

创世纪：裂变中的中国当代艺术(系列展)  
Genesis: Chinese Contemporary Art in a State of Fission

主 编：吴 鸿 / Editor: Wu Hong

# 倒叙的美术史

## ART HISTORICAL FLASHBACKS

中国当代艺术的另一种线索  
Another Path in Chinese Contemporary Art

新 华 出 版 社

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## “创世纪：裂变中的中国当代艺术”系列展总序

# 裂变，对于被异化的中国当代艺术的重新正名

◎ 吴鸿

中国当代艺术出现以来，既是自上个世纪八十年代初的思想解放运动在视觉艺术领域的一个延伸，其自身也是改革开放在社会文化领域的一个重要组成部分。

曾经有人说，为什么美国或法国的当代艺术不会冠以“美国”、“法国”的特指，而中国当代艺术要以“中国”来特别标示呢？原因很简单，因为中国当代艺术的产生和发展有其自身的特殊条件和特殊环境。其一，中国当代艺术不是一个在艺术自身的完整线索中自然演变的结果，它是和中国在改革开放的社会环境下思想解放、文化开发的背景是分不开的，如果脱离了这样一个大前提来孤立地谈论中国当代艺术是不得要领的。其二，中国当代艺术在三十多年的发展中，始终是以改革开放以来中国社会在不同阶段下的发展形态为其分期标志，这就说明，整体的社会影响，不管是积极的还是消极的，一直保持了对于中国当代艺术的强大的影响力。这样，中国当代艺术一方面在和国际艺术界保持着某种同步性的同时，其自身对于所身处的社会环境的历时的体现，也一直是一个显而易见的重要特征。所以，中国当代艺术要以地域性的特指来说明和规定它的特殊性，是有其一定的内在的合理性。

简单来说，在上个世纪的八十年代，虽然之中有其一定的反复性，但是，“改革”一直是社会的一个主旋律，求新求变的社会风尚表现在艺术范围内，就是一切以区别于“文革美术”的样式和形式都可以被视之为“新潮美术”，所以，我们通常意义上所说的新潮美术在体现了八十年代的理想主义的时代特征的同时，它自身社会运动式的高歌猛进下的混杂性和盲目性也是一个不容掩盖的事实。及至九十年代，在市场化 and 自由经济的催生下，当代艺术的市场化也开始萌动，市场的出现带动了艺术家职业身份的自由化。这个时候，脱离了体制束缚的所谓职业艺术家的出现也得以成为可能。同时，当代艺术的具体表现形态也开始改变了八十年代的那种不食人间烟火式的理性主义特质，而逐渐具备了特定的社会批判性。新世纪前后，随着证券、互联网经济、地产模式的出现，社会经济形态也越来越虚拟化和金融化，艺术品市场的“金融产品化”也势在必行；再加上在社会文化的转型过程中，大众娱乐文化的异军突起在一定程度上，改变或影响了主流文化的表现形态和价值判断。所以，市场化和时尚化构成了2000年以来的中国当代艺术主要形态特征。

上述的简单回顾，一方面说明了我们在研究中国当代艺术的历史和现实特征的时候，有必要强调它的特定地域特殊性；而另一方面从它的历史发展轨迹中也能够体会出它在逐步被异化和被规定化的逻辑线索。固然，我们从其整体性和积极意义来看待中国当代艺术在促进社会文化发展的层面上，怎么正面评价其历史价值都不为过，但是，我们也必须正确认识到它的局限性和庸俗性的一面。这种局限性源自于它的历史内在逻辑，而其庸俗性也正是来自于它的现实妥协性。我觉得，我们在这个时候有必要对于中国当代艺术保持着一种反思和反省的精神和态度，其动机恰恰是当代艺术自身的质疑精神和结构文化传统所使然，它是当代艺术自身血脉的一个有机组成部分，是一种建设性的自我批判，而与那种盲目批评和简单否定的方式有着天壤之别。

这种建设性的自我批判的思路应该包括以下几个方面：

其一，如上所述，中国当代艺术的局限性正是源自于它的历史内在逻辑。我们在就其形态进行特征性分析的时候，固然可以强调它的地域性和社会性的特性，但是，过于突出其社会参与性的结果必然是，艺术风格和艺术语言自身演进的逻辑简单化，成为了社会运动式的简单否定。主流的关于中国当代艺术的叙事逻辑往往会过于强调它的社会背景的完整性，而忽视了它从艺术语言自身来观照的连续性。事实上，也正是这种外在完整性的解释体系的过于强大，遮蔽了它的内在连续性，甚至是带来了这种内在连续性的缺失。所以，关于中国当代艺术的话语体系演化成为一种庸俗社会学的模式，与它的历史内在逻辑某些重要环节的断裂是有着必然联系的。

