



SHENG QI

BETWEEN
RELIGION & ENTERTAINMENT,
DOCTRINISM & MONEY

H U A
G A L L E R Y
contemporary chinese art

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G A L L E R Y

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2013 Hua gallery

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THE WORD HUA MEANS TO PAINT, OR A PAINTING, IN CHINESE.

Hua Gallery specialises in the exciting and sometimes controversial space that is Chinese contemporary art.

As Chinese contemporary art continues to fascinate and intrigue collectors around the world, demand and appetite for fresh and innovative art from this fast-changing region continues to escalate.

Hua Gallery represents and exhibits cutting edge, stimulating works by established contemporary Chinese artists, as well as emerging contemporary Chinese artists who are not as yet internationally recognised.

Hua Gallery adopts a distinctive business strategy by acquiring works from artists before selling them, as well as by exhibiting and selling works by artists on a commissions basis - an approach which demonstrates a passion, dedication and commitment to the artists and also, importantly, provides confidence to art collectors who trust the gallery to help expand their collections.

Hua Gallery's founder and director, Shanyan Koder, has developed strong relationships with her artists, and hopes to build a Chinese contemporary art collection in her gallery that is different and inspirational. Every artist represented by Hua Gallery is chosen for their artistic individuality, the creative symbolism in their work, and the emotional energy their work creates.

Hua Gallery is situated on the Albion Riverside, a prestigious residential block on the Battersea riverside, designed by world-renowned architects Foster and Partners. With close to 2,000 square feet of gallery space, Hua Gallery is London's only Chinese contemporary art gallery with a permanent exhibition space of this size and scale.

BETWEEN RELIGION
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DOCTRINISM AND MONEY.

SHENG QI

A pioneer of contemporary Chinese art, Sheng Qi developed his career in response to the socio-political situation of China. Starting as a performance artist, collaborating on Concept 21 in 1986¹, Sheng Qi has always used the human body as a key subject in his art. In fact, in 1989, as a rebellious gesture to express his indignation for the Tiananmen Incident, Sheng Qi cut off his little finger and buried it in a flowerpot. It was a strong and violent act triggered by the brutal context of the period. Not only did his later art inspired by this act serve as a spark for his career, but saw his mutilated hand become a symbol bearing the drama of a whole nation. Today the poignancy of this work has rendered it one of the icons of contemporary Chinese art.

As Sheng Qi's focus is on history and on those elements that shaped its course, his paintings portray religious and political figures as well as Chinese symbols, celebrities and slices of everyday life. Interested in exploring social issues and questioning the reality of China which is quickly and constantly changing, his works are mostly centred around four themes: religion, entertainment, doctrinism and money².

The artist refers to Buddhism, Asia's most popular religion that was originally introduced to China from India and spread all over the country. Through the course of the centuries, Buddhism was subjected to both persecution and veneration. Sheng Qi portrays Buddha's head, hand and foot as well as melancholic images capturing spiritual Tibetan atmospheres.

After contemplating these paintings, some questions immediately arise: is this religion still a solid pillar of Chinese belief? Are Chinese people still expressing their need of religiosity? Are these religious scenes the only way capable of leading us to salvation and liberation? Is this what current Chinese society is looking for?

Without providing any definite answers, Sheng Qi's next series of paintings seems to suggest that the search of happiness, the trigger of all human beings' existence, could be fulfilled through more practical and immediate means: the industry of entertainment. Film stars, singers and celebrities become the mirror of the individual's desires. Fame, success and power, materialistic and consumerist fun, this seems to be the new faith to achieve amusement and satisfaction. Glamorously smiling and exuding a sense of self-realisation, Sheng Qi's famous characters are portrayed in a vivid and lively manner.

Through this series of paintings the artist shifts his attention to Chinese economic development, which, although only a recent

reality, is deeply transforming the country's image and affecting its inhabitants' thoughts. Sheng Qi analyses the transition between the idealism and doctrinism that characterised China before the 1980s, and the pragmatism and profit that were to immediately follow. Prior to the opening of the country to the world and the implementation of economic reforms in 1979, China had been victim to decades of political oppression that reached an apex of brutality in the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), generated by Mao Zedong (1893-1976) to reinforce his own power³. In this period everything was done in the name of the big revolutionary machine and people were instigated to idolise the Great Helmsman and to denounce those who disagreed with him.

