

Miss and Jonathan Borofsky—were commissioned to fabricate monumental works in China. American Dennis Oppenheim was both a participant and the chief foreign consultant to the project. Most of the sculptures were sited along the main promenade of the extravagantly landscaped Olympic Park. Despite their scale and prime location, many works were overshadowed by the impressive Olympic stadium, the Water Cube and official sponsors' pavilions offering interactive displays using advanced technology.

Private venues in numerous art districts provided the kind of art that officially sponsored shows could not display. After the government temporarily suspended a show of Andy Warhol's "Athletes" and "Celebrities" series at Faurshou Beijing (an offshoot of the well-known Copenhagen gallery), most venues chose to mount exhibitions with a focus on China, offering a shopping list of Chinese names often found on the international contemporary art roster.

Two venues favored by local and international visitors alike were Pace-Wildenstein's cavernous new gallery and the would-be authoritative Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, both in the 798 art district. Also known as Dashanzi, the Bauhaus-chic area of converted industrial structures is now reputed to be the third most popular tourist destination in Beijing, after the Great Wall and the Forbidden City.

The inaugural exhibition at Pace Beijing, "Encounters," presented paintings by Qi Zhilong, Fang Lijun, Liu Wei and Li Songsong in one-to-one matchups with established Western artists such as Alex Katz, George Condo and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Although the theme of East meets West is increasingly outdated, the visual affinities between works by leading foreign artists and their Chinese peers were striking. This mano a mano hanging provided the Beijing art-viewing public, chronically short on shows from abroad, a rare firsthand chance to compare and contrast.

"Our Future," a selection of works from the Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation collection, gave an overview of the greatest hits in contemporary Chinese art from the past 15 years. The center also featured several new site-specific installations by leading Chinese artists, including a large pink, womblike, padded-floor tent composed of T-shirts, by Yin Xiuzhen. Lin

Tianmiao's "Mothers!!!" exhibition at the nearby Long March Space was a sensuous installation of her new satin-covered soft sculptures. These two women artists frequently contribute strikingly conceived works to China's largely male-dominated art scene, bringing a sense of quiet interiority to the widespread preoccupation with social critique.

NANJING TRIENNIAL

SEPT 10 - NOV 10
BY FRANCE PEPPER

The 3rd Nanjing Triennial, titled "Reflective Asia," was held at the Nanjing Museum. Organized by the RCM Museum of Modern Art and curated by Huang Du and Li Zhenhua (both from China), Fumihito Sumitomo (Japan) and Kang Jae Young (Korea), the exhibition featured 105 artists from the curators' respective countries as well as India, Southeast and Central Asia, and even the Middle East and Europe—choices meant to broaden the definitions both of "Asia" and "Asian artist."

The historic Nanjing Museum, built in 1933 in the style of 10th-century Chinese architecture, posed many challenges for the installation of contemporary art. Lack of proper lighting made it difficult to appreciate a number of works, and poor electrical wiring and little tech support hampered the proper functioning of many of the video pieces. Handwritten labeling, mostly in Chinese and with incomplete information, was painted with brush and ink directly on the walls, which added a touch of charm as well as confusion. Nevertheless, the high quality of many of the works stood out.

Yue Minjun, best known for his multiple grinning self-portraits, contributed the painting *Maze—Looking for Chinese Art* (2008), a modern rendition of a traditional Chinese garden from a bird's-eye view. The labyrinthine setting is replete with symbols of the literati of ancient times. (Images of teapots, birds, flowers, rockeries and bamboo were adopted as insignia by elegant retired Chinese

scholar-officials, who retreated to their gardens to cultivate artistic and intellectual pursuits.) Similarly bucolic was a video animation by Moon Kyung-won (Korea) titled *Diary* (2005), a meditation on the four seasons and the passage of time, a favorite theme in East Asian poetry and painting, here updated in a modern medium. Set to music, the work shows the leaves on a tree gracefully budding, blossoming, reddening and falling according to nature's cycle.

Darker but equally contemplative was the Japanese artist Meiro Koizumi's single-channel video *CraftNight—Devil's Play* (2008). In sinister lighting, a man made up to look like a vampire is asked questions about his early relationship with his father and instructed to manipulate clay as he works through his childhood issues. The process—leading to a breakthrough—results in a sculpture. Du Zhenjun (China/France) showed the interactive video *Human-Dog*, also known as *Chienman* (1996), which operates on an even deeper psychological level. Two figures morph between human and dog, attacking each other viciously. Walking past the screen, visitors trigger blurred images of the figures growing and moving swiftly toward and away from each other, their actions alluding to the animal nature harbored within humankind.

The curators' reflective theme was manifested in cutting-edge art that offered fresh interpretations of Asian

KYUNGWON MOON: *DIARY*, 2007, VIDEO PROJECTION.
COURTESY NANJING TRIENNIAL.



