'Chineseness' in Contemporary Art Discourse and Practice (Lisbon, 16–19 Mar 15)

Mar 16–19, 2015
Deadline: Jan 7, 2015

Franziska Koch

International Symposium

(In)Direct Speech. 'Chineseness' in Contemporary Art Discourse and Practice. Art Market, Curatorial Practices and Creative Processes

and Launch of the

International Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art

Location: Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal
Dates: 16-19 March 2015
Deadline for Applications: 7 January 2015 (see details below)
Addressees and Co-organizers: Rui Oliveira Lopes (rui.o.lopes@gmail.com) and Franziska Koch (koch@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de)

Informed by post-colonial and post-1989 perspectives as well as critical area studies and post-modern cultural theories of art and visual culture, scholars no longer look at Chinese art as a visual expression of "Chineseness", conceived as a long-standing, homogeneous geographic and cultural unit. Instead, they consider the ways in which cultural identity is constructed and the role of particular actors, who continuously claim, contest and propagate its boundaries. Such an analytical stance has emerged as a response to recent positions on Chinese culture that are either charged with (neo-) nationalist assumptions fuelled by the PRC's role as a rising global power or a result of long-standing Western strategies to essentialise the Chinese "other". In the name of a "global art history" that is conscious of its epistemological limits, these scholars suggest a critical engagement with modernist, often Eurocentric assumptions that narrowly interpret works of (contemporary) art in terms of "place", and call for a more nuanced methodological framework that questions the taxonomies and values that have been built into the discipline since its historical beginnings and have been taken as universal. Such a transcultural perspective seems particularly relevant given the increased migration and mobility of Chinese artists since Deng Xiaoping's Open Door policy and the growing interconnectedness of the art worlds (in-)formed by economic and technological globalization. In particular, such an approach takes into account the continuity of a long-term historical cross-cultural dialogue, which is often overlooked when speaking about "Chineseness", but lies at the core of many processes of cultural and artistic demarcation. This includes, for example, the examination of non-Chinese artists, who have actively responded to

what they perceived as specifically "Chinese", thereby supporting the notion in turn, while embedded in (very) different institutional, economic, and political power relations than their Chinese colleagues.
The international symposium (In)Direct Speech. 'Chineseness' in Contemporary Art Discourse and Practice. Art Market, Curatorial Practices and Creative Processes seeks to critically address constructions of "Chineseness" that are apparent in three often entangled spaces of the art world across the globe: in the art market's institutions, in the exhibition halls, and in the artist's studio. Art historians, curators, and artists are invited to engage with the following key questions and to explicitly address pertinent socio-cultural, economic, and art historiographical aspects.

- How does the market’s labelling power shape canonization and how do economic categories and criteria direct processes of cultural identification that lead to discursive as well as institutional in-/exclusion of specific artworks and their makers?
- How do notions of "Chineseness" inform the curatorial practice and thereby support or defy the writing of a distinct "Chinese" art history? What kinds of taxonomies govern the choice of artworks and displays of contemporary “Chinese” art outside and inside the People’s Republic of China? How do curators realize the frequent claim to represent "China" when they present contemporary artworks created in China? What concepts of "tradition" and "contemporaneity" do they use and how do they explain them?
- How do Chinese and non-Chinese artists engage with notions of "Chineseness"? How do they relate to cultural "traditions" and link an (imagined) past with the present and future in their artistic practices? How do they negotiate desires of cultural belonging with political and/or economic aspects of claiming or discarding a specific cultural identity in their individual approaches? What are the rationales driving the cultural essentialism or relativism of their positions in turn?

Taken together, the international and interdisciplinary symposium will discuss the "voice(s)" of "Chinese" contemporary art in a global context and examine what kind of "China-images" they project. The participants will engage with cases of "indirect speech", in which Chinese as well as non-Chinese artists, cite "China" as a motif or address it by explicitly using (pre-modern) techniques associated with Chinese culture, such as ink and rice paper or Chinese characters. They will also address cases of "direct speech" by artists, curators and art dealers, who proclaim cultural and artistic uniqueness, critical attitudes towards the "Westernization" of aesthetic standards, or - on the contrary - try to forge a place for their works in the global art discourse by avoiding cultural distinctions. The symposium thus aims to make visible the historicity of "Chineseness" as discursive and practical construct and to analyse how agents and institutions contribute to its changes during the last three decades.
The symposium creates an opportunity for scholars, curators, artists and other professionals working on contemporary Chinese art to discuss their projects, recent research, and the latest trends of the growing field. Its programme includes the launch of the "International Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art", which will be based on a suitable academic social media platform that ensures easy accessibility, global outreach and a secured space for the sharing of professional information as well as in-group discussions. It will particularly address the career needs of junior scholars with non-permanent institutional affiliations and a lack of funding to support their often expensive research travels, enabling them to quickly and internationally gather helpful information together with the support of senior researchers. It is planned to be institutionally affiliated to a university - probably Heidelberg University - to ensure a sustainable, non-

-commercial and democratic administration by chosen representatives of its scholarly members.

