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PAULINE J. YAO

Pauline J. Yao is curator of contemporary Asian art at M+, the new museum for twentieth- and twenty-first-century visual culture being built in Hong Kong. A frequent contributor to *Artforum*, she also serves on the editorial board of *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. She recently participated in the jury selection for the inaugural Hugo Boss Asia Art Award and edited a monograph of Singapore artist Heman Chong published by *ArtAsiaPacific*. She lives and works in Hong Kong.



1. Left: Bo Xilai, Beijing, March 11, 2012. Photo: Andy Wong/AP Images.

1

THE TRIAL OF BO XILAI A once-in-a-decade power shift in one of the world's most authoritarian and opaque political systems does not occur without consequence. As soon as Xi Jinping took the helm of the Chinese Communist Party, the scandal surrounding expelled party member Bo Xilai was set to implode—and it did, in the most spectacular fashion. Bo's trial was not only marked by a leadership struggling to provide new levels of transparency, but shaken by the unprecedented "austerity measures" Xi has implemented to curb corruption. Yet one trial can only change so much; despite slackening sales of moon cakes, liquor, and cigarettes, memories of hedonistic government officials and their Porsche-driving offspring will be hard to erase.

2

GENG JIANYI (MINSHEG ART MUSEUM, SHANGHAI) At age fifty-one, Geng offers an artistic output as vital as ever. His pioneering explorations of human behavior and

articulations of individual subjectivity in the rigidly controlled society of his homeland are among the most conceptually rigorous to be found in the recent history of Chinese art. The title of his career retrospective, "*Wu Zhi*," which translates as "Ignorant," is a nod to the artist's unpretentious demeanor as well as to his understated genius. The undisputed standout was the outside *Useless*, 2004, a sprawling taxonomy of some three hundred unwanted appliances, worn-out pieces of furniture, and disused goods that not only predates Song Dong's more internationally famous accumulations but more acutely pushes the question of objects and their operative identities.

3

MICHAEL LIN, PLACE LIBRE (TANG CONTEMPORARY ART, BEIJING) The gesture is deceptively simple: Add a few carefully placed white lines to the concrete floor of a gallery, transfigure its white walls with two bands of drab, institutional color, cut



2. Above: View of "Geng Jianyi: Wu Zhi, 1985-2008," 2013, Mingsheng Art Museum, Shanghai.

3. Right: Michael Lin, *Place Libre*, 2013, paint. Installation view, Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing.



5

a wide opening onto the street and—presto!—you have an indoor parking lot. But Lin went one step further with his ultra-precise wall painting to execute a perfect synthesis of two core threads in his practice—surface ornamentation and spatial intervention—inviting viewers (and the unsuspecting drivers who followed signs for free parking, only to find themselves emerging from their cars into an art gallery) to contemplate the hazy distinction between art and imitation.

4

"TOKYO 1955-1970: A NEW AVANT-GARDE" (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK; CURATED BY DORYUN CHONG WITH NANCY LIM) Superbly researched, visually compelling, and historically significant, "Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde" had it all. The landmark exhibition not only brought a welcome end to MoMA's long silence with regard to Japanese art, but did so by opening audiences' eyes to the enormous wellspring of creativity—encompassing everything from performance to painting, graphic design to photography—that was postwar Tokyo. Histories of the avant-garde will no longer be able to ignore the intensity of the innovations that emerged in this era.

6

EDWARD SNOWDEN'S PASSAGE THROUGH HONG KONG Bizarre references to palaces and phoenixes aside, Snowden's month-long stay in Hong Kong was as enthralling as it was surreal. In the political farce that unfolded, great nations were reduced to mere caricatures: the US the spoiled child, China the strong, silent type. The Hong Kong government, in turn, became the dutiful one expected to do the right thing. Few could have imagined that the dramatic finish—



4. View of "Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde," 2012-13, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Thomas Griesel.



