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Image and Phenomena: The Development of Video Art in China, 1988 to 1998

Introduction

The exhibition, "Image and Phenomena" was the first significant engagement with video art in China. It consolidated the primarily individual experiments with video in art into an exhibition that sought to demonstrate the artistic potential of video as a medium and created a foundation for video's continued art historical and theoretical study. Curated by Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie, the exhibition opened on 14 September 1996 in the annex gallery of the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou and exhibited sixteen works by fifteen artists. Videos were shown on some forty television monitors rented through the electronics company, TCL, and played on VCRs borrowed from faculty, staff and friends in Hangzhou. The majority of works were multiscreen video installations, and many artworks were the artists' first exploration of video, offering a broad, if not unwieldy, survey of the possible applications of video in art. Wu and Qiu staked a claim in video as new category essential to the field of contemporary art, which they achieved through the production of printed materials, the organization of academic symposia and the visibility of exhibition itself.

Until 1996, and arguably until the establishment of new media art departments at several art academies in 2003, video was a marginal medium within the fine arts mainstream in China, and, from 1988 to 1996, fewer than fifty video artworks were made by some twenty artists. Wu and Qiu's exhibition sought to remedy this situation and to introduce what had become normative art practices internationally to an academic and institutional audience. While the exhibited work provided practical examples of video art in practice, the roundtable discussions, lectures and publications producing in conjunction with "Image and Phenomena" sought to establish a theoretical and art historical platform for the continued development of video art within China's mainstream fine art establishment.

Video in the 1980s

Video in the 1980s emerged within two oppositional strains to the mainstream fine art establishment. The first resisted the formal, stylistic and creative conventions of fine arts institutions and used video primarily to document performances and other happenings within the "avant-garde." This oppositional strain is often referred to as the '85 New Wave Movement, a spontaneous outpouring of independent artistic activities following the disappointingly conservative Sixth National Art Exhibition in 1984 and a general return of conservative cultural attitudes following the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1984. The '85 New Wave's "avant-garde" is most closely associated with the writing of art critic Gao Minglu, then-editor of *Fine Arts in China* and later organizer of the seminal exhibition, "China/Avant-Garde," in Feburary 1989. Gao estimated that over eighty artist groups in twenty-three cities and provinces emerged in China from 1985 to 1986.[1] The movement embraced a self-conscious iconoclasm, but, from 1986, increasingly sought to discursively and organizationally formalize the disparate independent activities of the avant-garde in a cohesive "movement." The rise of a self-conscious, self-stylized avant-garde rankled its radical experimentalists, who sought autonomy from the fine arts establishment and who perceived, in centralization and formalization, the reproduction of institutionalized conventions and behaviors. The second oppositional strain that emerged in the 1980s

resisted an increasingly self-stylized avant-garde, and sought alternative visual languages to the primarily painterly explorations of Euro-American modernisms associated with the '85 New Wave. The radical artistic experiments and social interventions of the late 1980s, of which video was a central component and critical device, emerged from within this milieu.

Video was most commonly used during the 1980s to record and document performances and art events, and video cameras were accessible to artists primarily through television studios and work units, their use secured through connections or studio commissions. Many of the performances and activities most commonly associated with the '85 New Wave Movement were created for special topic films (*zhuantipian*) or for culture segments on local news programs. In some ways, documentary commissions by state-run television stations encouraged the organization and filming of avant-garde activities. For example, many of the performances and spontaneous activities associated with the '85 New Wave Movement were organized for a CCTV commissioned special topics film, Today's *New Wave Art*, produced by Li Shaowu and Gao Minglu. The three episode broadcast interviews and recorded the performances and exhibitions of artists in eight cities across China, and, through the special topic film's standard illustrated lecture format, offered a narrative of the '85 New Wave Movement as both an expression and symbol of China's national cultural revival following opening up and reform.[2] As Gao and Li's documentary suggests, artists in the 1980s primarily experienced video as the object of the camera's lens, as the subject of local news programs or special topics films. However, important exceptions exist with artists like Qian Weikang and Liang Juhui, whose practical exposure to the video camera was gained professionally through their work units.

Qian Weikang became familiar with the video camera through his work on the Shanghai Galvanized Wire factory's propaganda team.[3] The six-member team was tasked with producing two to three short internal broadcasts per week that were shown over lunch in the factory's canteen. Their short news segments were recorded on a JVC camcorder. Qian had transferred to the Shanghai Galvanized Wire factory in 1986 after several years working in the furnace room at the Shanghai Electric factory. On the factory's news team, Qian was in charge of the copy, but he also learned how to frame shots, operate a camera and cut film. The experiences framed video as a space of narrative and of an imaginary (*xugou*), where he could produce human interest stories about workers in the factory under the auspices of political directives and safety campaigns, just as easily as mainstream media could manipulate human interest stories in the name of politics and ideology.

Liang Juhui was not only designed the sets for some of the most popular Cantonese period dramas in the 1980s and 1990s as an artistic director at Guangzhou Television from 1984 until 2006, but was essential to producing, and televising, the First Experimental Exhibition of the Southern Artist Salon in 1986. During the 1980s, the Southern Artist Salon was the most prominent independent artist group in Guangzhou. It was a loose collection of students and recent graduates from several local Guangzhou universities that gathered to discuss aesthetics and philosophy. Beginning in May 1986, the salon's visual artists began discussing the possibility of organizing an exhibition.[4] When realized in September 1986, the First Experimental Exhibition of the Southern Artist Salon more closely resembled a modern dance performance than a fine arts exhibition.[5] The exhibition unfolded as a sequence of choreographed arrangements of wooden cubes, human poses and colored lights, bound together by its formal staging and an ambient electronic score. Audience members experienced the performance as theater in the round, but the precise formations of bodies and objects on stage often only revealed themselves as formal compositions within the camera's frame, which were captured on television cameras mounted aerially above the stage and at stage level on mobile pedestals. The set design melded salon artist Wang Du's sensibilities as a formally trained sculptor and Liang Juhui's sensitivity to the staging and framing of an televised event. In addition to securing lighting, sound and film crews, as well as air time on Guangzhou Television, Liang cultivated an understanding of the exhibition as a televised event, and, for salon artists, the future television audience came to be perceived as important virtual extension of the salon and its exhibition's claim to openness and accessibility.

Where Gao used video to construct a narrative of the avant-garde and the Southern Artist's Salon incorporated video into a broader program of artistic experimentation across media, Zhang Peili used video as both conceptual and critical device. In 1988, he created, *30 x 30*, a three-hour work that records Zhang's gloved hands repeatedly breaking and repairing a square mirror [Fig. 1].[6] Recorded at the Hangzhou Customs Bureau on the bureau's video equipment, Zhang's canvas sneakers and crossed legs frame the upper margins of the image, whilst the seams between terrazzo tiles create a sharp orthogonal line running from the upper right to lower left corner of the screen. Semitransparent bottles of glue populate the lower left edge of the frame, dodging in and out of view according to their application to shattered glass. The original, unedited recording played with the extended temporality of the tape and of remediated performance, but also transferred to the medium of video the painterly sensibility of a highly rational pictorial surface which Zhang had developed in the series, *X?*, and a group of nine paintings of swimmers and musicians created between 1985 to 1987.

Fig. 1. Zhang Peili, 30 x 30, 1988, single channel video, 32 minutes

While stylistic sensibilities may have carried into *30 x 30*, the video played with the extended temporality of the tape and of remediated performance, and Zhang's interest in the television monitor reflected the growth of a popular consumer culture. In an interview with the Asia Art Archive, Zhang discusses *30 x 30* as such:

> In 1988, television was already fairly commonplace. In urban areas, most households had a television set, many of which were color. People started owning not only VHS recorders but personal camcorders. Television was an increasingly important part of people's lives. Anyone who owned a television spent a lot of time watching it, regardless of whether you enjoyed it, because television was a new thing. On the other hand, from 1986 onwards, at the same time as I became curious about television, I started to become interested in approaches and methods [to art] outside of painting. But, I wasn't thinking about creating something that was Video Art. I had never even considered it, nor had I thought about whether [30 x 30] was performance or video art.[7]

Significantly, Zhang underscores that his earliest, much like other artists' earliest, uses of video in art were not motivated by the desire to create video art as such. Rather, video was applied in the service of existing conceptual or artistic concerns, but registered the means through which a new popular mass culture and its collective imaginaries were being created.

