

MULTIPLY!!! POWER IN NUMBERS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART

Barbara Pollack, Curator
Hongzheng Han, Associate Curator

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Chinese artists have known the power of copying and multiplying as tools for studying and glorifying original artworks. From the grand display of the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an to Cai Guo Qiang's AR fireworks above the Forbidden City, the experience of the "multiplier" is the core of Chinese artmaking. Printmaking was invented in China in 700 A.D. and molds were used for even the earliest of bronze sculptures. Today, Chinese artists rely on the tools of reproduction to create, duplicate and distribute their creations. Yet, beyond practical uses of multiplication, "multiplicity" has become a central theme in Chinese contemporary art with many young Chinese artists replicating a mass of identical objects and images to create astounding spectacles.

This exhibition examines a group of artists for whom multiplication and repetition are the very point of their artworks, rather than merely a tool for easy replication and widespread distribution. Instead of the usual selection of prints and multiples that are expected in such an exhibition, here is a survey of artists who are pushing the envelope demonstrating the spectacular effect that can be achieved by grouping masses of similar objects together in the same space. There are artists who still rely on classical techniques, such as molds, printmaking and paper cutting. But there are also many others who challenge the very notion of an "original" or a "limited edition" by employing the latest technology, including 3D printing, multi-channel animation, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and NFTs. The exhibition demonstrates that rather than wowing an audience with a single unique work, such as the Mona Lisa, a greater impact can be achieved through amassing a crowd of works in total environments that invite interaction.

The use of multiplication to create spectacle is the core of this exhibition. Like synchronized drummers at opening ceremonies or omnipresence of images of social media idols, China excels at this form of spectacle yet its artists' use of multiplication has rarely been investigated in a museum exhibition. Here, instead of attaching shame or illegality to multiples, the exhibition celebrates the power of the crowd and highlights those artists who make use of reproduction to beautiful and thought-provoking ends.

繁衍生息 (pronunciation: “fan yan sheng xi”; Meaning: flourish, multiply, and thrive.) is a four-character Chinese idiom that perfectly encapsulates this exhibition. It is divided exhibition into four sections, and each section is represented by each character of this famous idiom:

繁 (FAN: Grand/vigorous/complicated)

This section creates a visually alluring spectacle and underlines the significance of repetition and multiplication rooted in the originality of contemporary Chinese art. It is an invitation to find variations and nuances in a seemingly still and repetitive environment.

衍 (YAN: creative Replication/expansion)

The second part of this exhibition focuses on creative replication. By experimenting and expanding on the elasticity of traditional fine art mediums, the art here represents innovative techniques to demonstrate the infinite possibility of multiplication.

生 (SHENG: innovation/reborn/young)

The third section of the exhibition focuses on building an exhilarating and complex multiverse where art and technology intersect, integrate, and innovate.

息 (XI: life/message/rest)

This part of the exhibition intends to juxtapose the "highbrow" fine art elitism versus the "lowbrow" mass culture fantasia.

CURATION

Barbara Pollack, Curator

As a curator, educator and writer, Pollack has been involved in global contemporary art since the late 1980s. She is the co-founder of Art at a Time Like This, a nonprofit organization providing a platform for free expression to artists addressing pressing issues of the 21st century.

A leading expert on Chinese contemporary art, Pollack curated *Mirror Image: A Transformation of Chinese Identity* at Asia Society in 2022. Her scholarly essay, *Lu Yang: Artist vs. Avatar*, was published in *Screen Bodies*, an academic journal. She also curated *DOKU—Digital Alaya* by artist Lu Yang at Jane Lombard Gallery in New York in May 2021 and organized *My Generation: Young Chinese Artists*, the first show of Chinese younger artists in the United States, which appeared at the Orange County Museum of Art in 2015.

Pollack has published two books on her research in China: *Brand New Art from China: A Generation on the Rise* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China* (Timezone 8, 2010). Pollack has contributed major essays on many artists including Liu Ye, Li Songsong, Lin Tianmiao, Wang Gongxin, Zhao Zhao, Sun Xun, and Tu Hongtao. Several of her essays were included in the *China Art Book*, published by Dumont Literatur in 2007. Based on her extensive interest in this field, she has been awarded to Asia Cultural Council fellowships and a Andy Warhol Arts Writer grant.

Hongzheng Han, Associate Curator

Hongzheng Han is a Faculty member and Academic Content Manager at Sotheby's Institute of Art. They are also an associate curator at the Modern Art Museum Shanghai. Focusing on identity studies, Han has been invited as a guest speaker at the Asia Society and Museum, the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Michigan, New York University, the Brooklyn Rail, Christie's Education, the Asian Creative Foundation, among others. Han's recent curatorial works include *Within Global Isolation: Asian Artists in America*; *Runaway World 2020: Ten Chinese Artists Group Show*, *Beyond Borders: Art in the Post COVID Era*, *Standing Out*, *the Outstandings*, *Deformation and Reformation: A Modern Taste of Asian Identities*, *Mirror Image: A Transformation of Chinese Identity*, among others. Han's curatorial works have been reviewed by *Artforum*, *Artsy*, *Voice of Photography*, and the *New Yorker Magazine*, among others.