

历史之路

PASSAGE TO
HISTORY

20 YEARS OF LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA AND
CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ART

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威尼斯双年展与中国当代艺术20年

文献集
Archives

主编 成都当代美术馆 编著 Richard Widmer 黄诗云 杜昉

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序

吕澎



1993年下半年，“广州双年展”的后期工作结束后，我去了深圳。我在一份《边境贸易报》的专刊“艺术新闻”上读到了一篇题为“从威尼斯败兴而归的艺术家”的文章。文章大致介绍了十三位中国艺术家第一次参加威尼斯双年展的情况，从文章标题就可以知道，那些从威尼斯回来的艺术家的内心也许并不十分畅快：布展时间仓促、展示场所极为不理想、旅馆条件简陋、大多数艺术家需要自费前往、中方负责人栗宪庭没有机会向世界介绍中国艺术，如此等等。一开始，“出国护照办起来很顺利，拿意大利签证也没有遇到什么麻烦。随后，这帮名不见经传的现代艺术的探视者，从银行取出自己大部分或全部的积蓄，兴奋十足地朝着世界艺术圣地的意大利出发了。”但是，之后这些艺术家在意大利的经历并没有当初想象的那样美好，即便文章的作者仅仅是一家之言，不能够详细地介绍更多的情况，但是我们也没有太多的资料证明那些第一次参加这个国际艺术大展的艺术家当时有多么的高兴与满足。

文章的确带有一丝嘲讽的色彩，其实，二十年前中国当代艺术家的处境远远没有今天想象的那样轻



1993参加威尼斯双年展期间王广义、王友身与白南准合影留念。（王广义提供）



80年代初，周春芽和张晓刚在成都画院

松。之前，不少艺术家与批评家那时也许相信，只有到西方国家去，自己的事业才能够有所发展。留在国内的艺术家和批评家有好长一段时间没有恢复他们的精神，尽管更为年轻的艺术家例如方力钧和部分“'85美术运动”中充满活力的艺术家例如王广义在很短的时间里恢复了他们的具有决定性的艺术实践，但是大多数艺术家还沉陷在对未来的生活与艺术的苦思冥想之中。在1989年9月的一封给周春芽的信中，张晓刚写的是这样的内容：

回到学校转眼就是20多天，几乎没有干什么正事。学习了一个星期，天天听文件、座谈，屁股也疼了，头也昏了。当然最后我还是没有躲掉，书记动员几次表态，我就干脆认真地发了一个言，顺利过关。想想你们画院，这里不知要认真多少倍，美院又是重要的“重灾区”，抓得很紧。¹

短短的几排字呈现出了当时的基本政治语境，按照普通人的逻辑，逃离这个环境是很自然的。不过，在12月的一封写给毛旭辉的信中，张晓刚留下了这样的文字记录：

我收到Yang的信，劝我出去，我准备回信告诉他我的想法。我认为恰恰在目前不是落荒而逃的时候，不是去加入亚洲“吉普赛大军”的问题。离开了中国这个大背景，是没有什么“艺术”可言的，只要还不至于不能按自己的意愿去画画，那么我就会仍然留在这里。……我近来的状态有种走回到过去的感觉，听贝多芬（Ludwig van Beethoven）、柴可夫斯基（Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky），格列柯（El Greco）放在身边，还有萨特（Jean Paul Sartre）和乌纳穆诺（Miguel de Unamuno）。²

无论是无奈还是自觉，大多数人都留下来了，但是在1992年春天之前的日子里，在反复的思考与蠢蠢欲动的尝试中，80年代部分重要的现代艺术家正在转向当代艺术的实践。生命存在着挣扎的本能，如果增添了理性，生命仍然能够创造奇迹。事实上，在1990年左右的时间，尽管现代艺术家们没有展览的机会，

但是,社会生活中所充斥的另一种轻松——由商品市场带来的可能性——同样给予了艺术家继续工作的机会。在1991年6月的一封信里,王广义写道:

现在在中国只停留在学术意义的论战,其实是无意义的,站在彻底的当代运转机制角度来看,只有事实的成功才是真实的,否则,无论我们与他们说什么,其实都是在共同建立所谓的文化人虚幻的满足而已。

……但是我们又具有创造“实证性神话”的能力,正如我们在北京时所说的那个“滚雪球”的能力一样,重要的是我们必须让“滚雪球”这件事情真正的发生,成为众人可感知和困惑的事实!如果我们不把自己的雪球滚大,那么别人的雪球也许就会滚大的,也许90年代只需要几个雪球,现在大地上有“雪”,我们手中又有“石块”,我们需要积极的去滚这个雪球!也许一个时代和历史能给予我们的际遇仅此一次了,错过了,我们将会终身遗憾的!³

1991年的春天,一本策略性的杂志《艺术·市场》出版了,第一期介绍的就是王广义,在回答编辑的问题时,王广义说:

就目前来看,中国的当代艺术还没有获得与它本身所达到的学术高度相对等的地位,这里面的原因是很复杂的,其中主要的一点是没有强大的国家集团来做后盾,战后美国艺术的成功,实质上是国家集团的成功,否则,像波洛克(Pollock)、德·库宁(De Kooning)、琼斯(J. Johns)这些艺术家将不会是今天的样子了。你刚才用了一个“艺术工业”这个词,这个词很好。这里面涉及到一个循环流通问题。我想,首先要参与这个循环流通,然后才能在这个轨道上发生意义,现在,我们已经开始参与了,可以断言在五年之后的世界艺术工业领域里,中国“产品”将会是举足轻重的。⁴