The Mao era was characterised by a surge of idealism and a focus on politics, rather than on economics. With Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) there was a turning point as the country entered the era of pragmatism and economics started to play a major role⁴. It was in this period that people began to leave behind those utopian ideals for which they had been fighting and suffering for decades, and started to embark upon a more materialistic path: making money. This was the new direction officially supported by the authorities. As Deng Xiaoping stated, "to get rich is glorious".

In his paintings Sheng Qi captures these economic and social transformations. By portraying seductive young ladies and handsome young men staring at the audience with a large fan of money, the artist also plays with the multiple meanings of the word 'fan': 'fan' as in an object to flutter and 'fan' as in devotee, in this case a devotee of economic development. Using 'fan' as an object to flutter is here suggesting that a new wind is being generated. It is a wind of economics. By painting this series Sheng Qi is neither criticizing nor praising China's rampant development. He is simply bringing attention to an objective reality, leaving the viewers free to interpret the work according to their own sensibilities.

Although a new wind of economics and consumerist values have replaced the idealism of Mao's era, the ex leader's thoughts are still rooted in the Chinese authorities' principles of today. In fact, Maoist ideology has never been eradicated; now it simply does not need to play the major daily role. Through his art Sheng Qi questions the presence of Mao Zedong and his idealism in contrast to the materialistic desires of the latest generations. Mao's renowned figure is often depicted surrounded by a vast crowd of tiny people. The shape of the Great Helmsman is huge and prominent and stands in stark contrast to the small dimensions of those who are around him. The innumerable people allude to the enormity of the Chinese nation while the large figure of Mao symbolizes China's single-party system. The small stature of these human figures also recalls traditional Chinese landscape paintings, in which human beings were placed amongst the vastness of nature, occupying the same role as that of tree, rocks, and lakes⁵. In some works little bodies generate Mao's silhouette, which appears as a sort of ghost floating in an evanescent atmosphere. Playing with the notions of emptiness and fullness, Sheng Qi's symbolic work suggests that although physically absent, the Chinese ex-leader seems to still be spiritually present.

Sheng Qi enjoys playing with contrasts in terms of dimensions, colours and content. He often employs the bird's eye view as a way to convey a sense of irony to his subjects. Through this perspective the figures look distorted: large heads with small bodies; red and grey are his main colours. As a result, a contrast between the seriousness of the content and the way it is depicted gives the viewer the possibility to contemplate his artworks in a fun and easy manner. An interesting detail to note about his art is the choice of method used: acrylic on canvas with a dripping technique. As all of his works are intimately linked to history, Sheng Qi has decided to use this technique to create an effect that evokes the passage of time; drops are never still, they change and transform the subjects,

suggesting their presence within the wide realm of history.⁶

In his expressive and symbolic paintings, Sheng Qi conjures up scenes encapsulating the religious, social, economic and political transformations affecting contemporary China. As his aim is not that of offering precise answers to the questions suggested by his works, Sheng Qi's art is open to multiple layers of meaning and interpretation. It invites the viewers to reflect upon certain issues, providing space for questioning their veracity from different perspectives.

Dagmar Carnevale Lavezzoli

1 Concept 21 was one of the first-ever Chinese performance art groups of modern times. Sheng Qi and other three artists, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke and Zhao Jianhai, used their own bodies as canvasses. Employing paint, pieces of cloth and tai ji quan movements, they performed both at Beijing University and on the Great Wall. Berghuis, Thomas J. *Performance Art in China*, Timezone 8 Limited, Hong Kong, 2006, p.51, 55

2 Conversation between Sheng Qi and the author, London, April 2013.

3 Hung, Wu, "The Beginning of Contemporary Art", *Chinese Contemporary Art Primary Documents*, Duke University Press, Moma, New York, 2010, p.5