Widespread television ownership was a new phenomena in the 1980s, a result of open door policies and economic reform. In 1976, there were only 463,000 television sets in China, and only 4,000 of them were color sets. Ninety eight percent of these televisions were owned by work units.[8] By 1987, there were 1.2 hundred million television sets in China and 47.8 percent were owned by private households.[9] By 1988, when Zhang began to think about new artistic materials and become accustomed to the familiar newness of camcorders, VCRs and color television sets in private homes, ownership of a television set had emerged within the popular imaginary as the symbol of modernization and material attainment. Television sets, as well as consumer electronics and personal computers, arrived in China later than in many other parts of the world. Popular fascination with television set ownership was as much the symptom of a new commodity-oriented mainstream culture as it anticipated the rise of a dominant culture of materialistic consumerism in the 1990s. The television set in the late 1980s seemed to symbolize the sweeping sociocultural transformations and ideological reorientation in official discourse during the post-Mao period, in many ways signifying the appearance of a new post-revolution popular culture.

Although video accrued a new significance for Zhang with television's spread, *30 x 30* was also a response to the internal dynamics of an increasingly self-conscious, selfstylized avant-garde. Zhang created his work in advance of the gathering of artists and art critics at the 1988 Huangshan Conference, and was joined by Geng Jianyi, who produced the text-based work, *Forms and Certificates* (1988). Forms and Certificates requested trivial information on registration forms that mimicked those of the "China Avant/Garde" exhibition, themselves modeled on administrative documents from the annual National Art Exhibition. Geng's work responded to the avant-garde's sought-after convergence with the cultural mainstream and the parallels between its organizational form and the annual National Exhibition. To both Zhang and Geng, the increasingly institutionalized avant-garde had come to reflect the very institutions it sought to challenge and even supersede. For Geng and Zhang, the reduplication of the structural bounds of the art world, and the subsumption of the individual, and of individual expression, within the movement's collective identification, could only result in the reproduction of existing and historical systems of thought. Much as Geng's procedural mimicry foregrounded structural shortcomings, Zhang's durational video performance dredged the avant-garde's unchallenged artistic and material parameters, while also capturing, through the video's repetitive monotony, the sense of redundancy that pervaded the Huangshan Conference. Zhang's intent was to make conference participants "feel time," and, by making time tangible, raise their awareness of habituated professional routine.

Video in the 1990s

The concerns of the avant-garde, and artists' concerns with the avant-garde, dissipated after the violent conclusion to student-led protests on Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. The catastrophic events in June 1989 dissolved the youthful idealism of the 1980s and the artist groups so closely associated with the 1980s cultural fever. The years immediately following 1989 were characterized by an intense cultural conservatism and artists' retreat into the work units and academies that employed them. In the six months following June 4th, the support system for the avant-garde that existed within the fine arts establishment's publishing houses, museums, academies and professional associations was slowly, but deliberately, disassembled through organizational closures, job reassignments and forced resignations.[10] Many artists also emigrated abroad. In the mid-1990s, they would form a global network essential to the transnational circulation of information about contemporary art practices, but, in the immediate period after 1989, their numerous departures contributed to the profound sense of loss and alienation in the immediate post-1989 period.

The most noticeable transformation within China's cultural sphere in the 1990s was its marketization and globalization. During the 1980s, the state-sponsored system for the arts was the almost exclusive arbiter of taste and system of patronage, but, following the deepening of economic reforms initiated in January 1992 with Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour, global markets and the transnational art world would begin to introduce alternative cultural systems and mainstreams. Simultaneously, reforms asked cultural industries and organizations to submit to economic restructuring and respond to market competition for the first time.

In spite of economic reforms and restructuring, the conditions of artistic production, circulation and display for most of the 1990s continued to be determined by the socialist statesponsored fine arts system inherited from the Soviets in the 1950s. Video experimentation occurred because of the independent practical experiments of artists based primarily in Beijing, Hangzhou, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Their exploration of video, like those with performance, photography and installation, arose in response to contemporary post-1989 sociocultural realities that exceeded extant forms of representation. Most early applications of video in art were undertaken by formally trained painters who were attracted to video as a symbolic marker of artistic and personal independence and for the unique pictorial possibilities it presented.

Video experimentation fell against an intensely closed and limited cultural system that imposed an informal ban on the exhibition of non-sanctioned, alternative art forms. Artists responded to institutional marginalization by organizing their own exhibitions in temporary spaces, whose frequent closure by local authorities encouraged the production of scalable, portable and reproducible work. Artists ability to produce video work was further limited by access to technologies and the necessary negotiation of professional or personal networks to use filming and editing equipment available almost exclusively in state-run organizations. This would change towards the end of the decade as rising incomes, and an expanding consumer market and private sector made video cameras available for personal use.

The production of Zhang Peili's *Water: Standard Version from the Cihai Dictionary* (1991) illustrates how experimental artists accessed and utilized state resources to produce work. Through critic and curator Li Xianting, Zhang was introduced to a member of the CCTV news team who agreed, for 1,000 renminbi, to have the national evening news anchor Xing Zhibin read a selected excerpt from the *Cihai* dictionary. Zhang had portrayed news anchors previously in two multi-panel oil paintings completed in 1990 and 1991. Their serial representation across canvases played with the motif of the film strip and of subtle ruptures in seemingly stable images across frames, but the opportunity to create a video depicting a similar theme arose while Zhang was in Beijing editing *Assignment No. 3 (Hygiene)* [Fig. 2] prior to its exhibition in Shanghai. The final work records Xing, anchorwoman for the national evening news, reading the dictionary for nearly ten minutes in the practiced formality, cadence and pronunciation of an official broadcast.
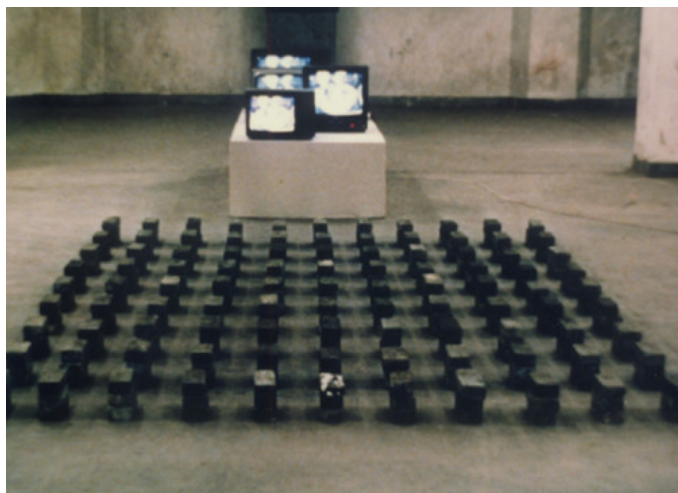
Fig. 2. Zhang Peili, Assignment No. 3 (Hygiene), 1991, video installation, exhibition view "Garage Art Exhibition", November 1991

Similarly, in 1993, Tong Biao, then an undergraduate in the printmaking department at the China Academy of Art, enlisted the help and resources of a former classmate from the Affiliated High School of the China Academy of Art to create the artwork, *Twelve Sleeping Positions* (1994).[11] Employed in the cultural affairs section of the People's Liberation Army, Tong Biao's classmate had access to their filming and editing equipment. Tong provided her with filming and editing instructions through written correspondence, and she delivered the completed work by mail to Tong in Hangzhou. The resulting sixty minute video splices together 12 five-minute segments of army cadets sleeping in their bunks.

