amusement forms, particularly the roulette wheel, used in various works from the Xiamen Dada period (1986–89) and later and “inspired,” according to Hou Hanru, “by the Chinese fortune-telling tradition and gambling.”⁵ More specific references are tied to Huang’s engagement with nineteenth-century colonial and imperial history. This is clearest in *11 June 2002—The Nightmare of George V* (2002), a modified recreation of a taxidermy configuration the artist saw at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. It consists of a tiger attacking an elephant-borne carriage emblazoned with the British Royal Coat of Arms. A simple statement of resentment against British colonialism in South Asia, the work is also intended as a comment on the role of exhibitionary techniques in the service of colonial power and self-representation. This work is a kind of post-colonialist “edutainment,” aimed most of all at pleasuring the liberal political persuasions of the art world and its expectations of “criticality” while taking care not to make too great a demand on viewer attention or intelligence. In other words, Huang makes postcolonialism—its trope of hybridization, its project of cultural decentering, and its anti-colonial and anti-imperial sentiments—fun, and to this end he has harnessed popular amusement and exhibitionary forms.

It is a sequence worth further consideration. First, in the late 1980s, commercial themed spaces began proliferating across China, beginning as the entertainment wing of neoliberalization in the Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen, and then into Beijing, other major urban centres, and numerous tourist sites, becoming a subject of global fascination in the middle part of the present decade. Second, from the mid 90s to the present, Chinese artists have been working in sculptural and installation modes that

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Left: Huang Yong Ping, *Large Turntable with Wheels*, 1987, painted wood. Courtesy of the artist.

Right: Huang Yong Ping, *11 June 2002—The Nightmare of George V*, 2002. Courtesy of the artist.

increasingly resemble the structures one finds in themed spaces generally across the world or locally in China. With his historical theme rides, flying taxidermy, and pyrotechnic spectacles, Cai Guo-Qiang is the indisputable champion of this mode. Of course, it is an international trend, applicable not just to Chinese artists, and it cannot be divorced from the museum and art fair preference for bombastic, easy-to-understand, space-filling work. Nonetheless, the strong predilection for amusement theme forms, particularly amongst leading Chinese artists, begs for explanation.

In the case of Huang, the main lesson learned from the modern theme park seems to be the theatrical power of miniaturization and monumentalization. As anyone who has been to a theme park knows, dwarfism and gigantism are basic operations, often working in tandem to imaginatively render the patron larger or smaller than the normal scale of human life. Monumental landforms can be shrunk to the size of an amusement ride, intercontinental geography can be condensed within a multi-hectare enclosure, and animals can be doubled or more in size to create pretend terror. For Huang, this scaling dynamic applies to a wide range of subject matter, including medicine flasks and historical buildings, as well as his favorite subject matter, the mythical Daoist bestiary. *The Theater of the World—The Bridge* (1995) is a clear example. In two terrariums—again, one shaped like an oversize serpent, the other like an oversize tortoise—live animals deemed propitious in Daoist mythology were pitted against one another in a death match that evokes not so much the intended existential and cosmic allegories as a Ray Harryhausen feature or a Japanese *kaiju* battle. Also relevant is *Python* (2000), a forty-metre-long wooden snake skeleton, its openwork structure and notch assembly resembling a giant version of those do-it-yourself dinosaur skeleton kits made of balsa wood and sold at museum gift shops and Chinatown novelty stores. Though later exhibited in gallery spaces, *Python* was first produced as a site-specific work for the German town of Hann Münden. Always ready to play the ethnic theming card, Huang noted how the town, surrounded by low mountains and fed by multiple waterways, had great *feng shui*, and in recognition of its auspiciousness offered a sculptural version of a Chinese aphorism: "Where there are high mountains and big lakes, dragons and snakes emerge."⁶ But what the work resembles most of all—with its fang-

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Left: Huang Yong Ping, installation view of *Python*, 2000, and *Theatre of the World—The Bridge*, 1993-95, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Right: Huang Yong Ping, *Theatre of the World—The Bridge*, 1993-95, metal, wood, insects, reptiles. Collection of Peter Huber, on long-term loan to Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon.



filled jaws open, tongue flicking, crawling across the land, over a bridge, and finally sliding into the town's waters—is the animatronic terrors of the amusement park jungle cruise and darkride. Like the bamboo *Tower Snake*, *Python* uses woodcraft and Chinese culture to mask its essential relation to the entertainment industry. It could just as well be a Chinese Godzilla readying to gobble up a small European town.

