

HISTORY OF EXHIBITIONS: SHANGHAI 1979-2006

Interview with Zhou Zixi

1993 Searching Campaign

ZZX: I was at school. In 1993 I participated in an exhibition, which turned out to be quite important to me. It was the only performance in my art career. That was in September of 1993.

BC: Who else also participated?

ZZX: Some of my classmates.

BC: What were their names?

ZZX: Yin Ming, Wang Shanxiang, He Yongmiao, Shen Yu and I.

BC: How was the exhibition conceived?

ZZX: I worked out a general proposal and some specific changes were made during our discussion.

BC: What kind of work did you present?

ZZX: I will describe it to you. My original idea was similar to Zhu Fadong's. One person would go missing every day and the missing person notice was to be posted by this person on campus. It would last five days. And then our classmates would post notice to look for the five missing

persons. Later we would 'officially' declare them missing under the name of Shanghai Intermediate People's Court. The law stated a person could be declared death if he went missing for two years. But the application must be filed by immediate family members. We ignored that and supposed that the intermediate people's court would declare their missing. We also supposed that the five persons would be expelled from East China Normal University for they never showed up for their classes. And afterwards we planned to announce under the name of our class that we would stop looking for them and there was no need to contact us if they were found. Such was the content of the proposal. We barely made it. After the first two days the university intervened, asking us to stop. They threatened to discipline us and even to expel us. So the participants gradually quit.

BC: What was the project called?

ZZX: *1993 Searching Campaign*...I shifted my attention to oil painting. I chose it because I loved it, but I didn't have much access to it before entering college. In my first year in college I didn't learn much about oil painting either. The curriculum was not very reasonable. I wanted to focus on practice, so I started to work on oil painting. I seldom painted exercise works if outside classroom. My work back then was something like Bacon's style. In 1995 I participated in a group exhibition.

1995 Workshop on Foot Landscape Exhibition

Not long after I was expelled by the school in the end of 1994. After that I started to do some paintings. In October, 1995, we curated the group exhibition at Shanghai University.

BC: What was the exhibition called?

ZZX: *Workshop on Foot Landscape Exhibition.*

BC: Where was it presented?

ZZX: At the gallery of Fine Arts College at Shanghai University.

BC: Who initiated the exhibition?

ZZX: We initiated it and curated it together.

BC: Who were 'we'?

ZZX: Jiang Chongwu, Lao Mao, Pan Tao and I.

BC: How many artists participated?

ZZX: Beside the four of us, there was Guo Hua, Bai Li, Wu Wei and Liang Shaoning from Shanghai University.

BC: Who proposed the exhibition title?

ZZX: I don't quite recall. We worked it out together. We wanted to form an artist collective and *Workshop On Foot* was the name for that collective. But actually after the show

the group disbanded.

BC: Why was that?

ZZX: It's hard to say. Even now I feel I don't quite understand. That exhibition didn't play a significant role in the art history of China or of Shanghai. But back then it caught some attention. Senior Shanghai-based artists like Shi Yong came to visit. It was a debut of Shanghai artists who were of my age. I chatted with them. They said artists looked forward to seeing newcomers. Since we were the first batch of newcomers, many wanted to take a look. The exhibition was well received. Everything went well. If we carried on, there should have been a second and a third exhibition. But for no reason the group disbanded.

BC: Was there a curatorial concept behind the show? Did you have meetings together before the show?

ZZX: We spent all day discussing and even fighting. But unlike today's shows, we didn't have a clear curatorial statement. We mainly focused on concrete things.

BC: Did the show feature both painting and installation?

ZZX: Yes.

BC: What did you present?

ZZX: Painting. I never stopped painting.

BC: Was any performance presented?

ZZX: No, only painting and installation. Wu Jianxin and Pan Tao each presented an installation.

BC: You said many Shanghai-based artists came to visit. Was

this the first time you officially met them?

ZZX: Yes. We organized seminar around exhibition.

BC: Who attended the seminar?

ZZX: Li Xu...

BJ: Who organized that?

ZZX: It was a self-organized event. Pan Tao played a major role I think.

BC: Who did you invite?

ZZX: Teacher Chen Xinmao from East China Normal University and Li Xu. I don't recall the others.

BC: What did you discuss about at the Seminar?

ZZX: The exhibition. Obviously we were still treated like students. Besides Lao Mao and I, all other participating artists were still students. So to viewers it was a student exhibition and students were supposed to be encouraged.

2000 Beyond Desire

BC: How did the exhibition *Beyond Desire* in 2000 come into being?

ZZX: Gao Min, Shi Dehong and I focused mainly on painting. We thought of making an exhibition. Xu Zhen encouraged us: "We already did one. You hurry up."

So we went ahead. The three of us started it and then Yang Fudong joined for he happened to come to Shanghai and happened to do some painting. Yang introduced Chen Zhongzhu, his classmate, and Lu Chunsheng to us. Lu was an interesting man. He rented an old one-bedroom apartment, while we could only afford to live in farmer's house, shabby but big. He rented a flat like that a bed almost occupied the whole room. He would drag some paintings from beneath the bed to show us. We couldn't see clearly as place was way too small. He wasn't happy with effect was not good for the room was too small. So he would come to our place with a bundle of his paintings, all on paper. He couldn't afford to do oil paintings at that time. He had neither the money nor the space. So his works were all paintings on paper. He showed us a thick bundle of his works. We were so excited to see his works, thinking he was awesome. He was very pleased and thought he finally found someone who could truly appreciate him. Before he met us, he had been living and working in Shanghai for many years and was always alone.