There were also important exceptions to a general dependence on resources within the cultural establishment to make video, such as Song Dong who purchased a Sony Hi8 camera in 1993 for around 8,000 renminbi, then an enormous sum. Prior to this, Song had rented cameras from both his university and a wedding studio to film, respectively, his graduate work and a 1992 performance in which he stir fried water. In order to purchase the camcorder, Song had supplemented his teacher's salary with an additional design job in Harbin, commuting there almost weekly from Beijing.[12]

In their absence from the filming and editing process, Zhang and Tong's examples illustrate the common difficulty in obtaining video cameras and editing equipment. This would change as the decade progressed and more, and more affordable, cameras became available on consumer markets. At the same time, more opportunities arrived for artists to supplement their existing sources of income. The combined expansion of consumer electronic markets provided artists with greater technological and economic means to work with video. The production of video art from the mid-1990s also reflected this shift, and artists, particularly those in Shanghai, increasingly rented their filming equipment from advertising agencies and wedding photography studios. However, even as handheld and shoulder mounted video cameras became readily available, access to post-production equipment and editing studios remained extremely difficult. Numerous participants in "Image and Phenomena" clandestinely used the post-production facilities at television studios to edit their videos, while others used editing equipment in advertising companies.[13]

Early Exposure to Video Art as Practice and Medium

In the 1980s and the early 1990s, art academies were the primary sites for the dissemination of information about video art practices. Art academy libraries included valuable visual material such as exhibition catalogues and artist monographs, while reference sections included subscriptions to domestic and foreign arts journals. Through the illustrations, exhibition reviews, artist profiles and editorials published in Taiwanese journals such as *Lion Art (Xiongshi Meishu)* and American publications such as *Art in America*, artists in China became aware of video art's development in Europe and America. These publications generated an awareness of video art, but their presentation of video art as still images and installation views provided little sense of video's distinctive properties or potential.

Academic exchanges provided the initial instances in which video art was seen as a moving, rather than still, image. Visiting professorships, visiting lecturers and international exchanges provided important instances when information about contemporary art, its history and practices reached Chinese audiences. Although major exhibitions in state run museums and cultural centers brought examples of modern and contemporary art to China during the 1980s, the artists and artworks selected were rarely working in alternative media.[14] The relatively private spaces of academy galleries and lecture halls provided the primary sites of exposure to and discussion about alternative media and practices. Lectures about video art occurred in Hangzhou in the late 1980s and early 1990s by professors such as John Aiken and Wolf Kahlen.[15]

For "Image and Phenomena" curators Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie, as well as their classmates then attending the China Academy of Art, it was during an academic exchange between the Hamburg Academy of Fine Art in April 1990 where video as a medium with a distinctive history and distinctive artistic potentials took hold. Over three two-hour sessions, video artist and Hamburg Academy of Fine Art professor Ernst Mitzka screened the entire program of *Kunstkanal (Art Channel)*, a television program created as part of the arts festival celebrating the 2,000th anniversary of the city of Bonn. The *Kunstkanal* program was one of the few instances when video art aired on broadcast television, and the program saw video integrated into a larger programming experiment that played with the content, format and technologies of broadcast television. In total, eight one-hour episodes were created with sponsorship from Bonn's cable television station, RTLplus, and the Federal Ministry for Science, Education and Research. Mitzka, Rotraut Pape and Gérard Couty acted as artistic directors for the program as well as the nightly newscasters during a live segment that reported on ongoing art events during the Bonn Cultural Festival. Aired in late September 1989, each episode contained original experimentation with visual design, screen text, motion graphics and other electronic effects as well as video works like Bill Viola's *Anthems* (1983) and Peter Campus' *Three Transitions (1973)*.[16] Kunstkanal, unexpectedly, attracted over two million viewers during its late night broadcasts, but is often remembered for its uncommon use of broadcast television not as an object of critique but as an alternative platform for the display for video art.[17]

Mitzka's April 1990 trip to China was a happy accident, the result of an invitation from his colleague and fellow professor at the Hamburg Academy of Fine Art, the painter K.P. Brehmer. Brehmer received his invitation to China from his former student, Xu Jiang. In addition to Mitzka, Brehmer invited fellow faculty member and printmaker, Rainer Oehms. The three spent twenty days between Shanghai and Hangzhou during which Mitzka gave two lectures in Hangzhou. His talks were casual and improvised given in German and translated into Chinese by Sun Chuanxi and Xu Jiang.[18] He discussed the general trajectory of video art's development in Europe and North America, emphasizing the medium's radical political potential as well as the documentary and expressive possibilities afforded by the Portapak. Mitzka's talks were couched in the language of freedom of expression and democratic access to information, a reflection, for Mitzka, on recent events in Beijing.[19]

Mitzka's lectures were given in the academy's assembly hall, the hall that was later renovated into the annex gallery that housed "Image and Phenomena." The videos were shown on a new video projector on a cinema-size screen. Much of the student body attended Mitzka's lectures, and the students were joined on the second day by individuals from local television studios, who, reportedly, blanched at nudity in works like Friderike Pezold's The Monologue, a raucous romp through the female nude and the gendered image.20 Mitzka left his collection of VHS tapes at the academy with Sun Chuanxi, and these works were subsequently circulated around CAA.[21]

While these artworks circulated within a small circle domestically, Chinese artists circulated abroad as expatriates and as participants in large-scale international exhibitions. Their experiences significantly broadened the awareness of, and dissemination of information about, contemporary art practices. artists began to travel abroad for exhibitions and this would bring them face-to-face with artworks, artists and institutions that previously were experienced as slide shows, illustrations and publication images.[22] The increased mobility of artists and artworks within the global transnational art world distinguishes feature of the 1990s and its impact on the perception of contemporary art and its possibilities was profound. Beginning in 1992 artists who lived abroad began submitting materials about large-scale international art exhibitions and art fairs to domestic arts publication such as Jiangsu Pictorial and Art Gallery Magazine for print. Such firsthand accounts and journalistic overviews of contemporary art events abroad provided invaluable insight into contemporary arts practices and exhibtionary forms outside of China. For example, Jiangsu Huakan began regular coverage of the largescale international art exhibitions in 1992 with materials provided by Huang Du.[23]

Specific to development of video art and to the organization of "Image and Phenomena," Qiu Zhijie's experience at the 1995 Venice Biennial and his exposure to Bill Viola's Buried Secrets at the United States Pavilion dramatically altered his understanding of video art.[24]

In 1995, a small group of artists traveled to Venice. Zhang Xiaogang, Liu Wei and Paris-based Yan Peiming had been selected for the Biennial exhibition, "Identity and Alterity," and Qiu joined them from Hamburg, where he had just attended the opening of "Out of the National Ideology: Avant-garde Art of China." In Venice, Qiu's experience in the United States Pavilion was transformative. For the 46th Venice Biennial, Bill Viola installed an several sound and video installations in an exhibition

titled *Buried Secrets*. Composed of the three video works, *The Greeting* (1991), *Nantes Triptych* (1992), and *Déserts* (1995), and two sounds installation, Buried Secrets was an immersive experience whose sophisticated display, diverse application of video and the installation's layered, complex iconography was striking to Qiu.[25] It also transformed him into a "something of a missionary for video art in China."[26]

Qiu's "missionary"-like activity included the proliferation of texts and information about Viola's work, video screenings and, eventually, the organization of "Image and Phenomena" with Wu Meichun. While in Venice, Qiu purchased the *Buried Secrets* exhibition catalogue and an open edition viewing copy of *The Passing* (1991) from Viola's European distributor, the Amsterdam-based C&S Entertainment. Once he returned to China, Wu Meichun translated Marilyn Zeitlin's catalogue essay about Buried Secrets and the text was published in the October 1995 issue of *Jiangsu Pictorial*.[27] In Hangzhou, Qiu organized screenings of *The Passing* at the China Academy of Art, a screening repeated by Li Xianting during his "Image and Phenomena" presentation. Viola's work would also circulate in televised news coverage of the exhibition, contextualized as representative of video art in the "West."[28] In China, Qiu and Wu also sought out resources about video art's history and development abroad from artists, critics and curators who had both an experiential understanding of video's diverse applications, and materials about video art collected on their travels or long-term residences abroad.[29]

