

# RH CONTEMPORARY ART

## RH CONTEMPORARY ART PRESENTS OUTSIDE THE LINES: NEW ART FROM CHINA

### ABOUT THE ARTISTS

---

#### **Gao Weigang**

Lives and works in Beijing

Gao Weigang makes work in a variety of media: painting, sculpture, installation and performance. These varied works are unified by their ability to disrupt expectations, a paramount concern for the artist. “We are happy to rely on our own judgments without questioning or speculating about them, which is a kind of vice,” he says. Through subtle deviations in material and form, he seeks to introduce doubt into a viewer’s experience of his work, hoping to inspire second-guessing and revised understandings.

Gao Weigang’s metal staircases seem to offer the possibility of ascendance until their skewed dimensions and awkward placement give them away. The risers are often hollow and placed against a wall, stairways to nowhere that appeal to and challenge viewers’ conditioned responses. His large canvases, covered with acrylic paint and adorned with shards of mirror, resemble delicate symmetrical compositions. This harmony is disrupted, however, when one realizes the danger and implied violence of their materials.

Gao Weigang initially worked primarily in painting, but he expanded his focus to include installation as a way to break out of his own patterns and conditioned responses. “I was getting bored with painting, as I was too familiar with it,” he says. “I can paint an object easily, but that is it. There is nothing new to it . . . so I decided to choose installation as a new vehicle to express my ideas in a different manner.” Gao Weigang will create works for the exhibition during his residency at RH Contemporary Art’s artist’s residence in DUMBO.

---

#### **Hu Qinwu**

Lives and works in Beijing

Hu Qinwu’s subdued and hushed works stand in contrast to the hectic pace of social change in contemporary China. Rather than match its speed, his paintings and works on paper explore timeless themes inspired by the Buddhist tenets of simplicity and interconnectivity.

Hu Qinwu’s practice is based on the repetition of forms and on subtle explorations of light and dark. Works such as *P-1203* (2012) investigate the interplay of two fundamental marks: lines and circles. Chinese calligraphic characters taken from Buddhist prayer books are laid over a nearly uniform grid of small circles whose tone ranges from light to dark gray. Also done in gray, the

characters' linear brushstrokes disrupt the circles in some areas; in others, the lines blend into the dots, nearly disappearing. Hu Qinwu creates the circles by dropping water onto the works' surfaces, performing a meditative act of mark-making that is both ordered and open to chance.

In *13016* (2013), Hu Qinwu further explores variations in color and form. Against a surface of dark red, vertical stripes appear to drip downward. In the areas where the stripes' shade matches that of the background, an underlayer of small circles becomes visible. Through understated gestures such as this, Hu Qinwu exposes the ways dissimilar marks and shades can interact, alternately drawing attention to and obscuring one another.

---

## **Li Hui**

Lives and works in Beijing

Built of light, smoke, mirrors and metal, Li Hui's installations seduce the viewer into becoming active participants. "To me, half of art is created by the viewer," he has said. "My art is always interactive, and it gains meaning through this interaction."

In *V* (2009), the artist uses a mirror, laser beams and clouds of smoke to create a mysterious and mutable scene. Red laser beams shine down on a mirror, which reflects the light back into the smoke-filled room; visitors to the installation are at times invited to inject their bodies into the scene, altering the beams' trajectories.

Li Hui's immersive artworks, such as this one, often deal with themes of transformation, enacting dynamic cycles in which opposites are juxtaposed and occasionally reconciled. For example, nature and technology confront one another in a series of robotic animals; violence and serenity intertwine in the wreckage of a car wrapped in white fabric; and freedom and captivity are contrasted in a cage composed of ephemeral laser beams. By allowing his viewer to alter these scenarios, he exposes the ways reality is malleable and subjective.

---

## **Meng Zhigang**

Lives and works in Beijing

Meng Zhigang's paintings of architectural interiors possess none of the comforts of home. Unadorned and unpopulated, they have white walls and gray floors. Though light cascades through doorways, casting shadows on the ground, no windows to the outside are seen. Instead the spaces seem to extend in an endless, monochromatic corridor: emptiness opening onto emptiness.

It is precisely this quality of absence that Meng Zhigang aims to highlight. Such works function as comments on the current housing problem in China, where new home prices far exceed what residents can afford to pay. As a result, entire "ghost cities" have emerged – newly constructed housing developments devoid of people. In some of Meng Zhigang's paintings, the spaces are not merely uninhabited but uninhabitable. Stairways ascend into walls, hitting dead ends. These minor failures in planning serve as allusions to the larger situation, implicating developers' shortsightedness in the problem.

In Meng Zhigang's other bodies of work, the artist paints architectural objects seemingly drawn from an apocalyptic, post-industrial future. As in his paintings of interiors, such scenes present unlivable conditions in which possibilities are few.

