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Foreword 前言

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Abstract

An introduction to the *Open Ground Blog* interviews included in this issue of *Contemporaneity*.

About the Author

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Foreword 前言

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Madeline Eschenburg and Ellen Larson have been involved in many events taking place in Beijing since the summer of 2014. The four papers included in this issue of *Contemporaneity* are selected from Madeline and Ellen's blog. I am very glad to read their essays and interviews, which provide various perspectives of Chinese contemporary art. The figures discussed in the papers represent four groups of people from different generations in the Chinese contemporary art world. The No Name Group began their art activities in the 1970s, Xu

Bing was from the 1980s avant-garde movement, Xing Danwen from 1990s video and photography, and finally, Hua Er, Lihui Dong, Antonie Angerer and Emma Karasz are from different professional backgrounds but all working in art institutions as curators, gallery owners, etc. in the Chinese contemporary world of the twenty-first century.

2014 年夏季以来，匹兹堡大学的博士研究生艾美林（Madeline Eschenburg）和赖清琳（Ellen Larson）在北京参与了很多当代艺术活动，并建立了她们的博客。这里发表的四篇文章都是从她们的博客中选取的。我非常高兴阅读她们的博客，因为它提供了很多观察中国当代艺术的视角。四篇文章所采访的人物似乎也代表了中国当代艺术中过去三十年中的四组不同身份的人。无名画会代表了七十年代的艺术家；徐冰是八十年代前卫艺术运动的代表艺术家；而邢丹文，作为中国少数成功的女性艺术家，则参与了九十年代开始活跃的影像艺术创作；最后，画儿、董丽慧、Antonie Angerer 和 Emma Karasz 则是本世纪过去十多年中非常活跃的策展人、画廊和其他艺术机构的职业工作者。

The four papers, it seems to me, cover three major issues. The first is about the individualism that very much concerned the first generation of contemporary Chinese artists, such as the Stars and the No Name groups from the 1970s, during and after the Cultural Revolution. Their individualism, however, should not be viewed as the same thing that people from Euro-America are familiar with. Rather, this Chinese individualism, appearing in the late 1970s as well as in the 1980s, was very much a relevant term associated with humanism, liquidating class struggle, and searching for a kind of universalism in the particular social context at the time. Therefore, early Chinese individualism seems inseparable from a certain collectivism popular at the time.

这四篇文章，似乎也概括了三个主要的主题。一个是关于“个人主义”的问题，这是七十年代和八十年代的艺术家，比如星星画会和无名画会等艺术群体所追求的价值。但是，在文革期间和文革刚结束的时代，这个对“个人主义”的追求与欧美国家的个人主义有所不同，它更多地与当时批判阶级斗争的“人道主义”有关，这种追求某种普世性的个体主义恐怕和那时社会普遍认同的某种集体主义分不开。

The second issue is Chinese feminist art. Is there Chinese feminist art, which either consists of a variety of female individuals or is defined as a movement and group? One may argue that the name “women's art” perhaps is more suitable than feminist art, since there has never been a feminist movement in either a political or artistic sense in the context of contemporary China. Although the early 1990s saw a peak of active Chinese women's art when Western feminist theory, along with postmodernism, encountered Chinese experimental art, especially in Apartment Art. But how to put Chinese women's art into a broader, not only domestic, but also global context to examine its nature is a complicated topic.

第二个主题是中国女性艺术。首先，人们会问，无论是作为多样化的个体组成的女性艺术，还是作为一个运动和群体性的女性艺术，中国到底有没有女性艺术？因此有人可能会说，用“女艺术家”去替代女性主义，或者女性艺术可能更适合。因为在中国当代历史中，无论是从政治角度还是从艺术角度，从来都没有出现过真正的“女性主义”运动。尽管，在九十年代，随着后现代主义和女性理论的引进并且与中国那时的实验艺术融合一起，形成了中国女艺术家的创作高峰，但是，如何界定和如何把中国女艺术家的活动放到一个更加广泛的、不仅仅国内的同时也是全球的背景中去检验它的本质仍然是一个非常复杂的课题。

The third issue is the relationship between art and society. Xu Bing discussed the relationship within the context of his career over the last three decades. What is the relationship represented in an artist's work? It is a good understanding of a period? As Xu said, "an artist must not separate himself from the period." But what does the "period" mean? It is a historical term or metaphysical concept, such as historical spirit. To my understanding, however, "period" here is not just a time period, but a complex system of energy produced by different social forces from the same time. The unification as well as conflict of this energy can make the society change and develop. The duty of an excellent artist is to discover and represent this social energy.

第三个话题是关于艺术和社会的关系。徐冰从他三十年创作中的个人经验角度讨论了这个问题。他认为,艺术作品中所表现的艺术和社会的关系就是艺术家对时代的理解。“艺术家不能把自己与时代分开”。然而,“时代”是什么?它是一个历史概念或者形而上学概念,比如像人们常说的时代精神。但是,我理解徐冰在这里说到时代,不是指一个时间,而是指社会能量之间的关系,时代不是单指一个时间或者一个时期,而是一个由不同的社会力量所产生的能量系统,不论是它们是正能量还是负能量。这个能量的一致或者冲突可以使社会发生变化和发展,而优秀的艺术家的责任就是去发现和再现这个社会能量。

Of course, all of these issues may be associated with the notion of contemporaneity in art. The contemporaneity, however, always responds to a particular period and specific cultural area: individualism in the 1970s, feminist art that started in early 1990s, and the relationship between art and society, which has confused generations of Chinese artists who have continually pursued a better understanding and judgment of what contemporaneity is for their particular historical moment. Since in China there has never been a linear historical progression from modern art to postmodern art to contemporary art, contemporaneity perhaps can be interpreted as a feature of the period. Although its meaning changes over time, it has created a consciousness of being permanently modern, permanently contemporary, or, simply a permanent novelty (sometimes, old as new) in the creation of art since the early twentieth century in China.

当然,所有这些主题似乎都要和艺术的当代性有关。当代性总是对一个具体时期特定的文化区域的反应。中国七十年代的出现的“个体主义”、九十年代以来的“女性艺术”和长期困扰着中国艺术家的“艺术与社会”关系等这些主题,都和艺术家在那个时刻对当代性的理解、追求和判断有关。正因为在中国的现当代历史中没有现代主义—后现代主义—当代性(或当代主义)这样一个线性的事件逻辑和艺术史进程,所以,“当代性”或许可以被解释为一种符合那个特定时期的时代性或者时代特点,尽管,这个当代性的意思总是变化,但是,它逐渐为中国当代艺术塑造了一种永恒的现代,永恒的当代,或者永恒的新(尽管经常把旧作为新)这样一种当代性。

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