就在这个时候,没有人能够想象“五年之后”中国的当代艺术在“世界艺术工业领域”究竟会是什么样的命运,不过,在孔长安的努力与联络下,我还是支付了三万多人民币的费用将意大利杂志《Flash Art》的编辑弗朗切斯卡·波纳米(Francesco Bonami)请到了于1992年10月在广州中央大酒店举办的“广州双年展”上,试图让中国本土的当代艺术为国际社会所了解。这一年,王广义的《大批判可口可乐》发表在《Flash Art》杂志的封面(1992年1/2月,第162期)上,我在这份杂志上也做了“广州双年展”的广告。

事实上,那时中国批评家也在努力推动世界了解中国的现代艺术和当代艺术,在1993年6月之前,有中国艺术家和批评家参与的国际性展览不乏数量:1986年,郑胜天、黄友葵、戴恒扬、沈柔坚参与亚太博物馆策划的“开门之后:中国当代艺术展”(Beyond the Open Door: Contemporary Paintings from the People's Republic of China, 美国·洛杉矶);1989年费大为协助让·于贝尔·马尔丹(Jean Hubert Martin)完成“大地魔术师”(Magiciens de la Terre, 法国·巴黎),并于1990年策划了“献给昨天的中国明天”(Chine Demain Pour Hier, 法国·不利里尔);1991年李欧梵(Leo Ou-Fan Lee)、郑胜天协助亚太博物馆完成了“不和塞尚玩牌:八十年代中国‘新潮’和‘前卫’艺术”(I Don't Want to Play Cards with Cezanne and Other Words: Selections from the Chinese New Wave and Avant-Garde Art of The Eighties, 美国·洛杉矶);1992年汉雅轩参与策划了“卡塞尔文献展的外围展”(德国·卡塞尔),孔长安协助的“Cocart——后波普国际邀请展”(Cocart Beve Arte Contemporanea, 意大利·米兰);1993年初,在中国的德国籍留学生施岸笛(Andreas Schmid)协助戴汉志(Hans Van Dijk)完成了“中国前卫艺术展”(China Avant-Garde, 德国·柏林),栗宪庭、张颂仁策划“后八九中国新艺术展”(中国·香港)、“毛走向波普展”(Mao



1989年，“中国现代艺术展”展场外



1992年10月20日，参加“广州双年展”的艺术家、评委大合影

Goes Pop, 澳大利亚·悉尼)；在国内，由西方人组织策划的有历史价值的展览有弗兰 (Francesca Dal Lago) 于1990年在家中举办的刘炜个展，于1992年在北京艺术博物馆举办的“刘炜、方力钧作品展”；北京外交人员俱乐部在1992年举办的“最近的工作——张培力和耿建翌绘画和装置作品展”。

然而，无论怎样，在冷战结束进入后冷战时期这个大的世界格局上看，包括1993年在内的很长一段时间里，中国当代艺术在国际社会中的影响微乎其微。那时，在国内的艺术家仍然没有太多的机会展览，销售更是没有什么可能性，王广义、张培力的一些重要作品就是在我的劝说下，让我在做公司的大学同学用极少的钱买走的。在1993年6月之前，没有任何人对未来有具体的想象，只有对艺术的信念和执着。不过，由于中国当代艺术家的艺术思想、内容以及表现形式与官方艺术体制所要求的完全不同，尽管由高名潞等批评家于1989年2月在中国美术馆举办了“中国现代艺术展”，但是，这次80年代的现代主义的最后“狂欢”并不表明一个新的艺术体制已经诞生。

之后，现代艺术与当代艺术就再也难以进入这个被认为代表中国艺术的殿堂。正是在这样的基本背景下，民间开始了对当代艺术的支持，“广州双年展”就是在市场经济明确为合法的条件下，在民间力量的支持下得以举办的。1992年邓小平“南巡讲话”之后，在政治上具有敏感性的任何人都可以看出，市场经济正在明显地改变这个国家的艺术体制，在官方艺术机构完全不支持当代艺术的情况下，市场因为其功能与本性，开始了新的艺术制度的建设，只是在市场介入艺术的初期，大多数人没有注意到这个具有决定性的事实。事实上，我在“广州双年展”的前言里已经说明了这个问题：

“双年展”不同于中国大陆过去的任何一次展览。在操作的经济背景方面，“投资”代替了过去的“赞助”；在操作的主体方面，公司企业代替了过去的文化机构；在操作的程序方面，具有法律效力的合同书代替了过去的行政“通知书”；在操作的学术背景方面，由批评家组成的评审委员会代替了过去以艺术家为主组成的“评选班子”；在操作的目的方面，经济、社会、学术领域的全面“生效”代替了单一的、领域狭窄的并且总是争论不休的艺术“成功”。……

改革的深入与发展，导致书写历史的方式有了新的变化，当旧有的规则不再适合于新时期的需要时，建立新的规则就显得至关重要。新规则的中心含义是：文化必须为销售而生产，这针对的是“为文化而创造文化”的古典模式。它与“孤芳自赏”、“无法可依”或政治工具主义的文化生产模式完全相悖；它要求立法、税