Making the Exhibition

Where his experiences in Venice cultivated an excitement for video art, Qiu's experiences in Shanghai while installing work for Zhu Qi's 1996 exhibition, "In the Name of Art" [Fig. 3], exposed him to the organizational methods of an independent curator and expanded his personal network to include numerous artists that would later participate in "Image and Phenomena." Held at the Liu Haisu Museum, "In the Name of Art" opened on 2 March 1996 and exhibited installation work from seventeen artists. In the months prior to the exhibition, Zhu had secured sponsorship to cover space rental fees, a curatorial fee and transportation for artists from Beijing, Guangzhou, Changzhou and Hangzhou to Shanghai.[30] The exhibition is perceived as having moved alternative art into a public space for the first time since the 1989 "China Avant/Garde" exhibition. Throughout the 1990s, video art was primarily exhibited outside of mainstream institutional art spaces in artist-initiated exhibitions within China or in largescale international exhibitions and overseas museum shows held abroad.[31] In the first half of the 1990s, spaces in China included university student clubs, art academy galleries, municipal cultural or youth palaces or private apartments.[32] From the mid-1990s onwards, the types of exhibition spaces expanded to include rental venues, including bars, shopping malls and, most prominently, real estate developments.[33] "In the Name of Art" was the first instance in which an individual like Zhu, who was neither affiliated with a cultural bureau nor an educational institution, positioned experimental art in a public arts venue simply by renting the space.

Fig. 3. "In the Name of Art" vernissage

Zhu not only claimed a position for alternative artistic practices within an artistic mainstream through the publicness of exhibition but also through media coverage in popular arts journals and Shanghai news programs; in June 1996, *Jiangsu Pictorial* and *Art Gallery Monthly* issued special topic reports on "In the Name of Art" and installation art.[34] The success of Zhu's exhibition, and of its monothematic grouping around medium, encouraged Qiu to organize an exhibition of video work. In the weeks following Zhu's exhibition, Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie began to draw up plans for "Image and Phenomena," and reached out to artists already working with video, many of whom, like Chen Shaoxiong, Chen Shaoping and Qian Weikang, Qiu had met in Shanghai while preparing his work for "In the Name of Art." By early summer, they had a working artist list of sixteen individuals, of which all but Wang Jianwei would participate in the September show [Fig. 4], and were in talks with *Popular TV (dazhong dianshi zazhi)*, TCL and the China Academy of Art to sponsor the exhibition and related programming.
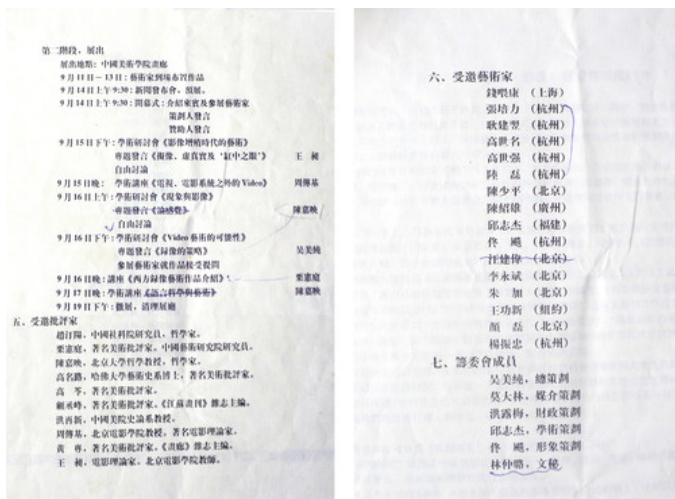
第二階段，展出
展出地點：中國美術學院畫廊
9月13日—13日：藝術家到場布置作品
9月14日上午9：30：新聞發布會，畫廊
9月14日上午9：30：開幕式：介紹來賓及參展藝術家
　　　第三人發言
　　　贊助人發言
9月15日下午：學術研討會《影像媒體時代的藝術》
　　　專題發言《視像、直實為"玉中之眼"》　王被
　　　自由討論
9月15日晚：學術演講《電視、電影系統之外的Video》　周轉基
9月16日上午：學術研討會《現象與影像》
　　　專題發言《論感驗》　陳意映
　　　自由討論
9月16日下午：學術研討會《Video藝術的可能性》
　　　專題發言《尋像的策略》　吳美純
　　　象加藝術家談自品接受質問
9月16日晚：講座《西方錄像藝術作品介紹》　栗憲庭
9月17日晚：學術演講《電影科學與藝術》　陳意映
9月19日下午：撒展，清理展廳
五、受邀批評家
　趙汀陽，中國社科院研究人員，哲學家。
　栗憲庭，著名美術批評家，中國藝術研究院研究員。
　陳意映，北京大學哲學教授，哲學家。
　高名潞，哈佛大學藝術史博士，著名美術批評家。
　高　，著名美術批評家。
　翻米峰，著名美術批評家，《江南畫刊》雜志主編。
　洪再新，中國美院史論系教授。
　周轉基，北京電影學院教授，著名電影理論家。
　黃　專，著名美術批評家，《出版》雜志主編。
　王　被，電影理論家，北京電影學院教師。

六、受邀藝術家
　錢喟康（上海）
　張培力（杭州）
　耿建翌（杭州）
　高世名（杭州）
　高世強（杭州）
　陳　磊（杭州）
　陳少平（北京）
　陳紹雄（廣州）
　邱志杰（福建）
　佟　颺（杭州）
　汪建偉（北京）
　李永斌（北京）
　朱　加（北京）
　王功新（紐約）
　顏　磊（北京）
　楊振忠（杭州）
七、籌委會成員
　吳美純，總策劃
　吳大林，媒介策劃
　洪器梅，財政策劃
　邱志杰，學術策劃
　佟　颺，形象策劃
　林仲略，文秘

Fig. 4. Exhibition plan of "Image and Phenomena". Pamphlet, 1996

The organization of "Image and Phenomena" recalled major institutional exhibitions in its formal structure, which included an organizational committee, sponsorship and media partnerships.[35] Roundtables and lectures were common features of official and artist-initiated exhibitions since the mid-1980s, and Wu and Qiu's programming also included lectures on film theory, phenomenology and art history. Prominent scholars Zhou Chuanji from the Beijing Film Academy and Chen Jiaying from Peking University as well as art critic and curator Li Xianting were invited to Hangzhou. Lectures were held in the evenings during the first three days of the exhibition, and were attended much more enthusiastically by student body than the exhibition itself.[36] On September 15, a roundtable was organized and attended by participating artists, invited critics and small group of interested students and recent graduates from CAA. During this time, Qian Zhijian, Wu Meichun and Wang Qiang presented short theoretical propositions about video and contemporary art.

Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie produced two small booklets of art historical essays, theoretical texts and artist statements in advance of the exhibition.[37] Most texts appeared in translation, an effort undertaken in the months prior to the exhibition's opening primarily by Wu Meichun with the help of friends. The books' covers and exhibition logo were designed by Tong Biao, and the texts transcribed at the offices of *Cosmo Lady (Dushi liren)*, a women's fashion magazine then located in Hangzhou, where Yang Zhenzhong worked.[38] The volumes, entitled "Documents on Video Art" and "Art and the Historical Consciousness," compiled a selection of scholarly texts from diverse disciplines, which, on the one hand, emphasized the interdisciplinarity of video art, the "synthesis of different fields," and, on the other, a generated an atmosphere of academic rigor through the diversity and breadth of the texts.[39] "Documents on Video Art" consisted of scholarly essays and catalogue essays about the development of video art in Europe and North America, and drew its texts from two sources: *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, an anthology of essays and artist statements, and the catalogue from "Arts for Television," an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art in April 1989 that surveyed video works produced explicitly for television.[40] Essays selected from Illuminating Video focused on the institutional barriers to video art's legitimization in the United States as well as video's subversive potential *vis-a-vis* mass media.