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DU ZHENJUN:
CHIENMAN, 1997,
INTERACTIVE VIDEO
INSTALLATION.
COURTESY NANJING
TRIENNIAL.

esthetics. At the same time, a new Asian script created by the Chinese design firm IKON was used for the Triennial's logo as well as the bilingual Chinese-English catalogue and website. Here, elements of modern Korean and Japanese scripts are organically melded with Chinese characters, an apt metaphor for a new visual language of Asian contemporary art.

GUANGZHOU TRIENNIAL

SEPT 6 - NOV 16
BY MATHIEU BORYSEVICZ

One striking thing about the Third Guangzhou Triennial's audacious title, "Farewell to Post-Colonialism," is its incongruity. While the surrounding region was a prime theater of the infamous Opium Wars, which forced China to open its major ports to European trade during the 19th century, and neighboring Hong Kong has only recently ceased to be an English colony, mainland China—with exceptions like the self-governing Concessions granted to several Western powers in Shanghai—has had no large-scale colonial history. The People's Republic was instead, the curators propose, self-colonized by a utopian Communist ideology, and it wasn't until the mid-1990s that postcolonial discourse entered China; like many other fashionable theories, it arrived as a Western import. Postcolonialism not only helped to reinforce the traditionally bipolar view of East vs. West but also became a ready-made conceptual framework for China's post-Mao esthetics. It is a framework, some may argue, that has allowed the contemporary arts of China to thrive.

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But now, in the context of more complex global realities, its relevance needs reconsideration. Postcolonialism's concepts, the Triennial curators argue in supporting materials, "once possessed revolutionary critical force but have become another form of dominant power discourse." Identity politics, political correctness and an institutionalized pluralism, or what the curators call "multicultural managerialism," are not only hindrances to artistic possibilities but fail to recognize our present reality. Six years after its inception, the Guangzhou Triennial bade farewell to the conditions that helped give rise to it. Following symposiums at the Tate in London in early 2006, and at various locations in China, the curatorial triad of Gao Shiming (director of the Visual Culture Research Center at the China Art Academy, Hangzhou), Sarat Maharaj (professor at Sweden's Lund University as well as Goldsmiths, London) and Johnson Chang Tsong-zung (founder of the Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong), along with seven "research curators," composed a show of 178 artists from 40 countries. The theme, Chang Tsong-zung claims, "clears the ideological ground for artists to operate freely." In the wake of such bold curatorial premises the show itself—held as usual at the Guangdong Museum of Art—was an unruly, albeit not completely post-postcolonial, account of what's going on today in contemporary art.

The Triennial's theme was most urgently felt in works that focus on the globalization process itself. In many cases, the concept of "other" was replaced with "us," a pluralistic monoculturalism rather than a fractured multiculturalism. The show presented African artists making work in and about India, Europeans working in Asia and Asians taking on American politics. Uriel Orlow, a Swiss artist, exhibited a group of works he made in West Africa about the famous Benin Bronzes (notoriously looted by the British in 1897, they are now in over 500 museums and collections worldwide).

The Visitor (2007) is a photo-essay in the form of a video of Orlow's audience with Oba Erediauwa, the reigning king of Benin. An English narration recounts the details of this elliptical conversation, which shifts back and forth between the bronzes, collective memory and the artist's current ethnographic interests.

While Orlow considered the elusive nature of colonial history, Shanghai-based artist Xu Zhen indexed the fictitious aspect of reporting current events. In one of the exhibition's many stairwell installations, Xu, with typical cheekiness, took on the U.S.'s war on terror in *Not Over My Dead Body* (2008), which proved to be a particular favorite among the kids. The piece was composed of a computer, printer, wide-screen television and stacks of DVDs. In this manned laboratory, stills from Hollywood films depicting the American military bloodily crushing Arab resistance were extracted, printed and used to paper the surrounding walls. The work implied that global politics are just that: we are all complicit in their perpetuation.

Throughout the show, scatterings of new-media work echoed curator Gao Shiming's sentiment that "today the virtual world is colonizing the real world." Most successful was American artist Joseph DeLappe's installation *The Salt Satyagraha Online* (2008), which re-creates Ghandi's famous 1930 March to Dandi as a virtual Second Life action. While the original 240-mile march was undertaken to protest the British salt tax and resulted in the imprisonment of 80,000 people, DeLappe once walked the same distance in place on a treadmill over a three-week period, propelling his digital Ghandi character through a virtual terrain populated by sci-fi freaks. Towering next to a recorded projection of DeLappe's journey in the exhibition space was an impressive 17-foot-high cardboard statue of the Ghandi character.

Equally impressive was Feng Mengbo's epic video-game installation, *Long March: Restart* (2006-08). This reworking of vintage Mario Bros. technology into an 8-screen, 16-level panoramic video loop is the virtuosic fruit of over a decade of experimentation, and creates an immersive sensory experience. In the artist's rendition of what he calls "the communist's creation myth," a Long March hero defies monsters, the Soviets, space aliens and Nationalist forces using bombs made from Coca-Cola cans.