1992年，广州双年展开幕现场

收、保险以及社会进一步的分工等一系列属于当代市场机制的因素的支持。这对一个没有市场传统的国度来讲，的确是一项极其艰巨而复杂的课题，“双年展”的参与者——企业家、批评家、艺术家、编辑乃至律师、新闻记者——正是通过对“双年展”的参与，开始了建立当代艺术市场这一历史课题的求证与解答，更多的人已经清楚：在九十年代，市场问题就是文化问题。⁵

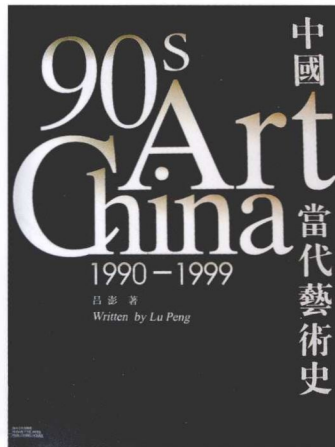
的确，由于市场经济关于流通与价值交换的游戏规则，在国内没有获得官方艺术机构支持的当代艺术家有条件被西方人（包括生活在资本主义制度下的香港人张颂仁）带到国际社会之中，那些本来就生活与工作在美国和欧洲的中国艺术家例如黄永砗、徐冰、谷文达以及以后开始呈现面貌的蔡国强也在他们各自的特殊语境中努力参与国际性的展览，并且不同程度地融入了国际艺术圈；在很长的一段时间里，侯瀚如、费大为这样一些熟悉西方游戏规则批评家也渐渐有了“国际策展人”的身份，只要有机会，他们就尽力将中国的新艺术插入国际展览，直至放入威尼斯双年展这样的展览中。

无论人们对中国艺术家参与威尼斯双年展有怎样不同的评价，事实上，正是所有关注中国当代艺术的人们的参与，使得中国的当代艺术渐渐为世界所知，更为重要的是，事实、金钱、影响力也会改变人们对当代艺术的看法：2000年，上海双年展开始采用接近国际规则的策展人制度，有不少西方艺术家参加了这次展览；到了2003年，威尼斯双年展有了中国馆，尽管这年的“非典”影响到了中国当代艺术在威尼斯的展览，但是，设立中国馆表明了中国官方艺术机构基于自身的策略也开始了对中国当代艺术的利用，中国当代艺术的合法性问题也正是在这样的背景下提出来的。

然而，在中国当代艺术还完全缺乏制度保护下的合法性的情况下，人们又发现了市场对艺术的严重影响，人们对市场下的中国当代艺术产生了质疑，同时，对中国当代艺术与市场的关系的批评也来自部分西方人。可是，所有的批评者应该知道：威尼斯双年展从第一届开始，销售、资本以及利益这些问题就尾随其后，除了1968年欧洲几个主要国家发生的“风暴”对资本主义文化制度的控诉与反抗外，市场与资本从来就没有脱离过艺术。此外，市场问题在中国还具有特殊性：从上个世纪90年代以来，只有市场以及由市场带来的国际资源在支撑着中国的当代艺术，由于政治体制方面的复杂原因，一个科学的市场制度远远没有建立起来，中国的艺术体制至今也没有发生任何实质性的变化，艺术领域的公权力并没有因为市场而出现合理的利用，相反，公权力的滥用与市场游戏的粗劣共同构成了今天中国当代艺术在国际和国内



2005年，威尼斯双年展中国馆首展“处女花园：浮现”现场



《中国当代艺术史 1990-1999》书影

新的困境，从2008年下半年开始发生实际影响的经济危机以来，中国当代艺术的命运一直是人们关注的焦点：中国当代艺术该如何发展？

在我看来，艺术创作——尽管这个词汇已经非常古老了——永远是艺术家的问题，而作为批评家、策展人或者艺术史家的我们，却可以通过对过往的一切进行反省，来梳理并评价之前的艺术历程，中国艺术家和批评家参加威尼斯双年展充满着焦虑、荆棘与问题，相信那些早年参加过威尼斯双年展的艺术家和批评家都有着难以忘怀的感受与故事，而我们所说的历史正是由他们的那些感受与故事构成的。此外，从1993年开始的全球“历史之路”不仅是中国当代艺术本身的历史，也是全球艺术史在这个时期最为重要的一个部分。

2011年底的一天，在中国生活了数年、对中国当代艺术不乏了解的美国人温成在北京重复咖啡馆里找到我，他说他想做一个关于中国艺术家参加威尼斯双年展的研究项目，需要一些经费（大约40万人民币左右），我没有犹豫就答应了。回到成都之后，我完善了一个想法：如果我们能够利用2013年威尼斯双年展期间举办一个回顾与纪念中国艺术家参加威尼斯双年展历史的展览，将文献与艺术家的新作品集中放在一起，不是更为完整吗？结果，成都当代美术馆（Chengdu MOCA）首先为这个研究项目准备了一百万的经费，以便能够将收集的历史资料与文献以及研究著作全部出版。在每天都有数十个展览的今天（而昨天，例如1995年之前，中国现代艺术和当代艺术在国内的展览机会少之又少，1996年，黄专在北京中国美术馆策划了一个有价值的当代艺术展览“首届当代艺术学术邀请展”，可是在展览即将开幕的时候被强行要求不得开门），老一代的批评家正在退出历史的前台，而刚刚入世的年轻批评家大多数转向了策展，巨大的经济压力使得他们很少有人能够有条件推动学术研究的进程，当然，关于当代艺术的研究从官方艺术机构那里仍然难以获得实际支持的机会，这样的背景继续促使着我们不得不寻找民间的力量，以便为以后的艺术史研究者准备最基本的材料。之前，我已经完成了《中国当代艺术史 1990-1999》（2000年出版），并于2012年春天完成了《21世纪中国当代艺术史 2000-2010》（2012年出版），这两部艺术史的写作让我深深的意识到，中国当代艺术这20年的历史需要更多的角度去研究，因此，在当代艺术圈普遍反省问题和回