Chinese theme parks are numerous in kind. Best known, however, and offering the most for the plastic artist is the miniature park. It is an amusement form most intimately associated with post-Mao neoliberalization in Chinese consumer leisure culture.⁷ First was Splendid China, which opened in Shenzhen in 1989. It features miniature replicas of the Central Kingdom's grandest monuments: the Great Wall, the Temple of Heaven, Potala Palace, and so on. In 1993, Beijing World Park opened. Like Splendid China, it is a miniature park, but this time of the world's natural and architectural wonders, amongst them the pyramids of Giza, the Roman Colosseum, the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, Niagara Falls, and the Manhattan skyline. In 1995, a similar park named Window of the World opened in Shenzhen, and others followed elsewhere in China. Though not in all cases resembling those at such commercial parks, miniaturized monuments appear with considerable frequency in Huang's work. There is *Two Typhoons* (2002), two four-metre-high towers shaped like the spiraling minaret at Samarra and made out of paper. The towers resemble two enlarged unfurling woodblock-printed scrolls, one with a Buddhist text in Sanskrit and the other a Qu'ranic text in Arabic. Similar in theme is *(543-622)* (2000), consisting of a wood model, a meter and a half in height, of the French Baroque Chapelle de la Salpêtrière set upon an Islamic prayer rug and installed with a small Tibetan prayer wheel. I cannot help but think again of Venturi and Scott Brown. As a perfect example of the "duck" within pre-modern religious architecture, the architects cite the Byzantine-era Little Mitropoli in Athens, which like Huang's Salpêtrière Chapel miniature is an undersized church (7.62 metres in length by 12.1 metres wide) on a Greek cross plan, "evolved structurally from large buildings in greater cities, but developed symbolically here to mean cathedral."⁸ Miniaturization, in other words, reduces a building to a sign of itself in its most general ideological aspect—a useful feature for an allegorical artist like Huang in need of clear and compact cultural symbols.

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Huang Yong Ping, *Two Typhoons*, 2002, paper, ink. Courtesy of the artist.



Huang Yong Ping, *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank*, 2002/2005. Collection of Guang Yi, Beijing. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Different in theme from these religious examples is *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank* (2000/05), a miniature version of the famous HSBC Building in the Shanghai Bund, an icon of British colonial power in China. Huang's version was three and a half metres high, made of sand (with a dash of cement), and was allowed to crumble over the course of its exhibition. *1/4 Hoover Tower*

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Huang Yong Ping, *1/4 Hoover Tower*, 2005, wood, plastic sheeting, 7 x 2.8 x 2.8 cm. Installed at Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University. Courtesy of the artist.



(2005) is a schematic representation of the tower at the Hoover Institute on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University. It is built out of two-by-fours and red-, white-, and blue-striped tarp. Stenciled onto the walls of its interior are phrases implicating American international aid as a facet of imperialism. Huang's use of miniature buildings for anti-imperial allegories culminates in *Colosseum* and *Pentagon*, both from 2007 and included in his previous exhibition at Gladstone. These half- to two-and-a-half-metre-high buildings are constructed of terracotta blocks that have been fired to look badly weathered and assembled with gaps to read as structural fissures. The blocks double as planters for saplings and other green leafy flora, as if the civilizations that erected and maintained these structures have long since passed, their monuments ceded to entropy and a slow return to nature. This allegorical register points to a basic difference between Huang and his miniature theme park models: while the commercial park aims at timelessness, the representation of a monument in frozen ideality, Huang often figures its physical or moral demise.