---

## **Ni Youyu**

Lives and works in Shanghai

Ni Youyu harnesses processes of erasure and erosion to create works in various media. This conceptual emphasis unites his diverse output, which includes soap sculptures, painted coins, woodblock prints and acrylic-wash paintings whose surfaces have been blasted with water.

In making these works, Ni Youyu often juxtaposes conflicting systems of value. His series of Buddhas sculpted from soap asks the user to choose between the object's potential for hand washing and its symbolic value; the more it is used for the former, the more the latter fades, as the Buddha's form increasingly deteriorates. For his works made from coins, Ni Youyu hammers the discs until their state-issued imagery disappears. He then paints miniature scenes – waterfalls and mountains, temples and trees – onto their surfaces. Stripping the coins of their monetary value, he infuses them with a new and different sort of meaning by transforming them into art objects. In doing so, he juxtaposes economics and aesthetics.

Ni Youyu further explores the tension between opposites in his ornate woodblock prints and acrylic paintings. His prints frequently depict the dappled surfaces of tree trunks; ironically, the image of the wooden tree is created through the removal of wood from the block's surface. His paintings often feature natural landscapes contained in nondescript rooms, juxtaposing the organic and the built. His method of making such works is also threaded with contrast: the artist applies paint to the canvas and then partially washes it away with large quantities of water, courting a precarious balance of intention and chance, application and removal. He immerses himself deeply in research as he develops each process; spending months reading and practicing before he begins to physically make a work.

---

## **Pan Jian**

Lives and works in Beijing

Pan Jian's landscapes exist in a transitional state, when the sun is either just dawning or just descending. In his canvases, darkened skies threaten to eclipse all else. As one's eyes adjust to his subtle palette of blue, purple and black, forms begin to emerge. One can discern trees sheltering dim roadways and ornate branches expanding against gray clouds, as his subject matter pivots between appearance and disappearance.

Pan Jian was born in 1975, just before the end of the Cultural Revolution, and his work's individualism reflects the relaxing norms of the period in which he came of age. Instead of depicting an objective reality, he paints scenes that are introspective and moody, humble rather than monumental. His freedom to pursue such a vision – one that is idiosyncratic rather than sociopolitical – speaks to the degree of creative freedom Chinese artists of his generation have enjoyed.

In his nighttime scenes, Pan Jian presents the everyday and overlooked, thwarting traditional expectations of landscape. He offers moderate hillsides, groupings of trees and flat roads; all

appear as cursory views, the kind normally glimpsed on the way to somewhere else, perhaps through the window of a moving car. Fleeting and melancholy, they conjure a sense of ephemerality that extends to the emotional states they inspire.

---

## **Qiu Anxiong**

Lives and works in Shanghai

Qiu Anxiong uses stop-motion animation to create narratives composed of individual black-and-white-paintings. His technique involves photographing each frame separately and then linking them together. Guided by an associative, poetic logic, they move at a meditative pace, encouraging the viewer to hover and pause on each cell. His sequences frequently explore the transformation of landscapes over time: floods slowly overtake tunnels and buildings; asteroids tumble through the sky and clouds pass above a distant earth below.

Qiu Anxiong is particularly interested in the cultural and physical evolution of China and in creating connections between historic eras; his animations alternately reference ancient Chinese philosophical thought and contemporary urban development. In doing so, Qiu Anxiong attempts to reconcile disparate time periods and cultures. "These days, most people consider new and old to be mutually exclusive concepts," he says. "No one has really thought deeply enough about the intimate relationship between the new and the old."

In a further allusion to the past, his acrylic paintings evoke traditional Chinese ink painting. His reverence for history is also reflected in his methods: he will often wipe off a canvas and reuse it, allowing the traces of an earlier scene to remain visible. Such physical remnants remind us of the ways the past continually informs the present. Qiu Anxiong will be concurrently featured in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's landmark exhibition *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China*.

---

## **Qiu Deshu**

Lives and works in Shanghai

Qiu Deshu calls his signature style "fissuring." The term refers to his process of tearing Xuan paper and applying the fragments to painted canvases. He leaves rough-edged areas of the underlayer visible, creating juxtapositions between the multiple physical layers.

Works such as *Fissuring 89-4* (2013) suggest geologic cross sections in which veins of contrasting sediment thread through an otherwise consistent ground. They possess a sense of both texture and flatness, as though they are surfaces opening onto ever-expanding depths. While his use of Xuan paper, a surface used for calligraphy, alludes to Chinese ink painting, his concern with depth and abstraction breaks from its conventions.

