

## HISTORY OF EXHIBITIONS: SHANGHAI 1979-2006

### Interview with Qin Yifeng

#### 1985 Six Painters Modern Works Exhibition

BC: Was *Six Painters Modern Works Exhibition* in 1985 the first exhibition you participated in?

QYF: Yes, I think so.

BC: How did you get to know teachers and students from the Shanghai Arts and Crafts School?

QYF: I graduated from the school and was classmates with Ding Yi and Feng Lianghong. Wang Guqing and Ai Dewu were one grade higher than us. Yu Youhan taught us photography for two weeks.

BC: How was the exhibition in 1985 organized?

QYF: We wanted to present an exhibition at Fudan University, so we contacted a friend of mine. His name was Lian Jianming and we went to the same middle school. He graduated from Fudan and back then was editor of *Labor Daily*. We managed to find a contact at Fudan through him. There were a few exhibitions of this kind at the time. We thought students and teachers at Fudan might be interested in it.

BC: Why did you think Fudan would show interest? Were there similar exhibitions presented at Fudan before or was it just a random choice?

QYF: There might have been some held at Fudan before and after our exhibition, but I can't quite recall. Fudan was not an art space but it was a hub for academic and cultural exchange. The place we chose was not a formal gallery. Back then people were satisfied enough if their paintings were hung somewhere clean. We put a notebook there for visitors to leave a message, but it is nowhere to be found now. I remember many visitors left their feedback. We received both criticism and praise. Someone even portrayed the six of us as a turtle with six points protruding out. That was funny.

BC: How long was the exhibition presented at Fudan? It was held at a club, right?

QYF: It was held at a student club for about one month. When the exhibition came to an end, the university wanted to keep one of the works as a souvenir; and since I was the contact person, I gave them one of my works. I also gave a piece of my work to Lian Jianming. Years later he came to ask for another of my works. I said, "didn't I give you one before?". He said that his mother had lost the work that I gave him. The one given to the university could not be found either. Four of my works were on display during the exhibition, and the other two were also lost after I moved several times. I didn't take pictures of those works. This piece was exhibited at another museum and I took a picture of it. I wanted to give you that picture. It featured the same work, but at a different place. Now I cannot find the picture either.

BC: How did the idea of this exhibition occur to you?

QYF: We were studying at the Arts and Crafts School. Our teacher Yu Youhan had significant influence on us. Back then we started to get to know Western modern art. I used to make Chinese painting and calligraphy and was interested in traditional media. But since I often hung out with the other five participants, their influence prompted me to try something new. I remember Zhao Wuji's exhibition was presented at Zhejiang Academy of Art at the time and teacher Yu took us to visit it. So you see, everything was sort of connected. After that I tried to make some abstract ink paintings and that was my first attempt, which was later presented at the exhibition. My works were not large in size. Most of them were 40 × 40cm to 50 × 50cm.

BC: Were all the participating artists influenced a lot by Yu Youhan?

QYF: Yes. We learned a lot about contemporary art from Professor Yu. There was no course on contemporary art at the school, but he did some experiments with contemporary art on his own. Since we communicated a lot with Professor Yu, we gradually became interested in it and wanted to try something new.

BC: Did Professor Yu interact a lot with you?

QYF: Yes. For instance, once during an evening self-study session, Professor Yu let us listen to Beethoven's Symphony No. 6. When the music was over, he called it a day. We just sat there, listening to the tape recorder. Back then a good recorder had four loudspeakers, while the one we used had only one. The sound quality was not particularly impressive, but we listened. Professor Yu introduced us to a variety of art forms, not just contemporary art. He also taught us photography. During another evening self-study session, he taught us about colors. I remember he took out a notebook with leather

cover. There were ten notes listed on the book. When he finished one by one, he asked if there was anything we wanted to add. Then the class was dismissed. He also took us to see Zhao Wuji's exhibition. He said, "I think there are several points worth noticing in this exhibition. First, Zhao Wuji added a gradient effect to the oil paints on linen. Flat painting technique plus a gradient effect compose the background. The four boundary lines are never the same. The edges of the frame changes and creates a very Chinese imagery." He mentioned six points in all, but I don't quite remember. In the end, he asked us: "Do you have anything to add?"

BC: Did you decide which works you wanted to exhibit on your own?

QYF: Yes. We decided by ourselves and we transported the works by ourselves. There was no curator for the exhibition. Everything was spontaneous.

BC: Did anyone write a foreword?

QYF: I think there was one, which was probably written by Professor Yu.

BC: He told me during an interview he lost it. Was there any media coverage of the exhibition?

QYF: I don't think so. There was some about the *Concave – Convex Exhibition*, especially about the *Cloth Sculpture*. But influence of the *Six Painters Modern Works Exhibition* didn't make a stir.

## 1986 Concave - Convex Exhibition

BC: Was *Concave – Convex* the second exhibition you

participated in?