If they were assembled, Huang's miniaturized monuments would form a theme park of the ruin of empires, but a very selective one. In striking contrast to Huang's numerous anti-monuments to Roman, British, and American Empire is the absence of a comparable intervention into the long and ongoing history of Chinese imperialism, territorial disputes, and

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ethnic conflict. For no good reason, China is exempt from Huang's critique. China is granted the status of exception, with Daoism functioning as an alibi. Since the mid 1990s, Daoism has functioned in Huang's work most of all as a method to figure China outside of political and social history. It produces a work like *Tower Snake*, the perfect culmination of the two theme park tropes explored mostly separately in preceding work: the monumental building miniaturized and the mythical bestiary monumentalized. Seen in the context of his other work, it is also an aggressive cultural statement. In Huang's miniature theme park, *Tower Snake* would have a central position. As a symbol of ancient and eternal China, it would provide, like the 1/3-sized Eiffel Tower at Beijing World Park, a commanding prospect across a landscape of dwarf monuments representing not the world eternal but the world according to a standard hyperbolic fantasy regarding rising China. Behold the Chinese dragon, a tourguide might say, towering and roaring above a Western civilization eclipsed.

Huang Yong Ping, *Colosseum*, 2007, ceramic, soil, plants, 226.1 x 551.2 x 758.2 cm. © Huang Yong Ping. Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York.

Notes

- ¹ Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1977), 87.
- ² For an overview of Daoist elements in Huang's work, see Doryun Chong, "Huang Yong Ping: A Lexicon," in *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005), text volume, 97-107.
- ³ Robin Laurence, "Huang Yong Ping," *Border Crossings* 26, no. 3 (August 2007), 132-36.
- ⁴ "Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-scale Exhibition," *Artforum International* (November 2003), 154.
- ⁵ Hou Hanru, "Change is the Rule," *House of Oracles*, text volume, 13.
- ⁶ *House of Oracles*, image volume, 54.
- ⁷ See, for example, Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 241-79; and Hai Ren, "The Landscape of Power: Imagineering Consumer Behavior at China's Theme Parks," in Scott A. Lukas, ed., *The Themed Space: Locating Culture, Nation, and Self* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007), 97-112.
- ⁸ *Learning from Las Vegas*, 105.

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Hanru, Hou. "A necessary reminder", *De Appel*, 1998.

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A necessary reminder

Hou Hanru

Huang Yong Ping's art should be understood first of all as a set of strategies of cultural resistance to the power of dominant discourses including the institutional system itself. As a major figure in the Chinese avant-garde of the 1980s, Huang Yong Ping has developed a radical system of thought and language that articulates critique and counter-propositions vis-a-vis the dominant power. His work introduced Western avant-garde art and thinking to China and emphasised the Dadaist tradition and deconstructivist theories. He combined these with traditional Chinese philosophy, which has been oppressed for many years under Maoist rule, in order to create a strategy to subvert the established and oppressive order of 'official art' in China. Today, living and working in the West, he focuses on a critique of Eurocentrism that still prevails in the dominant global discourse. To emphasise the alternative position of his critique, he resorts increasingly to Chinese culture that remains unfamiliar to the Western intellectual world. At the same time, various deconstructivist and post-colonial theories continue to provide him with a source of inspiration as critical counter-positions to the established order of Modernist culture. They enable him to confront the new reality of economic and cultural globalisation and the restructuring of the world order.

The notion of change is central to Huang Yong Ping's thinking and art. As a basic principle of the Chinese *Weltanschauung*, this idea is inscribed in the literature of Chinese philosophy and culture, most notably in the I Ching, the Book of Changes. It states that the world is always changing and is in a process of in multi-orientational movement and transformation. Reality consists of change, of the perpetually-reorganised tension between Yin and Yang, between necessity and chance, order and chaos. Whereas, since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the Western idea of the world and modernity has stressed rationalism, now the emphasis of 'irrational' movement, change, chance and even chaos, (as a more complete world view) can provide

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Hanru, Hou. "A necessary reminder", *De Appel*, 1998.