其二，中国当代艺术在其发展的过程中，特别是在其市场化的初始阶段，来自西方社会的关注是一个不容忽视的驱动力。在这个过程中，作为一种为了体现出以西方为中心的“文化多样性”的补充，在被挑选、被选择的局面下，被动的他者化，以及为了迎合这种潜在的“关注”而成为一种“主动的他者化”。近些年来，虽然中国国内的资本使本土收藏逐步成为了一种常态化，但是，上述的“主动的他者化”的心态似乎融进了中国当代艺术的血液之中，并且，它甚至还外化成为了某种样式、风格、方式。尤其是，当这种作为“被关注的结果”而出现的中国当代艺术样式在西方大获成功的时候，人们便罔顾其本来的内在多样性事实。就像一个生物圈，当我们为了一个更大的生物圈的多样性的需要，而过分强调在这种外在多样性中某种角色扮演的时候，它从一个外在范围中的重要性势必会形成一种生态性强势，从而对于其自身所生长环境中的其它多样性形成遮蔽式的迫害。

其三，前述的中国当代艺术的市场化和中国当代艺术市场是两个既有联系又有着本质性不同的概念。艺术的“市场化”是指整个艺术的生态链以及评判体系变成为以市场为核心，因而和将艺术作品进入商业流通体系的艺术市场当然有着本质性的区别。艺术创作过程中的某种流行化的风格和符号，是在市场流通的过程中自然形成的结果。而在市场化的局面下，由于其强大的生态整合能力，可以人为地制造出来某种流行趋势。在这种局面中，不仅是大量的年轻艺术家在机会主义的利益驱使下无所适从，只能被裹挟其中；即使是一些成功艺术家也很难摆脱在这种强大的市场力量下被“规定”之后的结果。市场化的结果必然是，消费者不再需要个体的独立判断，而只需要那种被操纵出来的集体无意识的盲从。

其四，大众娱乐产业日益从一种社会亚文化状态下演变成成为主流的意识形态。这种大众娱乐文化被社会主流意识形态化的结果必然是，时尚的、轻松的、戏谑的、浅层感官愉悦式的文化样式成为了大众消费的主流。文化不再是一种独立思考的结果，而是成为了在工厂式、产业化的模式下可以被批量制造出来的时尚“产品”。而在市场消费中，为了消费的快捷性，产品是需要被标签化和可识别化的。所以，市场化和时尚化的社会文化环境是中国当代艺术日益演化成为一种符号化和标签化的产品制造的主要原因。

其五，正是为了去除中国当代艺术创作和研究过程中过于庸俗社会学的弊端，在强调其艺术史逻辑的完整性的前提下，近些年来又出现了一种“学院派”的学究化趋势。这种学究气的研究和评论方式，无视美术史发展的社会特殊性以及它的不可重复性，简单地套用西方近现代艺术史的逻辑来硬性规定中国当代艺术的特殊性。这种做法，无异于削足适履式的教条和僵化。而这种学究化的“理论完整性”的外衣，恰恰是可以被那些官办的主流化的“当代艺术”所利用，从而使这种样式看起来其“理论性”高深莫测，似乎光鲜无比，而实际上空洞无物，其理论依据除了那些散文化的漂亮辞藻之外，只能利用一些生硬的哲学词汇来堆砌和拼凑。其结果是，使当代艺术理论成为了某种超越于经验之外的宗教化的不可知论。

其六，我们今天所身处其中而不知的“互联网生存”环境，标志着互联网不再仅仅是一种技术和工具，它已然成为一种意识形态和生活方式。它可以制造出思想并控制着我们的思维。所以，关于互联网的民主性特征正在成为一种过去的神话。特别是在自媒体时代，随着“中心”消失掉的必然是个体的消亡，人们在一种“真社会性”的裹挟下，成为了在集体无意识控制下的无差别个体。关于互联网发展的这种特征，我在另一篇专门的论述中曾经提出过真社会性与互联网时代下艺术史写作的谬误性之间的关系。关于中国当代艺术的前述的五个方面“被异化”的结果，在自媒体化的互联网环境中皆可以被放大和强化。