QYF: Yes. And after that was the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition in 1989. I only participated in these three exhibitions during the 1980s.

BC: Were you engaged in the *1986 Concave – Convex Exhibition* from the beginning?

QYF: Yes. I remember the title of the exhibition was decided in our classroom at Shanghai University. That night Xu Longsen, Yu Jiyong and Professor Yu all came. Xu Longsen suggested the exhibition should be a contrast to what was advocated by the Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute, which was traditional and conservative. In this regard, we needed to do something different and a unique name would be of great importance. Many titles had been proposed. Finally, Professor Yu said, “sculpture is about concave and convex, and why don’t we call it *Concave – Convex Exhibition*.” We all thought it was simple and nice. The two Chinese characters contained a certain sense of visual beauty. That’s how the title was decided.

BC: Was Xu Longsen the initiator of the exhibition?

QYF: In today’s context, he would be called the curator. He did a lot of work and even raised funds for the exhibition. Initially it was agreed that the cost would be shared by every participating artist. But in the end, no one went kept their word. It was a long time ago, I don’t recall the details. But I had this impression.

BC: Why did you want to make an exhibition to confront the Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute?

QYF: It might have something to do with Xu Longsen’s own experience. He was engaged in sculpture. He studied at the Arts and Crafts School and then worked at a Jade Carving Plant. He might use the standard advocated by the institute as a reference when making sculpture. Back then information

about modern art was very limited. There weren’t as many channels to communicate with others as today, so we all paid close attention to institutes, groups and exhibitions around us. Today people don’t pay much attention to the Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute. Moreover, the Institute symbolized the mainstream of the country’s art. The artists of the institute were very influential. Therefore, to confront it showed vision and attainment. That’s how I see it.

BC: Which work did you present?

QYF: *Cloth Sculpture* and performance, both of which were created in collaboration with Ding Yi and Zhang Guoliang. A slide show dubbed with music was played on site.

BC: Were you the only ones presenting works that were not easel art?

QYF: No. There were installations and performances.

BC: Who did performance?

QYF: Yang Hui. He said what he did was performance. I saw it as mischievousness in a serious manner.

BC: His name was not on the participating artist list.

QYF: Right. Back then we had already known Duchamp and John Cage. Their concepts were widely appropriated. It’s hard to judge Yang Hui’s work. He just said he would do a performance.

BC: Did he discuss his idea with you beforehand?

QYF: No. He showed up out of the blue. During the opening ceremony, we found that a hole was smashed on Xu Longsen’s sculpture, in which a head of leafy vegetable was inserted. It was an experimental move. During 1985 and 1986 people found such a rebellious action new and acceptable. It received much attention. If you go and smash a hole on

another's work today, it would cause legal and economic problems. But back then people found it to be acceptable. I believe Xu Longsen wasn't very happy. So you'd better interview him to see what he thought of it. I think the action was interesting, and so was people's reaction. It shed light on the mindset of young artists.

BC: You three did the *Cloth Sculpture* together?

QYF: Pictures were taken, some at Wu Song port and some in downtown Shanghai.

BC: Where did the idea of the *Cloth Sculpture* come from?

QYF: The exhibition asked people to present sculptures, but not traditional sculptures. And we three didn't know how to make traditional sculpture anyway. To wrap people with cloth would look like sculpture. So we called it *Cloth Sculpture*. It fit the concept and the title of the exhibition. It was actually a performance. Wrapping things with cloth was inspired by Christo, who was known for his wrapping projects.

BC: Where did you take the pictures?

QYF: We chose two spots. One featured downtown landscape and billboards. We went to a fast-food restaurant on Nanjing Road, a posh place to go back then. We decided to take a picture without ordering anything to eat. We went there out of opening hours so there weren't many people. We also went to Wu Song port. It was far from city, but not exactly a natural place. It was desolate, very different from the hustle and bustle of the city. I think it was Ding Yi who suggested the place. Hu Jianping came with us. He wrote reviews about our work.

BC: Were all the pictures taken in one day?

QYF: The pictures of Wu Song port were taken in one day. Others were taken separately. We took turns being wrapped and photographed. Later I participated in the *M Conceptual Art Performance show* with a performance featuring newspaper wrapping, which was a continuation of my previous practice.

BC: I watched a video of the show but didn't see you.

QYF: I should be included. That work also featured sound—the sound of a heartbeat.

BC: How would you describe the *M Conceptual Art Performance Show*?

QYF: It was presented at a cultural palace in the Hong Kou District. Pictures were taken during the process. There was a stage. The overall environment was quite dark. Song Haidong burned his work at the square.

BC: How about your work?

QYF: I stood still and was wrapped on site by newspaper. A soundtrack of a heartbeat was played for several minutes.

BC: What was name of that work?

QYF: I don't remember. Probably it was called the *Art of Wrapping*.