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an effective strategy to deconstruct the redundant ideologies of Modernism and Eurocentrism. Huang Yong Ping understands this perfectly. After moving to the West in 1989, he introduced metaphysical and practical systems such as Chinese divination and geomancy so as to counterbalance the rationalist, scientific and technocentric systems of Western ideology and knowledge. Here, art's aim is Art is to transgress the borders within which it has been defined and limited by the Western categorisation of disciplines.

In his recent work, Huang Yong Ping intervenes directly and provides a critique from within Western society itself. These interventions focus on events involving ethnic, cultural, political and economical conflicts, tension and transformations. They are mainly the consequence of colonial history and of the current globalisation which consists of a transformed reflection of that history. The issues of post-colonial migration, border crossing and cultural-political conflicts between the West and the Other are provocatively raised in pieces such as *Passage* (Glasgow, 1993), *Yellow Peril* (Oxford, 1993), *Human Snake Plan* (Columbus, Ohio, 1993), *Trois Pas, Neuf Traces* (Marseille, 1996), *Terminal* (Rotterdam, 1996) and *The Doomsday* (London, 1997). *AO*, his solo exhibition project at De Appel, is the latest development in this direction. Here, Huang Yong Ping has reappropriated the trademarks of two Dutch companies: *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (the Dutch East Indies Company, or VOC) and Philips. They in turn represent the global expansion of the Dutch economy in the imperial era (from the 17th to the 19th century) and our own post/neo-colonial times. Ironically, Philips, the most powerful Dutch company in today's global economy, is currently sponsoring the collection of VOC ceramic products that is now on show in the Rijksmuseum's 'VOC Gallery'. This connection between the two companies testifies to the historical continuity between colonisation and today's post-colonial reality. The discovery of this 'coincidence' was the starting point for Huang Yong Ping's project.

In the installation, Huang Yong Ping presents the logos of the VOC and Philips as featured on tea boxes, canons, ceramic plates and packing cases. The VOC was a company that combined various forms of economic, military and political expansion.

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Hanru, Hou. "A necessary reminder", *De Appel*, 1998.

It was the direct forebear of the contemporary multinational corporations. Chinese tea was one of the main products that was traded by the VOC. Chinese tea was a status symbol in the 17th and 18th centuries; it epitomised the craze for chinoiserie which in itself represented a typically colonial consumption of the Other. Huang Yong Ping has chosen tea as a form of drink (or food) that articulates the notion of consumption in general and the consumption of the Other in particular. As A. Appadurai remarks, the original meaning of consumption derives from eating. ¹ Consumption is consequently a 'technique of the body'. The consumption of products from other cultures within the colonial context signals a colonial appropriation of the Other's body. Meanwhile, it not only implies new habits for the consumer but also involves subtle but significant subjective changes through this new 'technique of the body'. In the consumption of the Other, the colonial subject also undergoes a form of self-deconstruction through an occasional and unconscious identification with the Other. In fact, Huang Yong Ping has already developed a whole strategy to deconstruct Eurocentrism by creating a 'food chain' that links cooked rice, insects, animals and various supermarket foods. Here, tea is engaged so that it becomes a new node which strengthens the chain of critical actions. To underpin this effect, Huang Yong Ping has included a real-life, mealtime scene in the installation as a 'footnote' to the main narrative: a dinner table with eight ceramic dishes and VOC boxes is presented at the end of the space so as to suggest that the story will somehow never end.

Of course, Huang Yong Ping makes a point of reminding us of the role of imperialist violence as was once committed by the coloniser over the colonised in the colonial expansion of Western capitalism. But he also emphasises the less visible and even more dangerous form of violence that is implicit to contemporary globalisation. This is why he has included the small replica of a VOC canon which is displayed on one side of a set of scales. The tension between the VOC box and the Philips box on the two sides of the second balance and the potential loss of equilibrium between the two sides also stress the continuing violence of Western market expansion. Ultimately this

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Hanru, Hou. "A necessary reminder", *De Appel*, 1998.

balancing act or state of affairs has to be destroyed. The end of this equilibrium is both inevitable and imminent. It is the fate of things and also the fate of colonial history. Huang Yong Ping identifies this process of dealing with the fact of things or (to be more precise) with the paradox of things as being an elemental task within this work. Here, it is important to note that the title is a reversed VOC sign. Obviously, this suggests the subversion of colonial hegemony. The necessity of such subversion is reinforced by the intense ambience that is created by the work. The installation is diagonally structured as a 'valley passage' and is surrounded by the VOC and Philips products while the huge scales in the middle function as the focus of the magnificent energy evoked by this structure. This energy entices the audience into directly experiencing this movement and consequently provides a unique experience in which a historic transition is represented both metaphorically and physically.