4 Brine, Daniel. Shu, Yang. *Chinalive*, Chinese Arts Centre in collaboration with the Live Art Development Agency and DaDao Live Art Festival, Beijing, 2005, p.12, 13

5 Conversation between Sheng Qi and the author, London, October 2012

6 Ibid.

MY LEFT HAND
2004
35.5 X 9.7 X 8.2 CM
BRONZE



BUDDHA'S CAR PARK
2010
97 X 119 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



GOLDEN HAND
2011
200 X 150 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



RED HAND
2011
200 X 150
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



BUDDHA'S FEET
2010
200 X 300 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



BUDDHA BRICK BIKE
2012
100 X 149 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



RED TIBET
2011
80 X 100 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



BLUE TIBET
2011
80 X 100 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



GREY TIBET
2011
80 X 100 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



TIBET BEHIND ME
2010
150 X 200 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



DESIRE AND DANGEROUS GAME
2007
79 X 99 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



DESIRE, DANGEROUS GAME, AND CAMOUFLAGE
2007
129 X 89.5 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



ANDY LAU TAK-WAH
2013
100 X 80 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



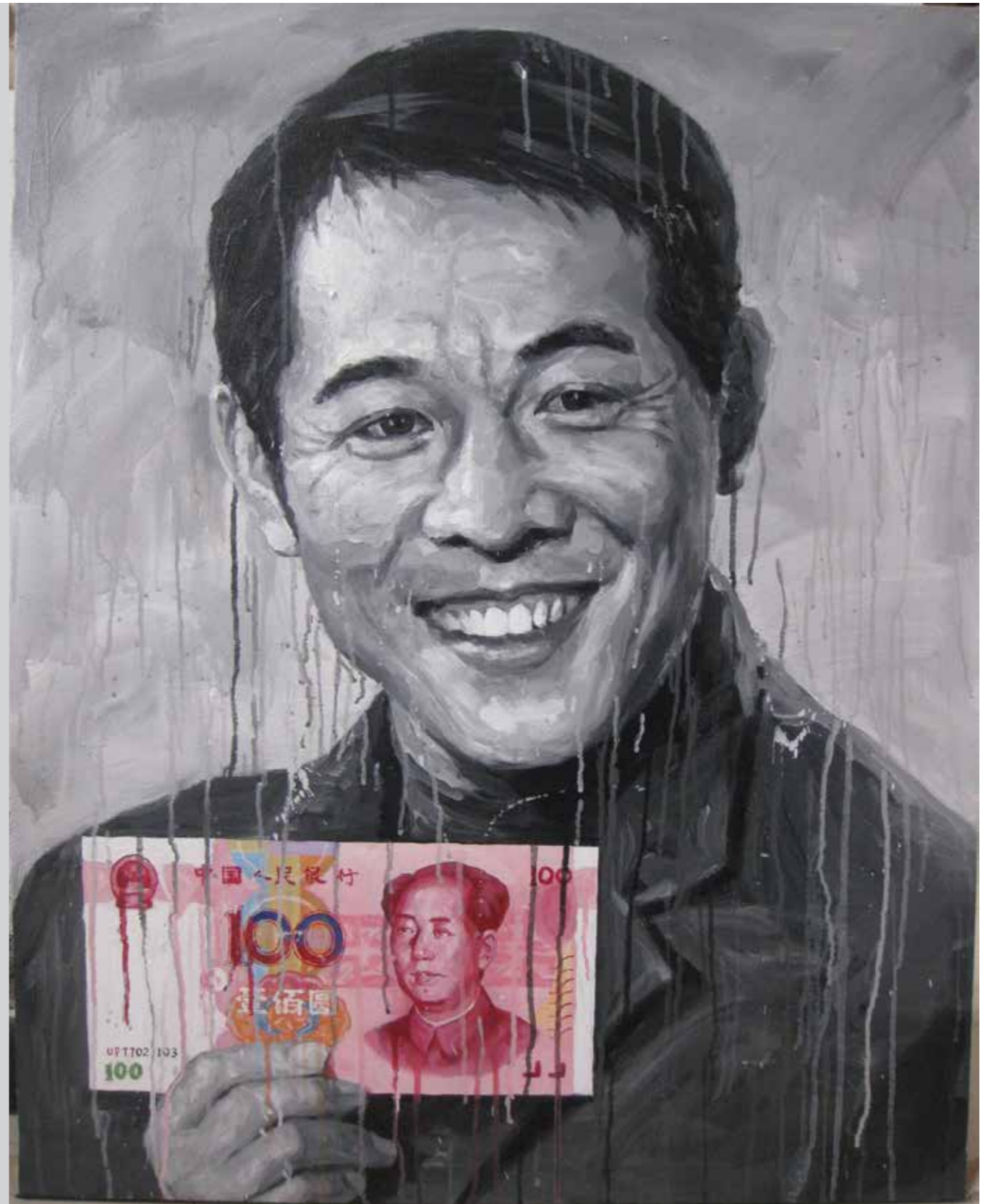
SIR KA SHING LI
2011
130 X 110 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