而中国当代艺术的内部正在涌动一种暗流，这种暗流不是通过外在的方式人为制造出来的，它生发在艺术家的内心，源自于艺术家的良知对于那些被异化的结果的不满和反动。

是时候了！当这种涌动的暗流被汇集起来的时候，它或许会演变成为一场中国当代艺术形态的大裂变！这种预期一方面来自于我近些年来对于中国当代艺术在主流的模式之外的思考，同时，也来自于某个世纪开始的前二十年往往会酝酿着一次文化的变革这种宿命式的期待。所以，我将其视之为中国的当代艺术的一次“创世纪”。今天，它或许是从某种“主干”上裂变出来的碎片，但是在其中或许蕴涵和预示着中国当代艺术未来发展的某种可能性。愿我们能够有耐心静观其变！

基于上述的判断，我们将通过系列展的方式，依次呈现出这些变化中的可能性。它或许是以某种材料为理由，也或许是以某种方式为依托，甚至是以某个地域、某个人群为线索，但是，我们更为重视的是它背后的某种象征性。也正是这种象征性或许会昭示着一种迹象、一种趋势，当它的发展蔚为壮观的时候，回过头来再审视它的逻辑源头和思想源头的时候，就是我们今天所共同参与的一次自我放逐和冒险。历史将会证明它是有意義的。

是为序。

2015年5月26日 于北京宋庄艺术区

Preface to the "Genesis: Chinese Contemporary Art in a State of Fission" Exhibition Series

## **Fission Cures an Alienated Chinese Contemporary Art**

Wu Hong

The emergence of Chinese contemporary art is an extension of the intellectual liberation in the visual arts that occurred in the early 1980s. This was an important part of the reform and development of culture at that time.

People once asked why American or French contemporary art was never designated "American" or "French," but Chinese contemporary art must always be marked "Chinese?" The reason is simple: Chinese contemporary art was born and raised in a unique environment. First, Chinese contemporary art is not the result of a natural artistic evolution. It is inextricably linked to the intellectual liberation and cultural opening of China during the Reform and Opening period. We would be missing the point if we were to put this background to one side and talk about Chinese contemporary art as an isolated phenomenon. Second, in the more than thirty years since Reform and Opening, Chinese contemporary art has been marked by different stages of development in Chinese society. Society as a whole has always had a significant influence on Chinese contemporary art, whether positive or negative. While Chinese contemporary art has maintained a certain synchronicity with the international art world, it also reflects the important traits of its transient social environment. Chinese contemporary art must use regional references to illustrate and formulate its uniqueness and there is a certain intrinsic rationality to this process.

Simply put, although somewhat repetitive, reform was the theme in 1980s Chinese society. Ever-changing social morality was expressed in art, and anything different from the patterns and forms of the art of the Cultural Revolution could be seen as New Wave Art, so New Wave Art is usually taken to represent the idealism of the 1980s. Its disorderly and blind quest for advancement, akin to that of social movements, is difficult to obscure. By the 1990s, a free market economy hastened the emergence of the marketization of contemporary art, and the market drove independence in the artistic profession. At this time, it became possible for professional artists to work outside the state system. The concrete manifestations of contemporary art had already started to change the ethereal rationalism of the 1980s, and contemporary art gradually began to take on an element of social critique. In the new millennium, the emergence of securities, e-commerce, and real estate made the economy increasingly virtual and financial, which necessarily transformed artworks into "financial products" in a market. In addition to social and cultural transformations, popular entertainment changed things to a certain extent, influencing the expressive forms and value judgments of mainstream culture. Thus, the twin forces of markets and trends constituted the primary characteristics of Chinese contemporary art after 2000.

This simple overview shows that, when we study Chinese contemporary art history and reality, we must stress its unique regional characteristics. From its historical development, it can represent its logical clues to gradual alienation and regulation. Of course, from its overall attributes and positive implications, we can see Chinese contemporary art as promoting social and cultural development, and it is fine to consider the movement to have a positive historical value, but we must correctly realize its limited and vulgar nature. Its limitedness comes from its internal historical logic, and its vulgarity comes from its compromised reality. We must maintain an introspective and reflective attitude towards Chinese contemporary art; it is motivated by the questioning spirit and cultural tradition of contemporary art. Chinese contemporary art is an organic part of contemporary art and a mode of constructive self-criticism. It is poles apart from blind critique and simple negation.

