Foreword –
Rethinking the history of art in a global perspective

Rui Oliveira Lopes
Artistic Studies Research Centre (CIEBA)
Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon (FBAUL)
There is a line between those who can watch and those who can see. The ones who can watch are limited to look at the things that are in front of their eyes. In their turn, the ones who can see have a vision that goes far beyond the line of the horizon.

In recent decades, art historians have emphasized the idea of stylistic chronology in relation to works of art that coexisted in space and that corresponded to a cultural environment or tradition. Today, more than ever before, we should not look at Chinese art as a visual expression of "Chineseness" or the continuity of a geographic identity and cultural ideology. Does it make sense to think about Modern and Contemporary art in terms of "place" and the effects of cultural environment on artistic creativity as a definition for the "geography of art"? On the one hand, contemporary artistic creativity cannot be seen through the perspective of a delineation of space or systematic arrangement of cultural distinctiveness, when migration, mobility and cultural heterogeneity are characteristics of the alleged aftermath of postmodernism. On the other hand, in artistic creation, the deep roots of a cultural environment usually become the distinctive discourse of an artist. Even though, artists can choose between maintaining a bond with their cultural tradition or instead use a broader artistic language and set of cross-cultural references. This may be a question of assuming individual cultural identity as a mainstream artistic expression or, on the contrary, refusing to be artistically represented by their cultural delineation.

In January 2012, the Albemarle Gallery presented an exhibition entitled “China: Memories & Imagination” where one could see the artworks of some of the leading “realists” working in China today. Although some of the artworks revealed the artists’ cultural identity through subject matter or technique, others chose to mitigate their cultural distinctiveness by using styles more associated with Western aesthetic standards. Despite differences between artists, their works were reunited and displayed according to their cultural geography as a sole body of Chinese creativity; that is, represented by their cultural delineation.

Interestingly, artworks by Shi Guowei (b. 1977, Henan) exhibited in this show presented a critical approach to the Westernized perspective over the history of art, which defines an excluding dichotomy between Western and Non-Western art. Guowei's hand coloured photographs are
a pastiche of some of the iconic artworks made by famous Western artists, such as Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Marriage* portrait, painted in 1434, Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of Medusa*, dated 1818, and René Magritte's *Golconda*, painted in 1953. The re-enactment of pictorial composition by the replacement of key elements draws a parallel between Western and Chinese painting. These works are not just a passing reference, a simple imitation for cheap trade, or a process of cultural and artistic appropriation. On the contrary, they are impregnated with Chinese cultural distinctiveness, creating the possibility for one to imagine what these great European masters might have painted if they were born in 20th century China.

On another level, the consequences of this transposition beyond space and cultural "contamination" may be polarized globally. Western artists are often compelled to plunge into Chinese aesthetics and philosophical tradition whose echo reverberates through their artistic creation. The artistic interaction that results from intercultural dialogue, establishes a bridge for mutual understanding, while at the same time ensures the continuity between past, present and the future in a global perspective.

The present book intends to examine the place of Chinese Modern and Contemporary art, the emergence and development of China’s avant-garde and their worldwide attain, the display and representation of Chinese art in the West, the issues related with cultural appropriation, artistic interaction, geographic delimitation, rejection of cultural tradition, and intervention as a means of artistic expression and cultural distinctiveness related with artistic creation.

For this purpose, this volume includes a selection of papers recommended by a committee of scholars, as well as papers authored by other prominent scholars invited to collaborate in this project. The papers in this book are divided in two sections covering two chronological periods: 19th century and Modern art; and Contemporary art, starting soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

This book offers some starting points for the study of the arts in China and its aesthetic attain throughout the world during the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. Whereas some papers move towards the display of Chinese modern and contemporary art in Europe and US; the emergence and development of a marketplace for the international commercialization of Chinese painting during the Republican period; and the interactions between Western advertising and graphic design,
and Chinese propaganda visual culture; others are more grounded on
the mutual influence of philosophical and conceptual content; the recon-
textualization of Chinese tradition and cultural environment; the inter-
play between art, politics and intervention; and finally, the formation of
Chinese avant-garde and their artistic expression by different kinds of
media such as performance, photography, installation and film, unusual
in the history of Chinese art scene.

Many people have provided important assistance in completing this
volume. The production of this book was possible thanks to Jorge dos
Reis who authored the design project, and his collaborative assistant,
Lúcia Buisel, whose patience and hard work on the book’s pagination was
invaluable. Special thanks to Professor Luís Jorge Gonçalves, Director of
the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon (FBAUL), and to Professor
Fernando António Baptista Pereira, Director of the Artistic Studies
Research Centre (CIEBA), for entrusting me with the responsibility to
coordinate this research project. I am especially grateful to the authors
who contributed to this volume, their valuable knowledge and outstand-
ing scholarly research that enriches our understanding of Chinese arts
and the artistic exchange with other cultures. I would also like to express
my gratitude to Andreia Tavares, Lurdes Santos and Isabel Nunes for
their assistance in the manage of this project.

Finally, a very special thanks to the Foundation for Science and
Technology (FCT) which provided financial support for the organization
of the international conference. The work and development of these two
edited volumes is part of the international conference *Face to Face. The
Transcendence of the arts in China and beyond*, would not have been possible
without generous sponsorship from Confucius Institute of the University
of Lisbon and Jorge Welsh Oriental Porcelain and Works of Art, and the
partnership with the Observatory for China.

It was a very rewarding experience for me to coordinate the interna-
tional conference hosted by the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon
between the 3rd and the 5th of April 2013, and to edit the two volumes that
resulted from this scholarly meeting. It has also been a great pleasure to
work with so many distinguished and young scholars from such a wide
range of related fields within the Chinese arts, and bring this publication
to completion. Although this is a collective volume of essays written by dif-
ferent authors, any errors the reader may find are my responsibility alone.