MISS MAGGIE CHEUNG
2010
200 X 150 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



JET LI
2013
100 X 80 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



DANIEL WU
2012
150 X 100 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



MOST WANTED- LOOK AT ME
2007
79 X 109 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



MR. LEUNG CHUN YING
2012
160 X 120 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



MOST WANTED-MISS MIMI
2007
119 X 99 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



THE MOST BELOVED
2007
119 X 89.5 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



REVOLUTION PARTNERS
2013
118 X 158 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



CHINESE GIRL + 100 REVERSE
2012
99.5 X 79 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



CHINESE GIRL + 100 UPRIGHT
2012
99.5 X 79 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



NAKED GIRL WITH POLICE
2013
120 X 160 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



BLUE RMB FAN
2013
98 X 128 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



COLOUR RMB
2013
100 X 150 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



RED FAN
2013
120 X 160 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



RMB
2013
160 X 120 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



PEOPLE'S RMB
2012
100 X 150 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



MOST WANTED-PEOPLE
2011
150 X 200 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



USD - MAO
2010
150 X 200 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



RMB VS. USD NO. 1
2012
99.5 X 79 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



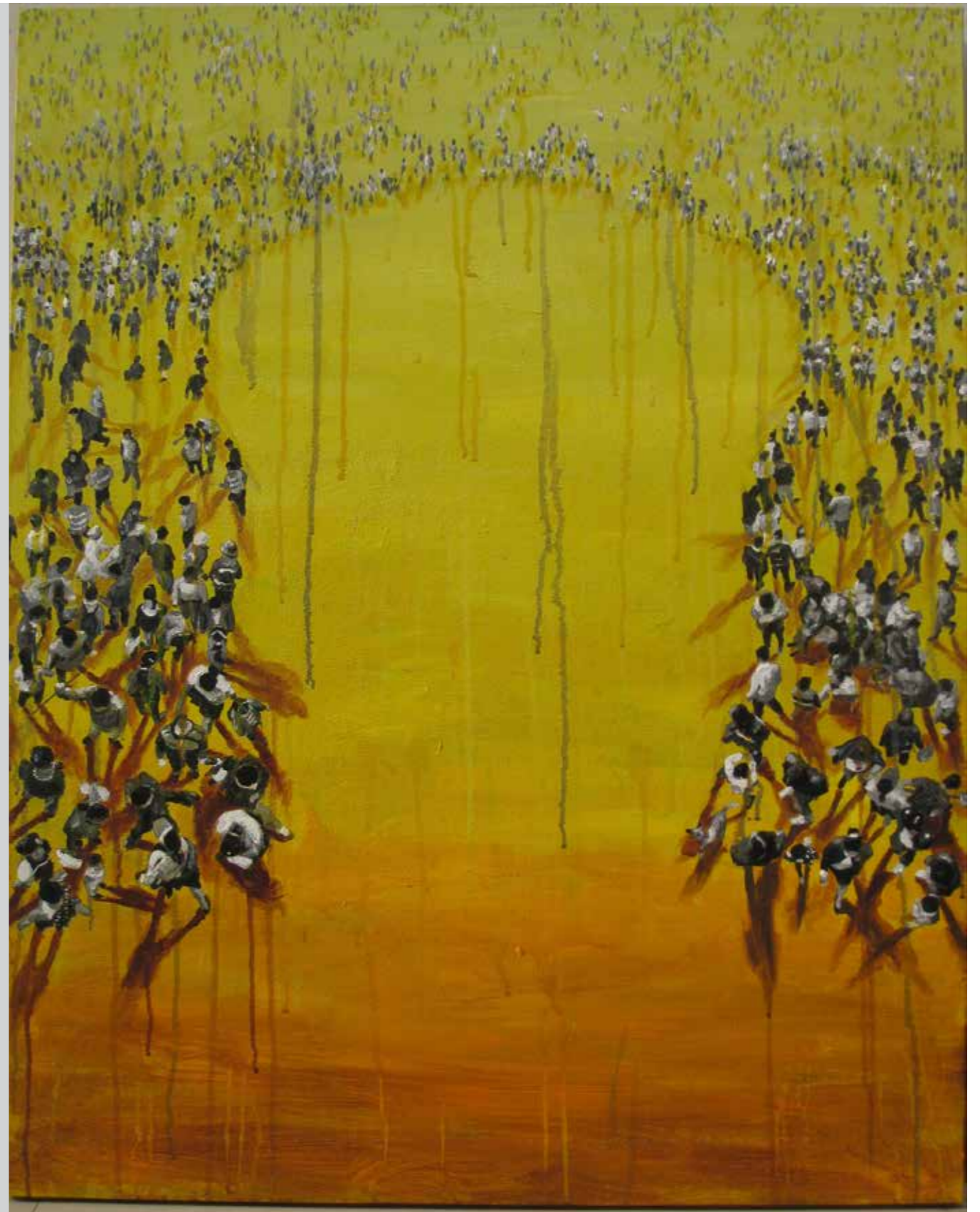
RMB VS. USD NO. 2
2013
120 X 160 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



BLACK AND WHITE SHADOW OF MAO
2011
120 X 100 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



YELLOW SHADOW
2012
100 X 80 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