The form of the valley passage also suggests a spatial openness. This openness not only leads us to experience the energy inside the space but also directly connects the work to the context of the venue itself: to the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat where *De Appel* is situated in the city of Amsterdam. This location is also an influential element in the construction of the work's meaning. The street is full of antique shops that trade in Oriental and African objects. They are decorated using the most cliché-ed of colonial representations of other cultures. More interestingly, this street leads directly to the Rijksmuseum itself, where the VOC gallery is sponsored by Philips! In fact, Huang Yong Ping recognised this specific connection with Holland's colonial past and decided to include it in his project from the very beginning. It is no coincidence that he targets both VOC and Philips products within this project. The work potently pinpoints a specific historical and economic context and eloquently describes the process of transition from colonisation to globalisation.

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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.

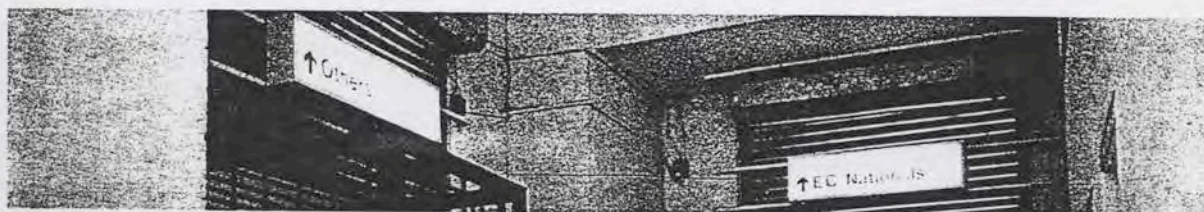
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HUANG YONG PING

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PASSAGE, 1993. INSTALLATION DETAIL, CCA GLASGOW.



PASSAGE, 1993. INSTALLATION DETAIL, CCA GLASGOW.

Above the two entrances of the gallery two signs light up, black writing on yellow: "EEC Nationals; Others." Standing in front of them, one is meant to ask oneself, "Which door do I choose?" Actually, the question ought to be, "Am I a European or a foreigner (an Other)?" The question of identity is serious and addresses each of us. If we really considered everyone as a free individual as per the Western humanist ideal behind the construction of a new cultural body, the European Community, we would by now be far from this identity problem. But this remains a political, decorative ideal. When will this be achieved? Huang Yong Ping always works on the real, either evoking the ultimate possibility of any culture's superiority, of any *Weltanschauung*, or when he questions any concrete event which limits or controls the Other's freedom. The work refers to the artist's own experiences as someone "outside" who travels across Western borders — this time through the British border in Glasgow (the light boxes are exact replicas of those at the Glasgow airport). What is problematic is not a physical border but a mental one. The artist originally proposed to put a pair of lions in cages under the light boxes. Obviously, the lions would function as both real guards and as metaphors of authority, power, and control which can be traced back to both Chinese and Western traditions. But the answer was no: no lions in a public gallery! The (expensive) cages stood empty, shorn of their real function and sense. The real in art has lost its reality in the face of the reality in which we all live. Such a loss is not a failing of art but derives from our incapacity to deal with the real. It testifies to the wise words: "Only one's fear of the Other forces one to deny its Otherness."

Hou Hanru

For Canton-born, Paris-based critic and curator Hou Hanru, Huang Yong Ping's Passage tackles one of the emergent issues in today's global culture: the definition and function of an international boundary, the border between "I" and the "other," and the "in-between" space where one confronts and contemplates the problem.