顾历史的时候,我相信通过对中国艺术家参加威尼斯双年展的20年(1993-2013)进行研究是一个重要的历史角度。

在几乎2012年整整一年里,温成带领他的助手黄诗云去了数个城市,走访了大多数参加过威尼斯双年展的艺术家,这个工作使得我们拥有了那些参加威尼斯双年展的艺术家的第一手口述资料,并以《历史之路:威尼斯双年展与中国当代艺术20年(访谈集)》为书名出版,这部文献收集了超过70位参展艺术家及相关参与者、推动者的访谈以及从1993年以来中国当代艺术与威尼斯双年展有关的文章,这可以向读者提供丰富的历史资料;与此同时,不少历史原件和复印件也让我们获得了关于这段历史的图像与手稿资料,当我们从这些图文资料中看到和读到中国艺术家过往的思想与经历时,难以抑制内心的感慨,经过温成和他的团队的精心编辑,我们也出版了一份有丰富图片的画册资料。实际上,阅读了这些材料之后,我们更清楚,正是国内和国外的中国当代艺术家、批评家以及那些热爱艺术的西方策展人的共同努力,构成了一部非常有价值的中国当代艺术史。为了让今天的读者和观众能够及时地了解中国艺术家参加威尼斯双年展的这段历史,深入地认识与理解威尼斯双年展的历史性质和作用,我也让中国美术学院硕士研究生王洋编写了《历史之路:威尼斯双年展与中国当代艺术20年》,将这部介绍性的艺术史著作安排给年轻作者来完成,旨在鼓励年轻的研究者们对中国当代艺术历史的关注和研究。在一个物欲横流的时代,在历史新的一页即将翻开的时候,年轻的研究者对之前的历史研究应该是必要的和意义多重的。当然,针对本次展览,我们专门编辑出版了一本画册,参展艺术家中大多数已经参加过不同届的威尼斯双年展,但是我们也选择了没有参加过的艺术家,同时,我们也选择了一位年轻的艺术家参加本次展览,其中的含义是显而易见的:中国当代艺术一定是承前启后、不断发展的。

与历次参与威尼斯双年展不同,本次展览在威尼斯和成都分别设置了展览空间,在威尼斯是军械库89号,成都是成都当代美术馆新开放的展览馆。这样的安排出自几个原因:首先,我希望没有机会去威尼斯的成都观众能够直接看到“历史之路”的展览,并对相关历史信息有同时性的了解,由成都当代美术馆带领中国杰出的当代艺术家参加威尼斯双年展,应该是成都市人民的文化艺术大事,当然应该尽可能让成都的观众参与其中;其次,我们说所的“历史之路”不仅仅中国当代艺术家参加威尼斯双年展的历程,更是中国艺术参与全球艺术史写作的历程,我们可以从一个特殊的视角来重新审视这段充满争议和具有特殊价值的历史。成都,是一个冷静而具有当代艺术传统的城市,这为“历史之路”设置两个展场提供了氛围条件;第三,2013年将迎来第六届成都双年展,我希望将六月开幕的威尼斯双年展的温度也能够在成都持续传递,为新一届的成都双年展提供有关联的艺术与历史资源。2011年9月,意大利副市长蒂奇亚纳·阿戈斯蒂尼(Tiziana Agostini)曾前来成都观看了2011成都双年展并给予了很好的评价,所以,2013年应该是成都与威尼斯两个城市进一步促进文化交流的机缘年,成都展场的设置,将有利于加强这样的交流;当然,很巧的是,“历史之路”成都展场的开幕时间,正值财富全球论坛在成都召开,世界各地经济、政治等领域的精英在成都期间将充分感受到成都所具有的国际性特征:具有全球影响力的艺术家和展览将为与会嘉宾提供最高艺术水平的艺术作品,这无疑是为从世界各国前来讨论物质财富的人们提供的精神财富。相信有趣的是,为了使威尼斯和成都展场遥相呼应,我们设置了一个实时的视频通道,让两边的观众可以了解并观看到异国城市不同展场的同一个展览与相关学术活动的情形,以便于提供尽可能广泛对话的可能性。

最后,我要感谢奥利瓦(Achille Bonito Oliva),正是他在1993年将中国当代艺术带到了威尼斯,让世界开始关注中国的艺术和艺术背后的命运;在2012年的初春,我在威尼斯问奥利瓦:“当你第一次将中国艺术带到威尼斯在国内产生了巨大的影响时,有中国批评家提醒说,‘奥利瓦不是中国美术的救星’,你怎么