Although the artist's use of fissuring is physical – both as a process and as a visual effect – it is also metaphorical. A fissure is an interruption, and Qiu Deshu believes one's life is composed of such breaks. Trained as an artist as a child, Qiu Deshu was forced to abandon his creative ambitions during the Cultural Revolution, when he went to work in a plastics factory. Qiu Deshu resumed his artistic practice when this historical era ended in 1976, developing his distinctive fissuring technique in the early 1980s.

---

## **The Gao Brothers**

Live and work in Beijing

The Gao Brothers are a pair of siblings who have been collaborating on installation, performance, sculpture, photography and text since the mid-1980s. The duo creates socially charged, iconoclastic works that cast a critical eye on contemporary China and its relationship to the West. They focus on the legacy of China's cultural and social history, frequently stylizing and giving new context to existing iconography. They are also interested in crossing cultures, an imperative suggested in works such as *Borrowing the Statue of Liberty for Exhibition in Beijing*. The large-scale conceptual conceit, which can never be realized, nevertheless has provocative international implications.

The Gao Brothers are also well known for addressing social concerns with equally powerful interpersonal gestures. Their ongoing performance pieces *World Hug Day* and *Embrace*, for example, involve inviting strangers to embrace for extended periods of time, both clothed and unclothed; the resulting photographs challenge taboos of public interaction, gender roles and sexuality. To the artists, something as simple as a human embrace can combat the pain, suffering and violence that persist in the world today. The resulting work is a moving and personal reminder of the importance of loving one another and of the healing power of the human embrace. The performance has taken place in multiple locations, including London and Rome, and at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, in Kansas City, and the Singapore Art Fair.

---

## **Yan Bing**

Lives and works in Beijing

Yan Bing's paintings nostalgically allude to his memories of growing up in rural China. His canvases resemble cowhide flattened over stretcher bars; the animal skins' patterns create map-like abstractions awash in earthy color schemes of warm browns, oxblood and the black and white of cattle markings. His application of pigment invests his compositions with a painterly texture that is its own kind of skin. His process honors agricultural labor, retaining the poetic space between modern social humanity and undeveloped landscapes.

"I think the reason why I repeatedly come back to depict these schemes and traces is the fact that [they] are discernible evidence of my having lived," he says.

In earlier works, Yan Bing has created installations and paintings made with farm tools and organic materials such as dirt, silk, cow skin and fur. Such elements reveal his appreciation of Italian Arte Povera of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a movement comprised of artists who used unconventional materials and styles to make pointed commentary on their era's corporate mentality. In a contemporary context, Yan Bing's work speaks to the fast pace of China's modern development, as well as the lightning speed with which large quantities of information bounce across the globe. "I would rather go back to the age of innocence," the artist admits. His work, however, is a knowing mixture of painterly skill and veiled cultural commentary. Yan Bing will create works for the exhibition during his residency at RH Contemporary Art's artist's residence in Brooklyn.

---

## **Yang Yongliang**

Lives and works in Shanghai

Yang Yongliang's photos and videos contain intricate worlds in which past and present intertwine. Urban development meets rural life, as skyscrapers tower beside cascading waterfalls. The past confronts the present in scenes where men in traditional garb graze horses beside burnt-out automobiles. "In my work, what is important is the ambiguous relationship between people and nature, tradition and modernity, West and East," he says.

Just as Yang Yongliang's artwork reconciles disparate elements, his technique combines ancient themes with modern tools. He uses a variety of new media to create his surreal landscapes, digitally layering photographs and drawn elements. The scenes he creates appear simultaneously futuristic and ancient, evoking both dystopic science-fiction scenarios and traditional Chinese landscape painting.

While Yang Yongliang's themes are universal, they particularly relate to China, where urban development has become increasingly difficult to manage and migrants have left the countryside to seek opportunities in already overcrowded cities. Erasing geographical and historical distinctions, Yang Yongliang's depictions reflect a contemporary world rife with ambiguities. Yang Yongliang will be concurrently featured in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's landmark exhibition *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China*.

---

## **Zheng Chongbin**

Lives and works in San Francisco and Shanghai

Zheng Chongbin's work reflects his bicultural education. Trained at a traditional Chinese arts academy in Shanghai, he later attended the San Francisco Art Institute, where he studied contemporary Western art. His ink paintings incorporate qualities of both approaches. While his use of ink and Xuan paper references traditional brush painting, his focus on materiality and perception is more aligned with the concerns of Western Minimalism.

Diverging from Chinese brush painting's conventional subjects of landscapes, figures and flowers, Zheng Chongbin instead explores his medium's physical qualities. To make his ink-based work, he applies black ink with a brush to Xuan paper, a traditional calligraphic surface. He then mounts multiple sheets of the thin material onto panels. This process results in a range of gestures and visual effects. Opaque black blocks sprout fissure-like tendrils; delicate lines contrast with spreading washes of gray. Forms, lines and fields overlay, creating ethereal surfaces suggestive of illusory, dreamlike states.