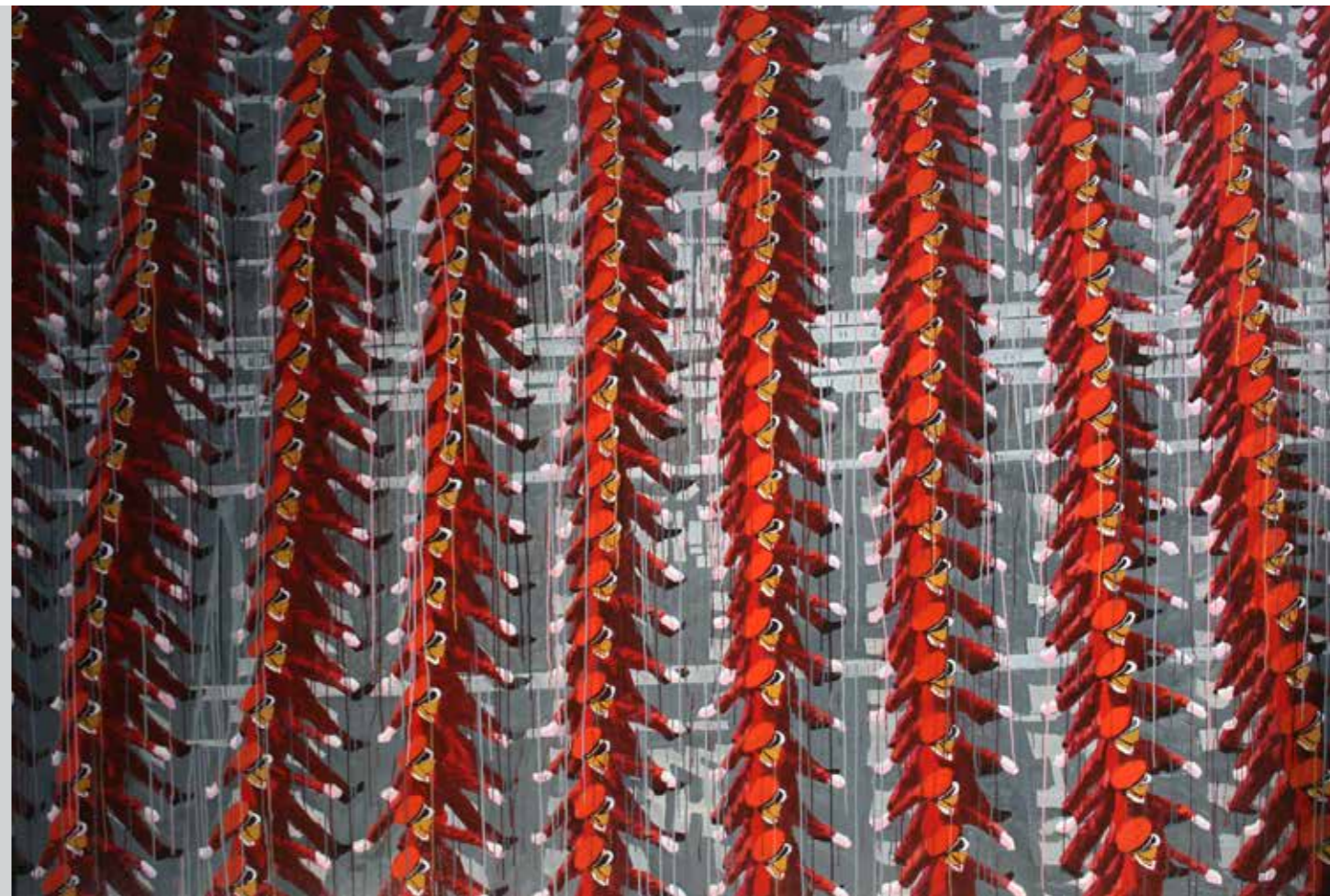
YELLOW WOMAN
2009
80 X 60 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



MY LEFT HAND WITH BLACK BACKGROUND
2009
240 X 180 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



RED ARMY
2010
200 X 300 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE
2009
99 X 148 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



OH
2010
200 X 300 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



HEAD TO SOUTHEAST
2013
42 X 59.4 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



SUN YATSEN STATUE
2011
100 X 150 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



FIRE FIRE FIRE
2011
100 X 120 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



EMPTY CHAIR
2012
160 X 120 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



SLOGAN + BIKE
2009
79 X 60 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



BIRDEYE RIDE
2009
DIPTYCH; 59 X 79.5 CM EACH
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



RED LANTERNS AND BICYCLE
2009
79 X 99 CM
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



DRUM TOWER
2010
DIPTYCH; 79 X 101 CM EACH
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