The second booklet, "Art and the Historical Consciousness," contains survey texts mapping either a specific field, a specific methodological position, or recent developments within Chinese video art. The first category of texts consists of the introduction to John Robert's anthology, *Art has no History: The Making and Unmaking of Modern Art!*, and Dudley Anderson's chapter, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory" from Bill Nichols's *Movies and Methods: an Anthology Volume II*.[41] Introductions to Marcel Duchamp, Ludwig Wittgenstein and the broader questions of phenomenology by Gao Shiming, Zhao Tingyang and Chen Jiaying comprise the second group. The third group, and the section included at the end of the book, includes essays by Qiu Zhijie and an individual writing under the pen name Lin Zhonglu, as well as artist statements and photographs of video art from China.[42] Both booklets were, first and foremost, an effort to establish a theoretical and historical foundation for video art's continued development in China by contextualizing its emergence in China within the history of video art in Europe and North America. The thirty year history of video art in Europe and North America provides subtext for selections in "Documents on Video Art," and is frequently referenced in exhibition materials, including Wu's curatorial statement and the exhibition's press release.[43]

Wu Meichun's curatorial statement consists of six concisely worded paragraphs whose tone alternates between an artist manifesto and the theoretical meditations of a curator grappling with the representational implications of technology on art.[44] She begins with stark commentary on the threat of mass media as tool of consumption and control and concludes with an affirmation of artists' ability to liberate technological media from its instrumentalization by the state and market. Wu's intermediate paragraphs exercise a self-reflexivity in her construction of video art as a practice, and her desire, an "activist stance," to use the exhibition as a catalyst for the further experimentation with video in art.[45] Since 1994, Wu, Qiu and Chen Jiaying had been engaged in conversations about art and the articulation of subjective experience.[46] These discussions formed the intellectual backdrop against which Wu formulated her frequently quoted proposition about the medium: "Video as a medium brings with it what kind of possibilities? Does video art exist as phenomenal image or is it a phenomenon that exists in the form of an image?"[47] The dilemma Wu grasps is that of technology's effect on art, of its unsettling of the relationship between the original and copy and the entanglement of reality and its illusory representations. These problematics have animated myriad theoretical and practical debates about filmic and photographic media since their inception, and, to varying degrees, discussions of the relationship between their analog and digital forms. Such theoretical endeavors sought to explore the status of the image in a media whose indexicality hinged on the same technical properties as its mutability. Such considerations were essential to "Image and Phenomena," and were immediately apparent in the exhibition's title, which constructed a dialectical tension between "appearance" and "context" through a double entendre in the homophone "*xiang*." In her play with image/appearance and phenomena/context, Wu invoked the contingency of the artwork *vis-à-vis* its physical, social and historical context.

Artists' greatest concerns with filmic and photographic media may well have been its relationship to, and apparent portrayal of, a phenomenological real, but the concerns described in Wu's curatorial text most profoundly articulate an acute alienation from the emergence of a technologically aided mass popular culture. Where the rapid expansion of television set ownership had caught Zhang Peili's attention in 1988, the diversification of televised content and the profusion of images and image sources concerned Wu in 1996. The decentralization and marketization of broadcast media since 1993 had dramatically transformed broadcast media from a media of pedagogy to a media of popular, consumer entertainment.[48] Expanding channels, coupled with the continued spread of television set ownership, permanently altered television content and forms of visuality, and Wu begins her curatorial statement as such:

> "There has never been a tool so seductive, and therefore so dangerous, as television. Television offers emancipatory freedoms that have little difficulty capturing us as slaves. Television's seductive charms transform its inventors into the instruments of invention. The proliferation of the image has already become the most startling of contemporary phenomena. The shock isn't just the sheer profundity of images, but also our life-world has been transformed into a world of images."[49]

Wu's "shock" registers that the types of images as well as their mode of dissemination had dramatically changed by 1996, and that the television set culturally and symbolically encapsulated the rise of this new technologically-aided mass consumer culture.

Exhibited Artwork

Wu's curatorial statement circulated amongst invited artists in early summer. The exhibition prompted recent academy graduates, like Yang Zhenzhong, Gao Shiming, Gao Shiqiang and Lu Lei, to undertake formal experiments with video for the first time.[50] For others, like Zhu Jia and Li Yongbin, "Image and Phenomena" provided an opportunity to exhibit works, both new and old, outside of Beijing. While for others, like Qian Weikang, the exhibition was their last practical and professional engagement with contemporary art. Works varied widely in content, form and conceptual investments, but all demonstrate tendencies towards creating non-narrative records of quotidian experience in largely unedited, fixed frame shots. The majority of exhibited works were multi-monitor video installations or multi-monitor video sculptures with sound. Most works were recorded on consumer video cameras with inbuilt microphones that allowed for synchronous sound filming, such as Sony Betamax, Sony Hi8 and Panasonic M9000, and whose videocassettes were widely available on consumer markets. The introduction and widespread availability of smaller shouldermounted or handheld digital video equipment after 1997 introduced degrees of physical and visual mobility largely unavailable to artists while creating work for "Image and Phenomena." Uniquely amongst exhibited artists, Wang Gongxin integrated a projector into his one of his two exhibited works, *Baby Talk* (1996), using equipment brought from the United States.

Works were installed along the central corridors of the art gallery's first and second floors. Larger sculptural and multi-monitor installations, such as Zhang Peili's *Uncertain Pleasure* (1996), Yang Zhenzhong's *Fish Tank* (1996), Chen Shaoxiong's *Sight Adjuster III* (1996) and Wang Gongxin's *Baby Talk* (1996), were concentrated on the first floor, while many of the single channel videos, like Zhu Jia's *Forever* (1994) [Fig. 5] and Li Yongbin's *Face I* (1995), were presented on vertical rectangular plinths on the second floor.[51] Sound bleed on both floors was extensive, a reality the curators could not anticipate and that was magnified, in part, by the gallery's architecture.[52] Electrical extension chords snaked across floors and up walls to reach sparse electrical outlets in baseboards and ceilings. Equipment rental required that the transparent TCL brand labels remain on the upper left-hand corner of all television monitors, and VCRs were borrowed from friends, family and faculty in Hangzhou. Few VCRs possessed looping or automatic rewind capabilities, and continuous playback required the nimble fingers of artists and audience members to ensure viewing through the duration of the exhibition period.

Fig. 5. Zhu Jia, Forever, 1994, single channel video [stills]

Many exhibited works used repetition as a mechanism to explore video's unique temporal and spatial sensibilities. This can been seen in the formal patterning of monitors in space, as an image repeated across screens or as an activity performed repeatedly or in succession. Zhang Peili exemplifies the tendency to array television monitors in space in a manner that creates sculptural coherence and allows for the play of images across and between screens. Zhang's work is often organized around a rigorous formalism that, through much of the 1990s, utilized the uniformity of the monitor and its component parts to construct an artistic language around internally coherent moving images. In "Image and Phenomena," Zhang's eight channel eight monitor video installation, *Focal Distance* (1996) [Fig. 6], is illustrative of these tendencies. The eighth monitor presents an aerial view of a busy traffic intersection. The image is reduced over eight screens from a clear recording to pixelated ribbons of color that move across the screen. The image's progressive discoloration and abstraction is achieved by the successive filming of each screen at an identical, fixed focal distance, a process that dissolves the clarity of the eighth screen into the indecipherable bands of the first. The process of abstraction disconnects the image from its geographical sitedness and imbues the work with a dislocated strangeness enhanced by the high pitched, otherworldly hum that reverberates through the work. The abstracted image is anchored spatially to its referent through a linear configuration of monitors, but the image's fracture and fragmentation in mediation points to the distortion of an empirical reality by technologies of representation.

Fig. 6. Zhang Peili, Focal Distance, 1996, video installation

Zhu Jia's *Forever* (1994) utilized repetition to communicate unease and alienation through the disorienting rotation of the pictorial image. Zhu affixed a small Hi8 camera to the wheel of a three-wheeled cart and cycled through the streets of Beijing, creating a video whose image rhythmically rotates around its center. The opposite curb forms a fixed horizon line and the axis on which the image turns. Wheels and vehicles traverse a receding foreground of dark asphalt, turned abrasive and reflective in the afternoon summer sun. A thin strip of cloudless blue sky swims around the edges of the frame in a counterclockwise motion. Beijing's streets blur as the wheel gains speed, and come into focus as the bicycle slows to a near stop. *Forever* anchors time in the uncertain relationship between the bike's forward motion and the cyclical reconfiguration of a stable composition, what remains in the work is a frustrating immobility in constant motion.