么看？”他回答道：“当然，我不过是一个热爱艺术的意大利人。”这个回答给了我深刻的印象。我们达成共识，联合策划“历史之路：威尼斯双年展与中国当代艺术20年”这个展览；我们共同约定，各自写出一篇不少于五页的文字，来纪念这段历史。我还要感谢保罗（Paolo de Grandis），正是他和他的机构的帮助，使得我们的展览能够更为顺利地展出。同样，我也要在这一感谢成都当代美术馆的工作人员以及相关团队的所有成员，没有他们的努力与工作，本次展览如此全面及专业的呈现与文献出版是难以想象的。

2013年2月11日于神仙树大院



10月6日，意大利威尼斯市副市长蒂奇亚纳·阿戈斯蒂尼参观



2009年6月，“给马可·波罗的礼物”展览中的吕澎和奥利瓦

1. 张晓刚：《失忆与记忆：张晓刚书信集（1981-1996）》，北京大学出版社，2010年2月版，第134页。
2. 张晓刚：《失忆与记忆：张晓刚书信集（1981-1996）》，北京大学出版社，2010年2月版，第144-145页。
3. 王广义给吕澎的一封信（未发表），1991年6月15日。
4. 《艺术市场》，湖南美术出版社，1991年创刊，第1期。
5. 《广州双年展画册》，四川美术出版社，1992年版。

Foreword

Lü Peng

In late 1993, as the follow-up work for the Guangzhou Biennial came to a close, I headed to Shenzhen. In a special issue on art in the Border Trade News, I read an essay entitled “Artists Return from Venice Disappointed.” The essay gave a basic introduction on the situation of the thirteen Chinese artists who took part in the Venice Biennale for the first time, and as the title suggests, these artists were perhaps less than pleased with their experience there: the installation time was too short, the exhibition space was very subpar, the accommodations were lousy, most of the artists had to pay for their own travel, Chinese representative Li Xianting had no opportunity to introduce Chinese art to the world, et cetera. At first, “Obtaining passports was easy, and there wasn’t any trouble applying for Italian visas, and so these not-so-famous artists withdrew most or all of their savings from bank and set off on a pilgrimage to this world art mecca with excitement in their hearts.” Their experience in Italy, however, did not live up to their rosy expectations. Though this essay was statement of a school, and could not provide more detailed information, we did not have any other material that suggests the artists who attended this large international art exhibition were either happy or satisfied.

To be sure, the essay was a bit satirical, and in fact, Chinese contemporary artists did not live nearly as easy twenty years ago as we would like to imagine. Not long before, due to the events of June 1989, many artists and critics left their homeland. Most of them perhaps believed that only by going to Western countries could they continue to develop in their respective fields. The artists and critics who remained in China did not revive their spirits for a long time. Though younger artists, such as Fang Lijun, and some of the more vibrant artists of the 85 New Wave Movement, such as Wang Guangyi, restored their definitive artistic practices relatively quickly, most artists continued to wallow in bitter meditations on the future of life and art. Here is what Zhang Xiaogang wrote in a letter to Zhou Chunya written in September 1989:

After returning to the academy, twenty days have passed in the blink of an eye, and it seems I haven’t done anything proper in all this time. I studied for a week, listening to papers and lectures every day until my butt ached and my head spun. Of course, in the end, I fail to escape from it. The secretary’s staff made a few requests and I said my piece, making it through smoothly. I think about you over at the painting institute; who knows how much more serious it is over there, no need to mention the Academy is being treated as a “major disaster zone.”¹

Those few short sentences present us with the basic political context of the time. By the logic of any normal person, leaving such an environment would be only natural. In a December letter to Mao Xuhui, however, Zhang Xiaogang leaves this record:

I got a letter from Yang imploring me to leave, and I plan to write back to tell him what I think. I think that, on the contrary, this is not the time to take flight, and it's not about entering the "gypsy camp of Asia" either. Removed from the greater background of China, there is no "art" to speak of. As long as I can paint as I like, I will remain here... The state I'm in these days feels a bit like returning to the past. I'm listening to Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, with El Greco by my side, not to mention Sartre and Unamuno.²

Whether or not it was by choice, most people stayed, but as spring approached in 1992, a certain set of important modern artists, through constant pondering and provocative experimentation, was making the shift towards contemporary artistic practice. There is an instinct towards struggle in life, and when reason is added to the mix, life can still create miracles. In fact, around the year of 1990, though modern artists had no exhibition opportunities, another kind of release that was spreading through social life—the potential of the consumer market—gave artists a new opportunity to continue their work. In a June 1996 letter, Wang Guangyi writes:

China is stuck in a war of words over the meaning of art, but this is pointless. From the absolute perspective of contemporary mechanisms, only substantive success is real. Otherwise, no matter what we say to them, we are doing nothing more than establishing the so called illusory satisfaction of the cultured.