This constructive self-criticism covers several facets:

First, as I have just mentioned, the limitedness of Chinese contemporary art stems from its internal historical logic. When its features are analyzed, we can certainly emphasize its regional and social traits, but the necessary result of an excessive focus on social participation is the simplification of the evolutionary logic of artistic styles and languages, such that art becomes simple negation. Mainstream narrative logic about Chinese contemporary art often overly emphasizes the monolithic impact of society and ignores its referential continuity of other artistic languages. In fact, the outsize strength of this complete external interpretive system overlooks internal continuity, to the point that this internal continuity may be lost. The discursive system for Chinese contemporary art evolved into a vulgar sociological model that is necessarily related to the rupture of an important link in its internal historical logic.

Second, interest from the West was an important driving force in the development of Chinese contemporary art, and especially in the early stages of its marketization. When chosen to augment

the cultural diversity of Western-centric art, the passive other panders to this potential interest and becomes an active other. In recent years, domestic Chinese capital has normalized local collections, but Chinese contemporary art has been infused with the psychology of the "active other," even to the point that this psychology is externalized into patterns, styles, and methods. In particular, when Chinese contemporary art models were noticed for their success in the West, people disregard their original, intrinsic diversity. When we overly emphasize Chinese contemporary art's external diversity because it is required for a larger ecosystem, its importance in this larger external system creates overwhelming strength and poses a hidden danger to the diversity of the environment that nurtured it.

Third, the marketization of Chinese contemporary art and the Chinese contemporary art market are two linked but inherently different concepts. The "marketization" of art means that the entire art ecology, including art criticism, has become market-focused, which is fundamentally different from the art market, in which artworks enter into a commercial system. A set of popular styles and symbols are the natural results of market circulation. Due to the strong integration of the market environment, it can artificially create popular trends. Many young artists are uncertain what to do in the face of this opportunism; they can simply be wrapped up in the possible benefits. A few successful artists have even found it difficult to shake off the rules set by these powerful market forces. Marketization means that consumers no longer need individual judgment; they blindly follow a manipulated collective unconscious.

Fourth, the popular entertainment industry gradually evolved from a social sub-culture to a mainstream ideology. This culture of popular entertainment is the necessary result of mainstream ideology; trendy, relaxed, ridiculous, and shallow sensory culture is important in mass consumption. Culture is no longer the result of independent thought; it has become a fashionable product that can be mass-produced within an industrialized context. In market consumption, products need to be labeled and distinguishable in order to make consumption more convenient. A market-led, trendy social and cultural environment is the primary reason that Chinese contemporary art has gradually evolved into a symbolic, labeled product.

Fifth, in order to correct an overly sociological approach to the creation and study of Chinese contemporary art, we must emphasize the integrity of art historical logic. In recent years, pedantry has led to the emergence of an Academic School. These pedantic research and critical methods disregard the social specificity of art historical development, simply applying Western modernist art historical logic to stubbornly regulate Chinese contemporary art. This method only results in forced orthodoxy and fossilization. This semblance of pedantic "theoretical integrity" is often used by government-controlled mainstream "contemporary art," and as a result, the "theory" behind this model can never truly be known. This theoretical backing seems bright and fresh, but is actually utterly devoid of substance; in addition to beautiful essay-like rhetoric, it is simply a pile of rigid philosophical phrases. As a result, contemporary art theory became a religious agnosticism that transcended experience.

Sixth, we are immersed in an omnipresent "online existence," which means that the internet is no longer a technique or tool; it has already become an ideology and a lifestyle that can create and control thinking. The democracy of the internet is becoming the stuff of legend. Especially in an era of "self-media," the disappearance of the "center" necessarily implies the death of the individual. When people are enveloped by a "true social nature," they become part of an undifferentiated entity controlled by a collective unconscious. Regarding this trait of online development, my other essay highlights the relationship between the true nature of society and the errors of art historical writing in the internet era. The consequences of these five types of alienation in Chinese contemporary art can be magnified and strengthened in a self-media environment.

An undercurrent now flows through Chinese contemporary art, and this undercurrent is neither manmade nor external methods. This was born in artists' hearts, stemming from their intuitive understanding of their dissatisfaction with and reactions to the results of their alienation.