Repetition emerges in Li Yongbin's works in his sustained exploration of the human face in the series, *Face* (1996-2009). *Face I* (1996), the first work in this series, records the artist's face overlaid with his elderly neighbor's projected portrait [Fig. 7]. Li and his neighbor's mouth, eyes and cheekbones align as slightly discontinuous peach orbs suspended in an otherwise darkened space. Li's involuntary twitches and facial movements punctuate an otherwise still, silent image. The unfolding and enfolding of the artist's face in another's marks the eerie passage of time. The entangled appearances appear as collapsing layers of skin in an act less about the coming alive of the portrait, as it is about Li's own performative act of self-articulation. From 1995 to 2009, Li's work explored the temporalities of video through exquisitely simple manipulations of the artists' reflected or projected portrait in ink, steam and mirrored or transparent glass. The videocassette's sixty minute length determined each works' duration, while the image's variable opacity was determined by the quality of light filtered through these surfaces.

Fig. 7. Li Yongbin, Face I, 1995, single channel video

In other works, such as Wang Gongxin's *Old Bench* (1996) and Qiu Zhijie's *Present, Continuous State* (1996), time becomes subject of the work itself. In *Old Bench*, Wang embedded in a worn wooden bench a small screen that looped a video of his finger scratching the bench's gnarled and cracked surface. The residual traces of Wang's touch resonate in the bench's obvious wear, and evokes the passage of time. If Wang's work apprehends time in material traces on the bench's surface, Qiu's interactive video installation, *Present, Continuous State* (1996), uses a live feed to explore cycles of life and death. Qiu embedded two monitors each in oversized funerary wreathes. A looped video of a blooming red rose played in each wreath on the smaller of the two embedded monitors. One of the larger monitors played a looped recording of black and white family portraits. The monitor positioned opposite these images displayed a continuous live feed of viewers gazing at the cycle of photographic portraits. *Present, Continuous State* played with technology and circuits to lend the appearance of one's image a quality of continuously unfolding.

Qian Weikang's *Breathe, Breathe* (1996) most directly addressed Wu's curatorial statement and her reservations about the liberating potential of popular consumer culture. Comprised of three 10-minute sequences, the work is a nearly thirty minute rumination on perception, desire and a globalized image-world. *Breathe, Breathe* begins with a series of transitional wipes in which an eye-like ovoid form, audibly triggered by the ominous, throaty flush of a toilet. When the eye opens, it reveals images from print and television advertisements. The second sequence appears as a silent montage of television footage manually recorded, the monitor's granular surface pebbling the found footage's surface. News clips show the proceedings from Bill Clinton's impeachment trial and F. W. De Klerk's appearance before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as an extended cut of Chris Isaak's music video, "Wicked Games," starring the artist and Helena Christensen. This sequence abruptly cuts to street level scenes of Shanghai shot on location. Qian's camera tracks pedestrians as they pass in front of his stationary lens. Sporadically, individuals recognize that they are being filmed and gaze directly into the camera, rupturing the observational quality of Qian's footage. By splicing found footage between a sequence of wipes and location shooting, Qian's uses an array of cinematographic techniques to reflexively invoke the roles of perceived, perceiving and documented. The collection of images, scenes and individuals presents the sense of a changing social and political imaginary produced by the rapacious form of consumerism that took root in China in the 1990s.

Conclusion

"Image and Phenomena" sought to consolidate individual experiments with video in art into a cohesive representations of video art practice and to establish a theoretical and historical foundation for the continued development of video art in China. Wu and Qiu continued to develop this project in a second exhibition at the Central Academy of Fine Art in late August 1997, titled "Demonstration of Video Art China '97." "Demonstration" took as axiomatic video's discrete properties as a medium and used a uniform presentational mode to highlight video's diverse applications; thirty single channel video works exhibited on plinths and monitors of identical dimensions foregrounded diversity in the image and its mechanical manipulation. The exhibition also highlights the rapid proliferation of video art practitioners and works in the eight months following "Image and Phenomena." The increased number of video works was, on the one hand, a reflection of the exhibition's successful promotion of video art. It was equally the result of the increasing availability and affordability of digital video cameras and personal computers, change that allowed greater access to recording and editing equipment. In particular, personal computers introduced home editing software that freed artists from the material constraints of television studios and other production facilities by transferring postproduction into artists' homes and studios. In this sense, "Demonstration" announced, if not recognizably at the time, the steady retreat of video art as a film and tape-based practice.

Beyond the space they crafted for the continued development of the moving image arts in China, the importance of Wu and Qiu's efforts in 1996 lay in what "Image and Phenomena" signaled about the changing status and orientation of a self-consciously constructed field of contemporary art within China. Over the course of the 1990s, the field of contemporary art became an increasingly self-conscious one, and, in many ways, the organization of "Image and Phenomena" reflects practical and discursive efforts to designate contemporary art as a discrete subfield of art practice and art history, and to do so within the institutional mainstream. "Image and Phenomena" made an argument for this expanded understanding of art through the artistic, practical, theoretical and historical foundation it created for the continued development of video art in China.

"Image and Phenomena" acted, like several video interventions before and after it, as a prism through which the institutional, practical and social boundaries of the art world were refracted and addressed. Video's material difference from mainstream art practices operated as a symbolic agent and conceptual device to surface formal, institutional and stylistic conventions. Examined comparatively, approaches to video art in the 1980s and 1990s measure the dramatic changes that occurred within the art world over a short twenty year period and that transformed the structures of artistic value and of artistic meaning. In 1980s China, video art registered artistic resistance to an institutional mainstream governed exclusively by the Party and state and to the institutionalization of the avant-garde within that system. In the 1990s, video primarily proposed an alternative to the commericalized art object and to marketable dissent, both of which register the domestic art world's integration into the transnational art world. In its organization within the academy and proposal of a new art form synonymous with contemporary art, "Image and Phenomena" signaled the coming convergence of two mainstreams: the fine arts establishment in China and the international fine arts world.

Footnotes

[1] Gao, Minglu. *Zhongguo dangdai meishu shi, 1985-1986* [The history of contemporary Chinese art, 1985-1986]. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991.

[2] Gao, Minglu ed. *'85 meishu yundong: lishi ziliao huibian II* [The '85 New Wave Movement: An Anthology of Historical Sources Vol. 2] Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 607-633. I am thankful to Gao Minglu for making a screening copy of the documentary available on several occasions and Madeline Eschenberg for her assistance and company in the Gao Minglu Archive in Beijing.

[3] Qian Weikang, Interview with the author, 25 April 2015.

[4] Lin, Yilin. "Nanfang yishu shalong" [Southern Artist Salon] in Gao, Minglu. *The '85 New Wave Movement: An Anthology of Historical Sources* Vol.2 , 572-3.

[5] For clips from the performance and other filmed performances in Guangzhou in 1986, see the Asia Art Archive's documentary, "From Jean-Paul Sartre to Teresa Teng: Cantonese Contemporary Art in the 1980s" available online: http:// www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/SpecialCollectionItem/19891. Last accessed 26 July 2016].

[6] Zhang's performance lasted the duration of a standard 180 minute VHS tape and was presented at the 1988 Huangshan Conference as a work of that length. It was later edited to 32 minutes and 9 seconds. Huang, Zhuan and Jing Wang eds. *Zhang Peili: yishu gongzuo shouce* [Artistic working manual of Zhang Peili]. Guangzhou: Lingnan Meishu Chubanshe, 2008, 136.

[7] See Zhang Peili interview for the Asia Art Archive's project, 'Documents of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980-1990' [http://www.china1980s.org/files/interview/zplftfinal_201104271739035788.pdf accessed 8 June 2015].

