The World, Two Metres Away (Birmingham, 9-10 Nov 20)

School of Art, Birmingham City University UK, Nov 9–10, 2020
Deadline: May 31, 2020

Lauren Walden, Birmingham City University UK

Special Call for Papers
The 13th CCVA Annual Conference

The World, Two Metres Away

Organiser: Centre for Chinese Visual Arts (CCVA) at Birmingham City University

This is our special conference call for paper responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the end of 2019 or the beginning of 2020, when the coronavirus first emerged, Wuhan became the first city worldwide affected by this deadly disease. It then rapidly spread to the entire country, and further on to Europe, America and the rest of the world. Restrictions of travel, instructions of keeping social distance, and finally the lockdown of districts, towns and cities were enforced to help slow down its transmission, but so far, nothing can stop it. We are all facing this unprecedented challenge.

China, a country with a population of almost 1.5 billion, has to implement the strictest measures to rapidly and efficiently control the situation in its own way. We envisage, however, a tension between the Chinese government's official narrative and public discussions emanating from social media; and we have seen light shows in Wuhan as a display of collectivism in overcoming the crisis, Chinese visual propaganda relating to the pandemic, dancing patients in the coronavirus hospitals, and mask-wearing in conformity. In Italy, where the virus arrived as a national disaster, its 60 million people were quarantined to control the spread, and yet, residents sang and performed, sharing music on their home balconies to long for a normal life and to imagine the outside world. In the UK, hundreds of thousands of citizens across the country applaud on Thursday evenings to support NHS workers, whilst pictures of rainbows created by school children have shone in windows in response to the outbreak as a prayer and, a sign of hope.

During the current strange times, many of us have experienced self-isolation, either voluntarily or by force, either with family or alone, either due to fear or for love – we stay at home. This lets us recall Michel Foucault's examination on a strict spatial partitioning through inspections. More recently, Jean-Luc Nancy appropriates the term 'communovirus', suggesting, essentially, 'a virus that communises us… That this has to involve the isolation of each of us is simply a paradoxical way of experiencing our community'. Digital technology, on the one hand, is gratefully received as, possibly, the only means to stay in touch; on the other hand, sometimes, online communications

seem to be too artificial when basic in-person meetings are completely prohibited, with no handshaking, hugs or kisses. We keep united by distancing ourselves from each other; we smile with our face masks on; we display our love for others by turning ourselves away from them. We witness the emptiness of streets, squares and cities everywhere; endless information and disinformation circulating on the Internet; heated debates around democracy, freedom, openness and transparency; racist views and actions, and increasing political and cultural conflicts, and ultimately, the challenge to our humanity. We experience a spatialised daily life – the social distancing measures, and perhaps more importantly, the increasing distance between China and the world; we suffer but benefit from the distance and because of it, we estrange from and yet connect with each other. One day, we will meet again, to recapture the world that is two metres away from us.

CCVA is a unique research hub in the UK to foster new knowledge in the field of Chinese contemporary art and visual culture, and also an intellectual platform for us to share, encourage and value views from different cultural and political backgrounds. This two-day interdisciplinary conference invites researchers and scholars at all stages of their careers to revisit their experiences and perceptions in this pandemic, to discuss and speculate its impacts, and to make a contribution to our understanding of the COVID-19 in the context of contemporary China, arts and culture in China and beyond. Possible keywords and perspectives to be re-examined during the lockdown include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Art and community
- Spatialising the everyday and social distancing
- Collectivism and conformity
- Surveillance, censorship and quarantine
- Isolated private and public spaces
- Visual information, disinformation and spectacle online
- Artists, art institutions and museums' responses
- Post-Covid-19

Please submit an abstract of up to 300 words, a 100-word biography, contact information and any institutional affiliations, by 31 May 2020 to Dr. Lauren Walden (lauren.walden@bcu.ac.uk), with a subject titled '13th CCVA Annual Conference'. Conference presentations should last no more than 20 minutes. Successful proposals for conference contributions will be notified by 5 June 2020. Invited full papers will feature in the Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art (Intellect) and should be submitted by 31 March 2021, for a special issue to be published in autumn of that year.

As this is a constantly unfolding situation both physical and virtual presentation proposals will be accepted, with the flexibility to alternate between the two as circumstances dictate. If permitted, physical presentations will take place at the Lecture Theatre, the School of Art, Birmingham City University, UK.

Reference:

CFP: The World, Two Metres Away (Birmingham, 9-10 Nov 20). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 28, 2020 (accessed Nov 25, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/23031>.