It is time! When these undercurrents are gathered together, they will create a great fission of Chinese contemporary art forms. This prediction comes from my observations of non-mainstream Chinese contemporary art in recent years; the first twenty years of a given century often carry the expectation of a cultural transformation. I see this as a genesis for Chinese contemporary art. Today, they might be fragments splitting off from some main trunk, but they may foreshadow the possibilities of the future development of Chinese contemporary art. We must patiently wait and see!

Based on this prediction, we wanted to present a series of exhibitions that showcase these possibilities. Each exhibition might focus on a specific medium or method, or even a region or group, but we are most interested in the symbolism behind these themes, as these symbols may reflect a trend. Looking back to examine the logical and intellectual sources of these flourishing symbols is the collective risk we now take, and we believe that history will bear out their interest and significance.

## 美术史如何被“倒叙”？

◎ 吴鸿

凡事都是有缘由的。

有天早晨，方力钧在名为“开悟”的微信群里突然发了两张他刚刚画的水墨线描，很快得到其他艺术家的一片叫好声。紧接着，其他艺术家们都疯了似的各自上传了自己的各种好玩而有趣的作品来，群里一片欢腾，只差高呼万岁。你很难准确界定这些作品的属性：草稿？小作品？涂鸦游戏之作？都是，也似乎都不是。唯一具有一致性的特征，便是这些作品都与他们各自的被我们所熟知的代表性风格既有联系又不太一样。它们之前或许只是画给艺术家自己看的，或许正是因为它的“没有其它作用”，所以它们都散发出一种似乎能挠到人最痒的地方的那种不可名状的魅力。但是，反讽的是，这些和他们的作品市场有关吗？和他们的艺术史地位有关吗？——只是些自娱自乐式的小欢乐嘛！

作为群里的旁观者，看到这里，我不自觉地发出了几声冷笑！——这些看似风光的成功艺术家们其实也很可怜，这点小小的快乐也可以让他们像孩童一样去高兴些许天。我甚至是产生了一个恶毒的联想：当年在美院上学的时候，每次去厕所蹲坑，那些墙壁上、门板上的即兴涂鸦，那结构，那形体动作，那神态，已经不能用“生动”二字来概括了，简直是可以点赞为神品之上的逸品了。或许，全美院最优秀的速写就在这里！

两件事情联系起来之后，我忽而就想到了一个看似“高深”的问题，到底是先有艺术还是先有艺术家？如果是先有艺术，那么在艺术家出现之前这个“艺术”是由谁创造出来的呢？如果先有艺术家，那么没有一个关于艺术的前设，如何去界定他的身份就是“艺术家”呢？这似乎是那个著名的“鸡”、“蛋”悖论的翻版。但是又似乎回到了当年学《艺术概论》的时候那些个著名的老问题：艺术是什么？艺术的起源是什么？艺术的功能是什么？

回答这些问题的答案可能会有千万种，就像“有一千个读者，就会有一千个哈姆雷特”。从我自己而言，更认可游戏说。或许也会有诸如功能说、宗教说、宣教说那些可能性，但是我一直坚信，具体做这个事情的那哥们一定是从心底里像做一个游戏那般喜欢自己所做的事情。如果仅仅是一个可以以此换取一小片鹿肉的“工作”，你想啊，在那些物质匮乏的史前时代里，你要在烈日下趴在寸草不生的巨石前，用一个小石块生凿出一大片岩画来；或者是，你要在昏暗的洞穴里，为了让老祖母给部落的下一代传授捕猎常识，用那些炭灰混着鹿血画那些壁画，把自己弄的一身腥臭、满脸乌黑。靠！我要干这个“工作”？还不如撒着野和那些小伙伴们逐鹿追兔来得痛快呢！艺术，一旦成为“有用”之后，一旦成为一个“工作”之后，也就失去了它原初的简单的快乐，而成为了一种“劳作”。

由此可以作为一种象征。所谓艺术，是一个在人类的文明发展过程不断被叠加上各种规定性之后的概念；而所谓艺术家，也是一个在不断被赋予了各种能力和技术之后的职业设定。艺术史实际上是一个按照某种规定性的逻辑，不断去叠加各种概念和各种功能的过程。自有“艺术”的概念以来，自有“艺术史”作为一种知识框架去建构关于视觉艺术的理论以来，艺术史和艺术理论在产生着关于艺术的“知识”的同时，也在不断增殖着关于如何去解释这些知识的“知识”。人们在用理论不断地去解释理论的同时，理论自身也在不断地衍生出理论。理论之间的差异性所构成的艺术史框架的混乱、无序和虚构性，实际上是无助于人们对于艺术的本质的理解。或许，我们只是在为了某种预设的概念在“从事”艺术工作，我们努力在那个接近关于艺术本质的路途上不断前行，或许在自以为接近目标之后才发现那只不过是为了“解释本质”而预设的一个理论镜像。在追随着理论正确性的过程中，努力接近却无限远离艺术的本质。就像博尔赫斯在小说《巴别图书馆》中所隐喻