BC: Why was it called *Beyond Desire*?

ZZX: Yang Fudong proposed it.

BC: What did the exhibition attempt to explore?

ZZX: It tried to search for ideals that had nothing to do with desire.

BC: What about the works?

ZZX: Paintings of various styles.

BC: Did every participant present one piece of work?

ZZX: No. Every participating artist presented more than one piece. It was presented at the Liu Haisu Art Museum.

BC: Was the exhibition catalog produced by Liu Haisu Art Museum?

ZZX: No. We paid by ourselves. We sponsored everything.

BC: You shared the cost?

ZZX: Yes, of course. Everyone needed to take out some money. Since I was the curator, I also became the one in charge of the money and how it was spent. After the exhibition we still had over 100 Yuan left, so we spent that on a dinner party.

BC: Did the Liu Haisu Art Museum ask you to donate works for their collection?

ZZX: No. We wouldn't have agreed if they had asked.

2000 Inertia & Mask Paper Work Exhibition

BC: The next show you participated in was *Inertia & Mask Paper Work Exhibition* in 2000?

ZZX: Yes. The preparation for *Beyond Desire* took a long time.

BC: How long?

ZZX: Almost a year.

BC: That was really long.

ZZX: True. I visited many people, including Li Xiaofei and

his wife, and Zhang Yong, etc. As a curator, I visited many artists. Initially I wanted to find some representative painters in Shanghai to do a group exhibition. But it didn't quite work out. But because of that I became good friend with Li Xiaofei. He was a great cook, and he and his wife were very diligent artists. But we also told them very honestly that the exhibition didn't fit them. After *Beyond Desire* we started to work on *Inertia & Mask*. We were very passionate about this show. It featured paintings on paper.

BC: Who initiated it?

ZZX: I don't quite recall. The several of us involved in curating and organizing conceived it together.

BC: Who else was involved?

ZZX: Xu Zhen, Yang Zhenzhong, Lu Chunsheng and I. There is few more but can't recall.

BC: Was this the first exhibition you were presented together with Xu Zhen and Yang Zhenzhong?

ZZX: Yes. But I didn't realize it until now you mentioned it. We didn't feel that way, because we helped them with their exhibitions. It didn't occur to us that we didn't participate in those exhibitions. Now that you mentioned it, it was really the first exhibition we presented together. And after that, there wasn't much collaboration among us.

2002 Sorry, I Don't Know Zhou Zixi Solo Exhibition

BC: You had your solo exhibition *Sorry, I Don't Know* at

BizArt Center in 2002, right?

ZZX: Right. That exhibition was a bit tricky. Originally it was supposed happen in april as part of the *One After Another* exhibition series at *Bizart*. Everything was almost installed. The day before the opening Xu Zhen gave me a call, saying the security bureau sent someone to intervene and the show might be not be open to public. Afterwards they posted a notice, stating the exhibition was cancelled.

BC: This is the work you referred to?

ZZX: Yes. I waited till May when I met Tang Shu.

BC: Why it was not allowed to be exhibited?

ZZX: I think it was mainly because of the instinct for self-protection. People were still afraid that they would be dragged into trouble if they had anything to do with politics. A major reason for totalitarianism was to succeed is people's fear.

BC: There should have been some materials left from this solo exhibition, right?

ZZX: Yes. We didn't publish a catalogue. But we made invitations, both times.

BC: Don't call it a contemporary exhibition space . It was called *T ART*.

ZZX: I didn't know that. I only knew it was located at the north Suzhou River region. In this exhibition I felt I figured out where to focus on-specific Chinese issues. Previously I tried to touch upon issues of all human beings. It was too grand to achieve. So I decided to focus on issues that China was facing. Such a theme continues to run through my practice. After the exhibition *Half Past Twelve* I went to a rural village to teach. It was in Fujian Province. It was called Guangcai Village, located in Xiang Dong County, Wu Ping Town, Long Yan City.

BC: Who and what were you major sources of influence?

ZZX: It's hard to trace back to the earliest source of influence. Xu Zhen, Yang Fudong, Yang Zhenzhong and Alexander Brandt (aka Fei Ping Guo) had great influence on the Shanghai art scene. The four of them embodied different attitudes for art. For instance, Xu Zhen showed a very meticulous approach, which was rarely seen in previous exhibitions in Shanghai. I don't mean that senior artists in Shanghai were not serious or meticulous. But I felt that they all shared this idea-that art was something romantic and accidental. The casualness was intriguing in itself. Hence, they tended to make exhibitions in a relatively casual and light-hearted way. They might think of one thing but the final presentation indicated otherwise. But they still felt it was quite good. Xu Zhen and the others I mentioned were not like that. If they wanted to achieve something, they would try to achieve it by any means necessary. They had a very meticulous approach.