...Yet we also possess the ability to create "concrete myths," just like the "snowball" ability we were talking about in Beijing. What matters is that we must ensure that this "snowball" truly happens, that it becomes a thing that the masses can perceive and puzzle over! If we do not make a big snowball, then perhaps others will make big snowballs. Perhaps the 1990s only needs a few snowballs. There's plenty of "snow" on the ground, and we've got "stones" in our hands. Now we must actively roll up our snowball! Perhaps the times and history can only give us this one chance, and if we miss it, we will regret it forever!³

In the spring of 1991, a strategic magazine was published under the title *Art & Market*. The first issue was on Wang Guangyi, and in answering a series of questions from the editor, he said:

At present, Chinese contemporary art has not gained a status commensurate with the academic levels it has attained. The reasons behind this are quite complex, but one main reason is that there is not a powerful national bloc to back it up. The success of postwar American art is actually the success of the national bloc. Otherwise, artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Jasper Johns would not be what they are today. You used the term "art industry," and that is a very good term. It touches on an issue of circulation. I think that we must first take part in this circulation if we are to be significant on this track. We have already begun taking part now, and I would predict that in five years, China's "products" will be playing a decisive role in the world art industry.⁴

At that time, no one could have imagined the fate that was in store for Chinese contemporary art in the "world art industry" five years down the road, but through the efforts and liaisons of Kong Changan, we spent over CNY 30,000 to invite *Flash Art* editor Francesco Bonami to the "Guangzhou Biennial" held at the Guangzhou Central Hotel in October 1992, in hopes that international society could learn about local Chinese contemporary art. In that year, Wang Guangyi's *Great Criticism: Coca-Cola* was featured on the cover of *Flash Art* (Jan-Feb 1992, volume 162), and I placed an advertisement for the Guangzhou Biennial in the same issue.

In fact, Chinese art critics were already making efforts to promote international understanding of Chinese modern and contemporary art at that time. Before June 1993, Chinese artists and critics were taking part in many art exhibitions. In 1987, Zheng Shengtian, Huang Youkui, Dai Hengyang and Shen Roujian were featured in *Beyond the Open Door: Contemporary Paintings from the People's Republic of China* at the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California; in 1989, Fei Dawei curated *Chine demain pour hier* in Pourrières, France, and assisted Jean-Hubert Martin in organizing *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris; in 1991, Leo Ou-Fan Lee and Zheng Shengtian worked with the Pacific Asia Museum to create the exhibition *I Don't Want to Play Cards with Cezanne and Other Works: Selections from the Chinese New Wave and Avant-Garde Art of The Eighties*; in 1992, Hanart TZ Gallery took part in a satellite exhibition at Kassel documenta, and Kong Changan helped put together *Cocart Beveve Arte Contemporanea* in Milan; in early 1993, Andreas Schmid helped organize the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition in Berlin, while Li Xianting, Johnson Chang curated *After 89: New Art from China in Hong Kong and Mao Goes Pop* in Sydney. Domestically, historically important exhibitions organized by Westerners included the Liu Wei solo exhibition that Francesca dal Lago held in her home in 1990, as well as the exhibition of works by Liu Wei and Fang Lijun that she held at the Beijing Art Museum; meanwhile, the Beijing Diplomatic Staff Club held the exhibition *Recent Works—Paintings and Installations by Zhang Peili and Geng Jinyi* in 1992.

Nevertheless, as the Cold War drew to a close and the world entered into the post-Cold War era, the influence of Chinese contemporary art in the international community was infinitesimal for a long time, even through 1993. At that time, artists in China had few opportunities to exhibit their works, let alone sell them, and at my urging, Wang Guangyi and Zhang Peili sold some of their important works for very little money to a friend of mine who had started a company. Before June 1993, no one had a clear picture of what they thought would come in the future, but they did have faith in art. The ideas, content and expressive forms of Chinese contemporary artists, however, were completely incompatible with the demands of the official state art apparatus. Though Gao Minglu and other critics were able to hold the *China / Avant-Garde* exhibition at the National Art Museum of China in February 1989, this last hurrah of 1980s modernism did not imply a change in official standards for art, let alone the birth of a new art system.

Afterwards, modern and contemporary art would have a hard time entering into this shrine to the national arts. It was under these circumstances that community-based elements of society began their support for contemporary art. The Guangzhou Biennial became a reality through the reaffirmed legitimacy of the market economy and through community support. After Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" of 1992, anyone with a hint of political sensitivity could see that the market economy was clearly transforming this national art system. While official art organizations were wholly unsupportive of contemporary art, the market, through its basic nature and functions, began the construction of a new art system, except that when the market first began to intervene in art, most people did not take notice of this decisive event. In fact, I pointed this out in the foreword to the Guangzhou Biennial:

This "biennial exhibition" is unlike any other past exhibition in Mainland China. In terms of economic backing, the "sponsorship" of the past has been replaced by "investment"; in terms of operations, the cultural organization of the past has been replaced by a company; in terms of process, the administrative "notices" of the past have been replaced by legally binding contracts; in terms of academic underpinnings, the old ad hoc, artist-run "artwork selection teams" have been replaced by jury committees run by art critics; in terms of goals, the old monolithic, narrow and always argumentative goal of artistic "success" has been replaced by efforts towards comprehensive economic, social and academic "effectiveness"...