的那样，不断重复、增加的六边形构成了图书馆（宇宙）的结构，“图书馆是无限的，周而复始的。假如一个永恒的旅人从任何方向穿过去，几世纪后他将发现同样的书籍会以同样的无序进行重复（重复后便成了有序：宇宙秩序）”。而他的另一本短的可以成为一篇谵语的小说《沙之书》或许可以与《巴别图书馆》构成姊妹篇。“我”得到一本奇怪的书，其页码无穷无尽，这本可怕的书令“我”恐惧，“我觉得这本书是一个梦魇的对象，一件污秽的东西，污辱并沾染了现实本身”。最后，“我”躲过了一个管理人员（秩序的守护者的象征），将书（知识体系的象征）丢进了一个图书馆（黑洞、原初的起点）中。由此，由无至有，再从有到无，完成了一个循环。

方力钧戏称自己的线描是十八描之外的“气若游丝描”，这就说明，这种手稿式的作品或者是在“创作”之余的一个身心放松，或者是在旅行间隙的一次见缝插针，总之，它们是在艺术家精神出窍的“气若游丝”状态下出现的，与其说是艺术家创造了这些，不如说是这些形象自己是在艺术家不设防的状态下乘机找到艺术家的。所以，这种状态或许更接近于博尔赫斯所隐喻的那个知识的“黑洞”：它吸纳一切，却似乎更接近原点。

所以，作为一种“倒叙”的结构，在被“艺术史”的理论架构界定之前的艺术状态，将是本展的第一个涵盖方向。

构成本次展览的第二个线索是“作品”之前的作品。这个命题实际上与前一个之间存在着某种内在的互文关系。作品既是被职业预设的“艺术家”的创造物，也是作为被概念叠加之后的“艺术”的具体承载物。在这里，作品是一个联接的中介，它一方面要体现出作为艺术史规定中的“艺术”的逻辑，另一方面也要体现出作为被社会角色规定化之后的“艺术家”自身的逻辑。所以，在本文的叙述框架中，因为它的“正式性”，以及经过“创作”的仪式性神话之后，它在离开艺术家之手以后，将要成为那部华丽的艺术史意义链条中的一环。而作为这之前的那些东西，我们习惯性地会称之为“草图”、“构图小稿”，通常意义下，它们只是给艺术家自己看的，所以，它或许是一个思维的过程，或许是临时性的记录，正是因为其“非完整性”和“非完成性”，它才有可能是在没有考虑技法和理论前提的不自觉状态下，最为接近自己的精神自由和心性真实的一种结果。

作为本展的第三个线索是“风格化”之外的艺术家。为了区别于前两种的特定指涉范围，在本文的叙述中姑且将其称之为小型作品。这类作品，或者是艺术家之间相互唱和酬答的礼物，或者是在两次常规性“创作”之间的感觉调剂，或者试笔、试墨式的在虚无中寻找形象的过程。这类作品，因为其小型化和临时性，故此一般也不一定会出现在艺术家自己的作品序列中。风格化是艺术理论或艺术市场按照某种易于辨识的特征对于一个特定的艺术家的期待。中国当代艺术的市场化和艺术市场是两个既有联系又有着本质性不同的概念。艺术的“市场化”是指整个艺术的生态链以及评判体系变成为以市场为核心，因而和将艺术作品进入商业流通体系的艺术市场当然有着本质性的区别。艺术家在创作过程中形成某种标志性的风格，是在创作过程中自然形成的结果。而在市场化的局面下，由于其强大的生态整合能力，艺术家或许会屈从于市场从易于辨识的角度而提出的风格化和标签化要求。而从那些或许并不是为了市场刻意创作的小型作品，或许与那种主导性的风格化之后的作品之间形成某种互补的关系中，我们借机可以较为全面地观察到一个艺术家风格或能力的多样统一性。更为可贵的是，这种小型化的作品因为其尺幅的易于掌控，以及不一定有一个预设的主题限定，所以这种信马由缰的自由状态也最为接近本文前述的艺术的游戏精神。也只有在这个状态下，作为行业内才能心领神会的，作为切口式的对于一个同行的最高认可，诸如“才气”、“帅气”这样的特征也才能灵光乍现。它是可遇而不可求的，但是，前提是必须要将自己调整到一个没有任何风格预设的状态下，笔与纸或画布的接触才有可能灵动起来。所以，从这个意义而言，小型作品的价值并不是意味着在“风格化”之外的另一种风格，而是它在被创作出来的过程中，作为创作主体的艺术家或许能够借此回复到艺术的本真状态。