TIMELESS
2013
42 X 59 CM
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER



LAKE
2013
29.7 X 42 CM
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER



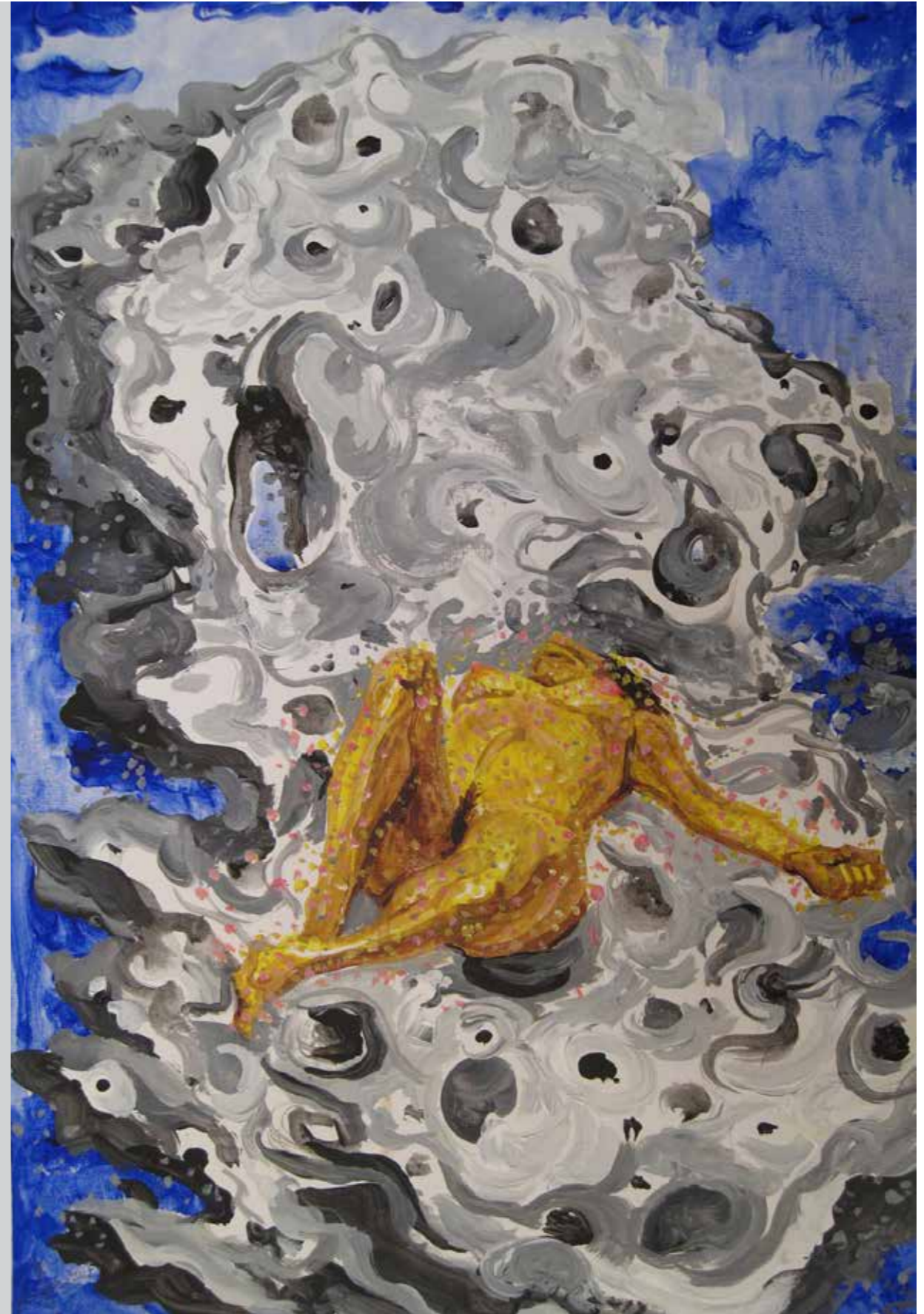
THREE FIGER PLUS TAI HU STONE
2013
42 X 59.4 CM
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER



TREE
2013
29.7 X 42 CM
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER



STONE
2013
42 X 29.7 CM
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER



BIOGRAPHY
SHENG QI



Sheng Qi, photographed by William Dowell © 2011

- 1965** Born in Anhui Province, China
- 1988** Graduated from the Central Academy of Art and Design, Beijing
- 1989** Lived and worked in Italy (1989-1992)
- 1998** Graduated with an MFA from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, London

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2012**
Post Mao, 6 November - 20 December 2012, Hua Gallery, London, UK
- 2011**
Square, March 19 - May 21, Opening: March 19 (6-8) - Fabien Frys Fine Art, Los Angeles, USA
- 2010**
My Painting Has No Colour, Poligono Gallery, Marbella, Spain
- 2009**
New Paintings, F2 Gallery, Beijing, China
China: Fluid Witness, Opal Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel
Sheng Qi, Galerie Bork, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2008**
Most Wanted, Cramer contemporary, Geneva, Switzerland
History in Black and Red, Andrew James Art, Shanghai, China
History in Black and Red, DF2 Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
Paintings, Gallery Köhler Müller, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2007**
History in Black and Red, Redgate Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2006**
Missing..., 798 Avant Gallery
Salute to Artists, 798 / RedGate Gallery, Beijing, China
Confidential, F2 Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2004**
Madness and Appropriation, RedGate Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2003**
Transcription, RedGate Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2000**
Melbourne Fringe Festival, Mass Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 1998**
Nine Pigeons + Nurse + Sheng Qi, Beijing, China
Are You Willing to Shake My Hand?, Performance, Tokyo, Japan
- 1997**
Fortune Cookies, Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London, UK