Symposium Format and Deadlines
The symposium will be held at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon on 16-19 March 2015. Each participant will have 30 minutes to present his/her paper/project followed by 15 minutes for discussion. In addition to the listed speakers below, the organizers will choose at least four additional speakers among applicants, who respond to this Call for Papers, based on how well the suggested papers fit into the overall programme. Unfortunately, funding of travel costs and accommodation cannot be provided.
The symposium will be conducted in English. Presenters are required to submit an abstract (max. 500 words), paper title, and a short biographical note (3-4 sentences) by 7 January 2015. Presenters will be asked to turn their paper in by 1 March 2015, which will be circulated among the participants in order to ensure a lively discussion and prepare the publishing of the papers afterwards.

Symposium Proceedings
The papers presented during the symposium will be reviewed and submitted as a special issue of an international peer-review journal (e.g. to the The Journal for Contemporary Chinese Art). Depending on length and content papers might alternatively be published in form of an edited book and submitted to an international publishing house.

Keynote Speakers
Katie Hill (Programme Leader of Art of Asia and their Markets at Sotheby's Institute of Art, London), Carol Yinghua Lu (Independent Art Curator and Critic, Beijing, Keith Wallace (Editor-in-Chief of Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art)

Speakers and Chair of the Round Table
Voon Pow Bartlett (Tate Research Centre, London), Paul Gladston (University of Nottingham), Ros Holmes (Oxford University), Birgit Hopfener (Freie Universität Berlin), Claire Roberts (University of Adelaide), Wenny Teo (Courtauld Institute, London), Peggy Wang (Bowdoin College, Maine), Frank Vigneron (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Bo Zheng (School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong)

Participating Artists (to be confirmed)
Qiu Zhijie (Beijing), Konstantin Bessmertny (Lisbon/Macao), José de Guimarães (Lisbon), N.N.

Concept and Co-ordination
Franziska Koch (Global Art History, Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" - Heidelberg University)
Rui Oliveira Lopes (Artistic Studies Research Centre, Faculty of Fine Arts - University of Lisbon)

Research Support Office
Pedro Soares Neves (CIEBA/FBAUL); Andreia Tavares (CIEBA/FBAUL)

Institutional Organizers
The Artistic Studies Research Centre, Faculty of Fine Arts - University of Lisbon (CIEBA/FBAUL) and the Chair of Global Art History of the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context: The Dynamics of Transculturality" - Heidelberg University

Cooperation
Confucius Institute of the University of Lisbon (UCUL) and Observatory for China (OC)

About the Project and the Institutional Cooperation
The International Symposium (In)Direct Speech. 'Chineseness' in contemporary art discourse and practice. Art Market, Curatorial Practices and Creative Processes is a joint project organized by the Artistic Studies Research Centre, Faculty of Fine Arts - University of Lisbon (CIEBA/FBAUL) and the chair of Global Art History, Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" - Heidelberg University, supported by the Observatory for China and the Confucius Institute of the University of Lisbon.
On the Portuguese side of the cooperation, the symposium is part of the on-going research project Face to Face. The Transcendence of the Arts in China and Beyond, launched by the CIEBA/FBAUL in 2011 and partly co-ordinated by Dr. Lopes. It aims at examining how "Chinese" identities are constructed in transcultural artistic processes. In the framework of this project, the CIEBA/FBAUL already held an international conference, realized a curatorial project that resulted in an art and design exhibition and published two edited books along with the catalogue of the exhibition in 2013 (See: Lopes, R. O. (ed.), Face to Face. The transcendence of the arts in China and beyond - Vol. 1 Historical Perspectives; Vol. 2 Approaches to Modern and Contemporary Art, Lisbon, CIEBA/FBAUL, Global Art Monograph Series, 2013–2014). The project is integrated in the research area Art in a Global Perspective at CIEBA/FBAUL, which aims to establish a network of relationships between critical art histories, and to examine how globalization transforms contemporary art and culture.
On the German side of the cooperation, the symposium presents one of several research activities and projects that internationally propel the innovative methodological agenda of the Chair of Global Art History at the Cluster of Excellence, Heidelberg University which was founded in 2009. Its research and teaching fosters a transcultural perspective on art objects and agents circulating across Asia and Europe and asks how their practices, discourses and institutions have informed entangled concepts of art and multiple ways to write art history. In particular, the symposium and the launch of the research network build on previous activities of the Chair in co-operation with the Chair of Asian Art History of Freie Universität Berlin, in form of the international conference Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context, the proceedings of which have been published in 2012 (see Koch, F. et. al (eds.), Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context, VDG Weimar, 2012).

For more information please visit the respective institutional websites:
www.artglobalperspective.fba.ul.pt
www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/hcts-professorships/global-art-history.html

Reference:
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