The increasing penetration of the reform and opening policy has brought new changes to the methods of history composition. As the old standards have become unsuited to the needs of a new era, the importance of a new standard is becoming increasingly apparent. The central implication

of the new standard is that culture must be produced for sale, a tenet directly aimed at the classical model of “culture created for the sake of culture.” This is in complete opposition to the old cultural production models of “self-indulgence” or political utility: it requires the support of a series of contemporary market mechanisms such as laws, taxation, insurance and the further division of labor. For a country with no market traditions, this is truly an immense and complex undertaking, and the participants of this biennial exhibition—entrepreneurs, critics, artists, editors, even lawyers and reporters—have begun the task of confirmation and explanation required for the establishment of the contemporary art market through their participation. Now, more people are clear in the understanding that in the 1990s, the question of the market is a question of culture.⁵

To be sure, due to the rules of circulation and value exchange in the market economy, the contemporary artists who were unable to gain official organizational support at home met the necessary conditions to be brought into the international community by Westerners (including Johnson Chang, who lived under the capitalist system in Hong Kong). Those Chinese artists who already lived and worked in the capitalist countries of Europe and America, such as Huang Yongping, Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, and others who emerged later such as Cai Guoqiang, also strove within their own unique contexts to take part in international exhibitions and became immersed, to varying extents, into international art circles. Over a period of time, art critics such as Hou Hanru and Fei Dawei, well versed in the rules of the game in the West, gradually gained the status of “international curators,” and whenever they had a chance, strove to insert new Chinese art into international exhibitions, placing it directly in exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale.

Regardless of people’s views on Chinese artists’ participation in the Venice Biennale, it was in fact the participation of everyone who cares about Chinese contemporary art that gradually led to the world’s awareness of Chinese contemporary art. More importantly, events, money and influence will change people’s views about Chinese contemporary art: in 2000, the Shanghai Biennial began using a curatorial system that approached the ones used in the West, and many Western artists took part in this exhibition; by 2003, the Venice Biennale had a China pavilion, and though the presence of Chinese contemporary art at Venice was affected by the SARS epidemic, the establishment of this pavilion demonstrated that official state art organizations had begun utilizing Chinese contemporary art in their strategies. The legitimacy of Chinese contemporary art arose against this backdrop.

Moreover, while Chinese contemporary art still lacked the legitimacy of systemic protection, people came to discover the serious influence of the market over art, and began to grow skeptical of Chinese contemporary art in the market. Criticism of the relationship between Chinese contemporary art and the market was also raised by certain Westerners at the same time. All of these critics should know, however, that sales, capital and profit have been chasing the tail of the Venice Biennale since its first installment. Except for the “storm” of anti-capitalist sentiment and protest that swept through several European countries in 1968, capital and the market have never left art. In addition, the question of the market has special circumstances in China—since the 1990s, the only support for Chinese contemporary art has come from the market and the international resources that it brought. Due to certain complex political factors, Chinese contemporary art is still far from establishing a scientific market system, and fundamental changes have yet to take place in the Chinese art system. Authority in the art field has not seen rational application because of the emergence of the market; to the contrary, the abuse of authority and crude market games have together produced the conundrum that Chinese contemporary art faces today both at home and abroad. Since the effects of the economic crisis first became apparent in 2008, the fate of Chinese contemporary art has always been on everyone’s minds: how should Chinese contemporary art develop?

As I see it, artistic creation—antiquated as this term may be—is always a question for artists. When it comes to us critics, curators or historians, we can engage in reflection, rearrangement and evaluation on everything in the past artistic trajectory. The artists and critics who have participated in the Venice Biennale

have been full of anxiety, stress and questions, but I also believe that the artists and critics who have taken part in this biennale also have unforgettable perceptions and stories, and it is through these perceptions and stories that our history of the event is constructed. Moreover, the global “historical passage” that began in 1993 was not only Chinese contemporary art history but an integral component of global art history.

One day in 2011, Richard Widmer, an American who has lived in China for many years and deeply understands Chinese contemporary art, sought me out at Café Copy in Beijing. He said that he wanted to do a research project on the Chinese artists who attended the Venice Biennale, and needed funding (roughly 400,000 CNY). I agreed without hesitation. When I returned to Chengdu, I worked out an idea: wouldn't it be more complete if we held a retrospective on the historical exhibition of Chinese artists at Venice, combining historical documents with their recent works? As a result, Chengdu Museum of Contemporary Art provided one million CNY in funding to collect the relevant historical material and research work for publication. At a time when there are many exhibitions every single day (while in the past, for instance in 1995, there were very few opportunities for the exhibition of modern and contemporary Chinese art; in 1996, Huang Zhuan planned a valuable contemporary art exhibition at the National Art Museum of China, entitled *First Contemporary Art Academic Invitational*, but it was forced to shut its doors on the eve of the opening), the older generation of critics are stepping back from the center stage of history, while most new young critics are becoming curators, as immense economic pressure makes it difficult for them to promote academic research. Of course, research on contemporary art still rarely gains support from official art organizations, and this situation forces us to continue seeking strength from the community so that we can prepare the basic material that will be needed by future art historians. I have already completed *90s Art China 1990-1999* (published in 2000), and in the spring of 2012, *A History of Chinese Contemporary Art in the 21st Century 2000-2010* (published in 2012), and the composition of these two art history texts has made me acutely aware that the twenty years of Chinese contemporary art history must be researched from multiple angles. And so, at this time when the entire contemporary art scene is engaged in reflection and retrospection, I think that the twenty year history (1993-2013) of Chinese artists participating in the Venice Biennale is an important angle for historical research.