7. Moe Satt, *F n F (Face and Fingers)* (detail), 2009, eight gelatin silver prints, text, each 15 1/2 x 15 1/2". From "A Journal of the Plague Year: Fear, Ghosts, Rebels, SARS, Leslie and the Hong Kong Story."



8. Hannah Hurlitzig, *The Waiting Hall, Scenes of Modernity*, 2012, mixed media. Installation view, Taipei Fine Arts Museum. From the 2012 Taipei Biennial. Photo: Hong-Chi Huang.

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5. Above: Song Ta, *Uglier and Uglier*, 2012, digital video, color, sound, 425 minutes 12 seconds.

6. Below: Protesters supporting Edward Snowden confront police outside the US Consulate in Hong Kong, June 13, 2013. Photo: Bobby Yip/Reuters.

Snowden's last-minute, unimpeded departure for Moscow and subsequent evasion of US authorities—was the direct result of Hong Kong's by-the-book bureaucracy. Never underestimate the power of pencil pushers!

7

"A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR. FEAR, GHOSTS, REBELS, SARS, LESLIE AND THE HONG KONG STORY" (PARA SITE ART SPACE, HONG KONG; CURATED BY COSMIN COSTINAS AND INTI GUERRERO) The diminutive size of Para Site Art Space has not deterred Cosmin Costinas, its executive director and curator, from organizing ambitious exhibitions such as this one. Making expert use of visual art, performance, and historical ephemera, the exhibition focused on two events in Hong Kong in 2003—the SARS epidemic and the death of hugely iconic singer and actor Leslie Cheung—that were defining factors in the territory's evolving character. It also consciously sketched out a broad culture of fear around contamination and infection that disturbingly lingers into the present.

8

TAIPEI BIENNIAL 2012: "MODERN MONSTERS, DEATH AND LIFE OF FICTION" (TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM; CURATED BY ANSELM FRANKE) The success of Franke's biennial rested on its ability to turn on a dime: from fact to fiction, back to front, East to West, viewer to viewed. Its varied contents tackled narratives that were at once grounded in the space of Taiwan and yet resonated

far outside it. In this multilayered montage, the figure of modernity—as represented by Tao-wu, a fearsome monster featured in Chinese folklore that inspired Franke's theme—could be reenvisioned as an endless array of manifold personalities and duplicitous representations.

9

"DÉJÀ DISPARU" (PEARL LAM GALLERIES, HONG KONG; CURATED BY DAVID HO YEUNG CHAN) This show captured the complex exigencies of cultural identity during the pre-handover days of Hong Kong, displaying exceptional sensitivity to the ways in which such anxieties still loom large in the city today. While Chan's theme limited his selection to artworks from the 1990s, the exhibition nevertheless offered a surprisingly fresh look at featured artists Ellen Pau, Sara Wong, Vincent Yu, and Ho Siu-Kei. Their meditations on the ever-shifting urban landscape of Hong Kong appeared simultaneously elegiac and prophetic.

SHINRO OHTAKE (TAKAMATSU CITY MUSEUM OF ART, JAPAN; CURATED BY YOSHIFUMI MOHRI) It's hard to imagine an artist more heterogeneous or prolific than Ohtake. Dubbed the Rauschenberg of Japan, he creates high-speed collisions of images, materials, sounds, and memories that play out across densely layered two-dimensional canvases, books, and room-size installations. The retrospective in Takamatsu included more than five hundred works (seventy-three never shown before) and offered a rare glimpse of Ohtake's exceptional range, foregrounding his unique ability to transform seemingly random found materials—newspaper clippings, photographs, scraps of paper, tape, daily ephemera, and even sound—into carefully constructed sculptural objects. These idiosyncratic assemblages may be born out of the fragmented space of memory, but they are grounded in the frenetic pace of the present. □



9. Left: Ho Siu-Kei, *Gravity Hoop*, 1996. Installation view, Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong. From "Déjà Disparu."

10. Above: Shinro Ohtake, *Dub-Hoi & New Channel*, 1999, mixed media. Installation view, Takamatsu City Museum of Art, Japan, 2013. Photo: Kazuo Fukunaga.