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2013**
Falsefakes at Centre de la Photographie, Geneve, Switzerland
- 2011**
Louisiana Collection 2009-2011 at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark
- 2009**
The Art of Caring at New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, USA
Blennale 2, Thessaloniki, Greece
- 2008**
Half-Life of a Dream: Contemporary Chinese Art from the collection of Kent and Vicki Logan, Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, USA
- 2007**
Zhu Yi! Fotografia actual en China, ARTIUM Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporaneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain
- 2006**
RedGate Gallery's 15th Anniversary
Mobile Socialism, Contemporary Art, 798, Beijing, China
- 2005**
Observing the Senses, RedGate Gallery, Beijing, China
Body Scape, ARC One Gallery, Melbourne; RedGate Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2004**
Between Past and Future, International Center of Photography, New York, NY
Over A Billion Served, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, USA
China's Photography Painting, Art Season Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2002**
Beijing Afloat, Beijing Tokyo Art Projects
- 2001**
Clues to the Future – RedGate Gallery's 10th Anniversary, Beijing, China
- 2000**
Post, Material, RedGate Gallery, Beijing, China
- 1999**
Departure from China, Beijing Design Museum, Beijing, China
4th NIPAF Asian Performance Art Series & NIPAF Contemporary Art Seminar, Nagoya, Tokyo, Nagano, Japan

8th Mexican International Performance Exhibition, Mexico City, Mexico

1998

Inside Out: New Chinese Art, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, NY

1993

China Avant-Garde, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford

1989

China Avant-Garde, National Art Gallery of China (NAGC), Beijing, China

1988

Great Earthquake, Great Wall, Beijing University, Beijing, China

1986-87

Concept 21 – Tai Ji, Great Wall, Beijing University, Beijing, China

BOOKS, REVIEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

2013

Kunstkritik im China der Gegenwart, Laugh Fan, painting on cover

2009

Sheng Qi, Galerie Bork, Copenhagen, Denmark (exhibition catalogue)

2008

(May) National Geographic, China inside the Dragon-Cutting off dissent, pp.129
History in black and red, DF2 Gallery, Los Angeles (exhibition catalogue)

2007

History in black and red, Redgate gallery, Beijing (exhibition catalogue)

2005

(March-April) Flash Art, Focus China, pp.92

2004

Newsweek, (international edition) Aug. 9, pp. 45
Madness, Appropriation, Huang Du, Wang Ming'an, Hou Hanru, Beijing (softcover book)

2000

Giving Art the Finger: Beijing's Avant-garde Extremists, Gary Jones, Sunday Morning Post (magazine), 6-9.
Newsweek, (special edition) July-September, pp. 86-88
The Australian Magazine, April, pp. 27-29

1999

Beijing Scene, World AIDS Day in Beijing, December 10-16, 12.

WORK IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

-Various photographs, acquired in 2010

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

-My Left Hand: Me, 2000 Colour photograph, 80 x 54 cm, acquired in 2008

International Center for Photography, New York, NY

-Memories (Mao), 2000, Colour photograph, 120 x 80 cm, acquired in 2004

-Memories (Mother), 2000, Colour photograph, 84 x 79 cm, acquired in 2004

-Memories (Me), 2000, Colour photograph, 84 x 84 cm, acquired in 2004

Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, IL

-Untitled, 1996- 1997, Gelatin silver print, 104 x 179 cm, acquired in 2000

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark

-Revolution, 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 400 cm, acquired in 2009

-My Left Hand- Family, 2007, Colour photograph (six prints), 90 x 60 cm, acquired in 2009

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