For most of 2012, Richard Widmer and his assistant Huang Shiyun traveled to many cities, visiting nearly all of the artists who have participated in the Venice Biennale over the years. This work has provided us with primary material on those artists and their participation in the biennale, which is now being published under the title *Passage to History: 20 Years of the Venice Biennale and Chinese Contemporary Art (Interviews)*. The book brings together interviews of over 70 artists and other participants who have taken part in the exhibitions, as well as documents pertaining to Chinese contemporary art and the Venice Biennale since 1993, providing the reader with a rich trove of materials. Meanwhile, many historical documents provide us with photographs and sketches pertaining to this period of history. When we read about the past thoughts and experiences of these artists through these textual and visual materials, it is hard to contain our emotions. Through the careful compilation carried out by Widmer and his team, we have also published a catalogue rich with images. Actually, after reading these materials, we can clearly see that it was the combined efforts of Chinese contemporary artists and critics at home and abroad, as well as those Western curators with a passion for art that made this precious period of Chinese contemporary art history possible. In order that today's readers and viewers can quickly gain an understanding of the history of Chinese artists at the Venice Biennale and learn about the historical nature and role of the Venice Biennale. I have asked China Academy of Art graduate student Wang Yang to compose *Passage to History: 20 Years of the Venice Biennale and Chinese Contemporary Art*, aimed at younger readers in order to inspire them to research and pay attention to Chinese contemporary art. In this era flooded with material desire, as history prepares to turn a new page, the research of past history by young researchers is both necessary and highly significant. Of course, we have also compiled and published a catalogue for this exhibition. Many of the artists included in this exhibition have attended past installments of the Venice Biennale, but we have also selected a few

who have not. We have also selected one young artist to take part in this exhibition to show that Chinese contemporary art must be both rooted in the past and facing the future in a continuous line of development.

Unlike previous Venice Biennale exhibitions, this exhibition will be presented simultaneously in both Venice and Chengdu. The Venice space will be at the Arsenale, Nappa N.89 and the Chengdu space will be at the Chengdu Museum of Contemporary Art. There are several reasons for this decision. The first is the hope that the Chengdu residents who are unable to travel to Venice can see the Passage to History exhibition for themselves and gain a synchronous understanding of the historical information. Chengdu MOCA's act of bringing leading Chinese contemporary artists to the Venice Biennale is an important cultural event for the city, and we of course must try our best to allow the people of Chengdu to take part. Second, the "Passage to History" is not merely the historical progression of Chinese contemporary artists at Venice but the historical progression of Chinese art taking part in the composition of global art history, and we can reexamine this controversial and uniquely valuable history from a new perspective. Chengdu is a city with rich contemporary art traditions that provides the proper climate for the presentation of this "Passage to History" exhibition. Third, the year 2013 will see the sixth installment of the Chengdu Biennale, and I hope that the warmth of the Venice Biennale, which opens in June, can be carried on in Chengdu, serving as an artistic and historical wellspring for this year's Chengdu Biennale. In September 2011, Venice Deputy Mayor Tiziana Agostini travelled to Chengdu and praised the fifth Chengdu Biennale, and the year 2013 should be a good opportunity to further promote the cultural and artistic exchange for these two cities, so the establishment of an exhibition venue in Chengdu will help to promote this exchange. Coincidentally, the opening of the "Passage to History" exhibition in Chengdu will coincide with the commencement of the Fortune Global Forum in Chengdu, and global economic and political leaders will have a chance to learn about the international character of this city: internationally influential artists and an exhibition will provide attendees with artworks of the highest artistic caliber, clearly providing much spiritual wealth to these people who have come to discuss the material wealth of nations. And, in a touch that I'm sure will prove interesting, we have created a visual channel for live interaction between the Venice and Chengdu venues, so that audiences in both places can see the same exhibition taking place in two locations in different countries and have the chance for a broader exchange.

Finally, I would like to thank Achille Bonito Oliva. In bringing Chinese contemporary art to Venice in 1993, he got the world interested in Chinese art and the destiny that stands behind it. I spoke to Oliva in early spring 2012, saying, "When you first brought Chinese art to Venice, it had a huge impact in China. Some Chinese critics chimed, 'Oliva is not the savior of Chinese art.' How do you feel about that?" He replied, "Of course, I'm just an Italian who loves art." This left a deep impression on me. We reached an agreement to co-curate Passage to History: 20 Years of the Venice Biennale and Chinese Contemporary Art, and agreed to each write an essay, no less than five pages long, commemorating this period of history. I would also like to thank Paolo de Grandis. The assistance of his organization smoothed the path for this exhibition. In addition, I would like to thank the staff of the Chengdu Museum of Contemporary Art and all other members of the team. It would be difficult to imagine such a comprehensive and professional exhibition and publication without their dedicated efforts.

February 11, 2013

Fairy Tree Courtyard, Chengdu

(Endnotes)

1 Zhang Xiaogang, *Amnesia and Memory: Collected Correspondences of Zhang Xiaogang 1981-1996* (Shi yi yu ji yi: Zhang Xiaogang Shu Xin Ji 1981-1996), Peking University Press, February 2010, p. 134.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

3 Letter from Wang Guangyi to the author (unpublished), June 15, 1991.

4 *Art & Market*, Hunan Fine Arts Press, 1991 volume 1.

5 *Guangzhou Biennial Catalogue* (Guangzhou Shuang Nian Zhan Huace), Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, 1992.