[8] Zhongguo dianshi hongpishu, 2001 [The red book of Chinese television, 2001]. Guilin: Lijiang chubanshe, 2002. p. 161.

[9] Zhongguo dianshi hongpishu, 2001 [The red book of Chinese television, 2001]. Guilin: Lijiang chubanshe, 2002. p. 175. See also Hazelbarth, Todd. *The Chinese media: more autonomous and diverse - within limits: an intelligence monograph* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997). quoted from Zhu, Ying and Chris Berry. TV China (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 3.

[10] Clark, John. "Official Reactions to Modern Art in China since the Beijing Massacre," Pacific Affairs, 1992, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 334-352.; Wang, Peggy. "Art Critics as Middlemen: Navigating State and Market in Contemporary Chinese Art, 1980s-1990s." *Art Journal*, Spring 2013, p. 8. The Asia Art Archive "Materials of the Future Archive: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art, 1980-1990" contains numerous firsthand accounts of the impact of 1989 on arts publishing, institutions and practice, see, for example, interviews with Li Xiaochun [http://www.china1980s.org/ files/interview/lxcftfinal_201105061228566367.pdf accessed 5 June 2015]; Fei Dawei [http://www.china1980s.org/files/ interview/fdwft_201106291514225050.pdf accessed 5 June 2015]; and Wang Jianwei [http://www.china1980s.org/files/ interview/wjwftfinal_201104281649342663.pdf accessed 5 June 2015].

[11] Illustrated in Wu, Meichun and Zhijie Qiu eds. *Yishu yu lishi yishi* [Art and the historical consciousness]. Beijing: Private Imprint, 1996, p. 34. *Twelve Sleeping Positions* was sent to Shanghai to participate in Wang Lin's exhibition at East China Normal University, "The Third Contemporary Art Documents Exhibition."

[12] Song Dong interview with the author, 22 April 2015.

[13] Interviews with Gao Shiqiang, August 2013, and Tong Biao, May 2014.

[14] Jane Debevoise provides an informative discussion and statistical analysis of exhibition programming at the National Art Museum of China from 1979 and 1989 that demonstrates that, while exhibition content covered a wide variety of media and formats, state control through the Chinese Artist Association and Ministry of Culture

determined that exhibitions conformed to ideological demands. See Debevoise, Jane. *Between state and market: Chinese contemporary art in the post-Mao era* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014), 16-20.

[15] I am grateful to Professor John Aiken for pointing out during my talk at the Asia Art Archive on 25 June 2014 that he presented lectures on video art in Hangzhou in the late 1980s. Research completed after the grant period has also indicated that media artist and Technical University of Berlin professor Wolf Kahlen also presented materials about video and media arts at the China Academy of Art during his visiting professorship in 1990. Kahlen began traveling to China in 1986 and presented video sculpture and media works completed in and about China in two shows in Beijing and Shanghai in 1996 and 1998, respectively. Correspondence with the author, 30 May 2015.

[16] Qiu Zhijie records Mitzka's visit as that of a "Professor Mijka." Qiu, Zhijie. *Zhongyao de bushi xianchang* [The Scene is not Important] Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2003: p. 269. For more information on *Kunstkanal* programming and organization, see Blase, Christoph and Peter Weibel eds. Record>>again! 40 jahrevideokunst.de tiel 2. Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe; 2010, pp. 449-50. Details of Mitzka's arrangements in China were communicated through correspondence with the author, April-May 2014.

[17] Wyroll, Regina and Philomene Magers. "Kunstkanal" in Blase, Christoph and Peter Weibel eds. *Record>>again! 40 jahrevideokunst de tiel 2*. Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz and Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe; 2010, p. 449.

[18] Qiu, Zhijie. "Luxiang yishu xingqi yu fazhan, 1990-1996" [The rise and development of video art, 1990-1996] in *Zhongyao de bu shi xianchang* [*The scene is not important*] (Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2003), p. 269-70.; Ernst Mitzka correspondence with the author, 22 May 2014.

[19] Author's correspondence with Ernst Mitzka, 22 May 2014.

[20] Ibid.

[21] See Molly Nesbit's essay on Yang Fudong, "Wild Shanghai Grass," for an anecdotal description of the after-life of Mitzka's tapes in at the China Academy of Art in October 133, Summer 2010, pp. 77-8.

[22] The year 1993 is often considered a turning point when contemporary art and artists from China began to circulate extensively within the global transnational. In that year, "China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture," a touring exhibition organized by Hans van Dijk and, Jochen Noth and Andreas Schmid, opened in January at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, and "China's New Art, Post-1989," an touring group exhibition organized by Li Xianting and Hong Kong gallerist and curator Johnson Chang at the Hong Kong Art Center opened in February and traveled as the smaller, but equally important, "Mao Goes Pop: China Post-1989" to Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. It was also the first year that artists from China participated in the Venice Biennial. For concise chronology of these exhibitions and others, see Erickson, Britta. "The Reception in the West of Experimental Mainland Art of the 1990s" in Wu, Hung ed. *Contemporary Chinese art: primary documents*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010, pp. 357-362. The year has also been subject to recent discussions in the field, see "Panel Discussion: Exhibition as Site-- Extended Case Study (China 1993)," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. May/Jun 2014, Vol. 13 Issue 3, pp. 23-65.

[23] Interview with Gu Chengfeng, April 2014. Until January 1992, the irregularly published "Overseas Art" (waiguo meishu) section of *Jiangsu Huakan* published either monographic studies of European or American modern artists or survey texts of secondary literature, with the exception of a brief account of the 1991 FIAC art fair by Hou Hanru. Hou, Hanru. "FIAC '91 yu Bilishi dangdai yishu" [FIAC '91 and Belgian contemporary art]. Jiangsu Huakan, 1992, No.1, 48. What changed in 1991 and 1992 was that the news about contemporary art activities happening outside of China become almost contemporaneous with their occurrence. See Huang, Du. "Yidali Boluoniya guoji dangdai yishu bolanhui" ['92 Bologna International Art Fair report]. *Jiangsu Huakan*, 1992, Issue 10, 54.; and Zhang, Xiaogang and Lei Tang eds. "Guoji xiandai yishu wenxian da zhan" [A review of Documenta in Kassel]. *Jiangsu Huakan*, 1993. 9, 54-6.

[24] Qiu, Zhijie. *Zhongyao de bushi xianchang* [The scene is not important]. Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2003, p. 278.

[25] Wu, Meichun and Zhijie Qiu eds. "The rise and development of video art and the maturity of new media art" in Wu, Hung and Peggy Wang eds. *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Durham, N.C.: Distributed by Duke University Press, 2010), p. 234.; Gao, Songyin. *Qiu Zhijie: xingzou yu zhijian* [Qiu Zhijie: Walking Inbetween]. (Chengdu: Sichuan Meishu Chubanshe, 2007), pp. 25-29.

[26] Qiu, Zhijie. "Top Ten." *Artforum International* 46.9 (May 2008), p. 147.

[27] Zeitlin, Marilyn. "Bei maizang de mimi: bi'er wei'oula zuopin de yanmianxing" [Buried secrets: continuity in the work of Bill Viola], trans. Meichun Wu. *Jiangsu Pictorial* October 1996, 48-51. From Zeitlin, Marilyn. *Bill Viola: buried secrets*. Tempe, AZ : The Arizona State University Art Museum, 1995, pp. 13-23.

[28] Zhejiang Television, "Culture Park," 12:05, date unknown. News segment seen in a video compilation of news segments about "Image and Phenomena."

[29] Interview with Wu Meichun, June 2014. See also Wu's forward to *Documents on video art* (*Luxiang yishu wenxian*) where Geng Jianyi, Li Xianting and Wang Gongxin are thanked for their contributions.

[30] Zhu Qi interview with the author, May 2014.

[31] In 2002, Zhu Jia and Ni Haifeng organized "Synthetic Reality" (Hecheng xianshi) in Beijing with the hopes of generating more opportunities for video art to be shown in China. See Ni, Haifeng and Jia Zhu eds., Synthetic Reality. Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2005. See also http://www.krachtvancultuur.nl/uk/specials/synthetic_reality/exhibition.html. Last accessed 1 June 2015.