作为本次展览的基本框架是以上述的三个线索为主，在此基础上我们还强调手绘性、非制作性、非完整性的技术特征。唯此，我们所希望达到的艺术以及艺术家的本原、本真、本心的状态或许能够看到。

这种将美术史回溯、倒叙的方式，并不是基于试图提出另一种理论框架的冲动，它更多的是作为一种象征性的表达方式，来作为我们的“裂变中的中国当代艺术”系列展的启动展。回到原点，回到本质，回到自己内心的真实状态，这样，也才有可能在日益被异化的中国当代艺术现实下寻找到“突围”的可能性。

## Can We Flash Back to Art History?

Wu Hong

Everything happens for a reason.

One morning, Fang Lijun sent two ink drawings he had just made to a WeChat group called "Enlightenment," and the drawings very quickly garnered praise from the other artists. Immediately after that, other artists began uploading their own fun and interesting little pieces. Everyone in the group got really excited, but you would be hard-pressed to define what these pieces were. Were they sketches? Small-scale artworks? Playful doodles? They were all of these things and no one of them. The only consistent trait they shared was that these drawings are linked, but not entirely identical to, the styles for which these artists are known. They may have been made for the artist's eyes only, or because the drawings "had no other use," they scratched an itch you didn't know you had. In any event, do these drawings have any relationship to the market for their work or a relationship to these artists' positions in art history? These small pieces are simply little games they play for their own amusement!

As an outside observer of this group, I saw what was happening, and I could not help but snicker a little bit. These extremely successful artists were also rather sad; these small moments of happiness made them as giddy as children. I might even have made a rather nasty association; when I was attending art school, you would see spontaneous little scrawls on the walls of the bathroom when you squatted down. Those structures, those formal gestures, those spirits were more than "lively;" they were masterworks of the highest caliber. Perhaps all of the school's best sketches were there!

After these two scenes came together in my mind, I suddenly stumbled upon a seemingly deep question. What came first: art or artists? If art came first, who made art before the emergence of the artist? If artists came first and art was not pre-defined, then how would one deem oneself an "artist?" This lands us in that famous chicken and egg paradox, with echoes of those old questions from our Introduction to Art classes. What is art? Where does art come from? What is the function of art?

There might be millions of answers to these questions, because "where there are one thousand readers, there are one thousand Hamlets." Personally, I prefer the playful answer. There may be functional, religious, and educational answers to these questions, but I firmly believe that the guys who made this art are actually doing something fun, something they like doing. If it was just "work" you did in exchange for a small chunk of venison, would you want to lie on a massive rock in the hot sun scratching out a massive cave painting with a small stone during pre-historic times? Or, would you rather get dirty and smelly in a dark cave, using ash mixed with deer blood to paint images of the hunting tips the village elders want to pass on to the next generation? No! This "work" would not have been anywhere near as much fun as chasing game through the wilderness with friends. Once art became "useful," once art became "work," it lost its pleasure and became labor.

As a result, art can be seen as a symbol. Art is a concept to which increasing numbers of overlapping regulations have been attached in the course of human civilization. Artists are a professional category to which many capabilities and skills have been attributed. Art history is a process of layering concepts and functions according to a certain logic. Since the concept of art emerged, art history became the intellectual framework for building a theory of visual art. In producing "knowledge" about art, art history and art theory endlessly multiples "knowledge" about how to interpret any initial piece of knowledge. People use theory to explain theory, so theory derives further theory. Differences between theories create chaos, disorder, and fiction in the art historical framework, which is unhelpful to our understanding of the essence of art. Perhaps, we only "work" in art in the service of some pre-defined concept. We work hard to approach the essence of art, and perhaps it is only after we feel close to our goal that we discover that we had simply created a theoretical mirror image in the name of "understanding the essence of art." For the sake of theoretical accuracy, we work to approach art's essence, which still remains rather far away. Like Jorge Luis Borges' novel *The Library of Babel* implies, the library (the universe) is comprised of an indefinite number of hexagonal galleries. "The library is unlimited but periodic. If an eternal traveler should journey in any direction, he would find after untold centuries that the same volumes are repeated



in the same disorder—which, repeated, becomes order: the Order." *The Book of Sand* is a seemingly related story, also by Borges, that some might find prophetic. The narrator receives a strange book that has an infinite number of pages, a fact that terrifies him. "I felt that the book was a nightmarish object, an obscene thing that affronted and tainted reality itself." In the end, the narrator hid from a member of staff (a symbol of the maintenance of order) and lost the book (a symbol of knowledge) in a library (a black hole or an origin point). Thus, he completes the cycle, moving from nothing to something and from something to nothing.

Fang Lijun playfully called his lines "floating like air," a type not part of the eighteen classical types of line. The name indicates that this sketch-like work might be a way to relax body and mind when not making artwork, or it might be a way to make use of every moment between artworks. In any case, these small pieces emerge when the artist's spirit is "floating like air." These forms find the artist when he is defenseless; the artist did not create these things. This state might be close to the "black hole" of knowledge raised by Borges; it absorbs everything, but is closer to the origin.

Within the structure of a flashback, the state of art before the theoretical framework of "art history" was established is the first thread in this exhibition.

The second thread in this exhibition is the artwork before the formalization of "the artwork." This thread actually has an intertextual relationship with the first. Artworks are the creative products of artists assumed to be professional; artworks are specific vehicles for "art" after conceptual layers have been added. Here, the artwork is the linking intermediary, and it must represent the logic of "art" stipulated by art history and the artist's logic stipulated by social roles. In this narrative framework, because of its "formality," the artwork must pass through the ceremonial legend of "creation" and leave the artist's hands before it becomes a link in the splendid chain of art history. The things that precede the artworks are often called "drafts" or "compositional sketches." Usually, they are just for the artist, so they might be part of an intellectual process or a temporary record. Precisely because of their lack of integrity or completeness, they can represent an artist's unconscious state, devoid of technique or theory; these sketches best approximate an artist's spiritual freedom and emotional truth.

The third thread in this exhibition is the ability of artists to transcend "stylization." In order to differentiate this from the two other threads, we will tentatively call them "small artworks." These types of works may be gifts that artists exchange, or emotional refreshers between two conventional "artworks," or the process of finding forms out of nothing with brush and ink. Because these works are small and temporary, they do not often appear in an artist's works list. Stylization is the expectation that an easily-discernible trait will appear, and this expectation is often placed on an artist by art theory or the art market. The marketization of Chinese contemporary art and the Chinese contemporary art market are two linked but inherently different concepts. The marketization of art means that the entire art ecology, including art criticism, has become market-focused, which is fundamentally different from the art market, in which artworks enter into a commercial system. Artists create a trademark style in the course of the creative process, and this is a natural result of this process. Due to the strong integration of the market environment, artists may yield to the market, which raises the need for easily recognizable stylization and labeling. We might discover a complementary relationship between the stylized works and the small works that were clearly not created for the market. We must seize the opportunity to observe the diversity of an artist's style or ability. The small size of these works makes them easy to grasp, and they are not necessarily bound by predetermined thematic limitations, so this free state best approaches the playful spirit of art. Only those in the industry understand this state and applaud it in their peers, because it reflects traits such as "talent" and "elegance." It can only be found by accident, when the artist has found himself in a state free from stylistic limitations; it can only be inspired by interactions with brush and paper or canvas. In this sense, small works are valuable because they do not need a style outside of "stylization;" instead, the artist, as the creative entity, may be able to return to the origins of art in the process of their creation.

These three threads constitute the basic framework for this exhibition. On this foundation, we want to emphasize the handmade, unprocessed, and incomplete elements of these works. Only here might we be able to see the principles, truths, and intentions of art and artists.

These recollections and flashbacks of art history do not attempt to propose another theoretical framework; they are more a symbolic mode of expression for the first exhibition in our "Chinese Contemporary Art in a State of Fission" series. Returning to art's origin, essence, and true state makes it possible to find a way to escape from the increasing alienation faced by Chinese contemporary art.

May 27, 2015

Songzhuang Art District, Beijing