[32] For examples of artist-initiated exhibitions from 1978-1990, see Andrews, Julia and Kuiyi Shen. *Light before dawn: unofficial Chinese art, 1974-1985*. Hong Kong: Asia Society, Hong Kong Center, 2013.; Gao, Minglu. *The wall: reshaping contemporary Chinese art*. Buffalo, NY: Albright Knox Art Gallery, 2005.; and Gao, Minglu. *Zhongguo dangdai meishushi 1985-1986* [*A history of contemporary Chinese art 1985-86*] Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991. Detailed accounts of artist-initiated exhibitions, happenings and events were also created by artists during the 1990s. For example, see Song, Dong and Shirui Guo. *Yesheng 1997 nian jingshe shi* [Wildlife: starting from 1997 Jingshe]. Beijing: Contemporary Art Center, 1997, pp. 112-123.; and Ai, Weiwei, Bing Xu and Xiaojun Zeng eds. *Heipishu* [Black cover book]. Beijing: Private Imprint, 1994, pp. 138-149.

[33] Examples are numerous, but, most prominently and relevant to the development of video art, Big Tail Elephant (Chen Shaoxiong, Liang Juhui, Lin Yilin and Xu Tan) organized their exhibitions in parking garages, bars, construction sites and the street. See Fibicher, Bernhard ed. *Big tail elephant* [*Da wei xiang*]. Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle Bern 1998, 6. In the late 1990s, real estate developments and shopping malls emerged as frequent sites for experimental art exhibitions such as "Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusions" (1999) and "Synthetic Reality" (2002) in Beijing; and "310 Jin Yuan Road" (1998) and "Art for Sale!" (1999) in Shanghai. See

Qiu, Zhijie. "Houganxing zhan shi mo" [Post-Sense Sensibility: From Beginning to End]. Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2003, pp. 63-70.; Ni, Haifeng and Zhu Jia eds., *Synthetic reality*. Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2005.; and Ciric, Biljana. *A history of exhibitions: Shanghai, 1979-2006*. Manchester: Centre for Contemporary Chinese Art, 2014.

[34] See the June 1996 issue of Jiangsu Pictorial and the second issue in 1996 of *Art Gallery Magazine* for articles on "In the Name of Art," of which Zhu, Qi. "Yi yishu de mingyi'izhan zai hu juban," [The exhibition, "In the Name of Art," organized in Shanghai] *Jiangsu huakan*, 1996 No. 6, pp. 12-15, and Wang, Lin. "Yi piping de mingyi - Zhongguo dangdai yishu jiaoliu zhan shuping." [In the name of criticism - comments on an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art]. *Jiangsu huakan*, 1996, no. 6, pp. 20-21.

[35] "The China Avant/Garde" exhibition is good example and the exhibition plan is detailed in Gao, Minglu and Dan Yi eds. *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi*, *1979-1989* [A history of China modern art, 1979-1989]. Changsha: Hunan Meishu Chubanshe, 1992, p. 325-329.

[36] I am grateful to Xu Tan for this insight about "Image and Phenomena," shared after my presentation at the Asia Art Archive in America on 25 June 2014.

[37] For complete table of contents for the two volumes, see Appendix II.

[38] Yang Zhenzhong, Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie used the offices of *Cosmo Lady*, now located in Hangzhou Shanghai, and an unnamed colleague also contributed to the transcription effort. Yang Zhenzhong interview with the author, 22 July 2013.

[39] Wu, Meichun. "Image as Phenomenon: A Curatorial Perspective." No pagination. Available in Francesca Dal Lago Collection at the Asia Art Archive.

[40] Hall, Doug and Sally Jo Fifer. *Illuminating video: an essential guide to video art*. San Francisco, CA and New York, N.Y.: Aperture in association with the Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990.; Huffman, Kathy Rae and Dorine Mignot. *Arts for television*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987.

[41] *Roberts, John. Art has no history: the making and unmaking of modern art*. London and New York: Verso, 1994: pp. 1-36.; Andrews, Dudley. London and New York: Verso, 1994: pp. 1-36.; Andrews, Dudley. "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory" in Bill Nichols. *Movies and methods volume II: an anthology*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985: pp. 624-632.

[42] Zhao, Tingyang. "Weitegensitan meixue: huajie wenti" [Wittgenstein's aesthetics: the problem of demarcation] *Philosophical Trends*, August 1990.; Chen, Jiaying. "Ganren guanqie yishu" [Moved. Concerned. Art] Frontiers June 1996. Both republished in "Art and the Historical Consciousness."

[43] Wu, Meichun and Qiu Zhijie eds. *Luxiang yishu wenxian* [Documents on Video Art]. Beijing: Private Imprint, 1996, p. 1.; Wu, Meichun and Zhijie Qiu eds. *Xianxiang yingxiang zhanlan jihua* [Image and Phenomena Exhibition Plan]. Pamphlet. 1996.

[44] See Appendix III for complete curatorial statement.

[45] Wu, Meichun. "Image as Phenomenon: A Curatorial Perspective." No pagination. Available in Francesca Dal Lago Collection at the Asia Art Archive.

[46] Wu Meichun, interview with the author, May 2014

[47] Author's translation.

[48] For accounts of transformations within the television industry at both the local and national level, see Bai, Ruoyan. "Media Commercialization, Entertainment and the Party-State: The Political Economy of Contemporary Chinese Television Culture." *Global Media Journal* 4.6 (Spring 2005): article no. 12.; Li, Xiaopeng. "Focus (Jiaodian fangtan) and the changes in the Chinese Television Industry." *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, no. 30, pp. 17-34.; Zhu, Ying and Chris Berry eds. TV China. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009.; Zhu, Ying. *Two billion eyes: the story of China Central Television*. New York: New Press, 2012.; and, as memoir, Sun, Yusheng. *Shi nian: cong gaibian dianshi de yutai kaishi* [Ten years: transforming the voice of television]. Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2003.

[49] Author's translation. Wu, Meichun. "Image as Phenomenon: A Curatorial Perspective." No pagination. Available in Francesca Dal Lago Collection at the Asia Art Archive.

[50] Prior to "Image and Phenomena," Yang Zhenzhong, and the artist group of Gao Shiming, Gao Shiqiang and Lu Lei were each working with film and photographic media. In 1994, Yang used video to film his performance, Shower, while Gao, Gao and Lu had been working with photography.

[51] For complete works description, see Qiu, Zhijie. "Luxiang yishu xingqi yu fazhan, 1990-1996" [The rise and development of video art, 1990-1996] in *Zhongyao de bu shi xianchang* [The scene is not important] Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2003.; and Smith, Karen. "Moving images; moving concepts: A survey of the moving image 1988-2011." in Guo, Xiaoyan and Tiehai Zhou eds. *Moving image in China: 1988 - 2011*. Shanghai: Minsheng Art Museum, 2011, pp. 122-129.

[52] The tremendous noise in the gallery space was mentioned by all artists interviewed for this project. Qian Weikang discusses the challenges of sound bleed in a different light in his interview with Biljana Ciric in *Shanghai tan 1979 - 2009: Shanghai yishujia ge an* [*History in the making, Shanghai 1979 - 2009*]. Shanghai: Shanghai Fine Arts Publishing House, 2010.

Appendix I

"Image and Phenomena" Works List (Alphabetical by Artist)

1. Chen Shaoxiong, *Eye Rectifier No.3*, 1996, video installation
陳劭雄，〈視力校正器3號〉，1996年，錄影裝置
2. Chen Shaoping, *Coincidence Detection*, 1996, single channel video
陳少平，〈完全重合檢測〉，1996年，單視頻錄影
3. Gao Shiming, Gao Shiqiang and Lu Lei, *Visible and Invisible Life*, 1996, four channel four monitors video installation (sound)
高士明，高世強，陸磊，〈可見與不可見的生活〉，1996，4視頻4畫面錄影裝置（聲音）

4. Geng Jianyi, *Direction of Vision*, 1996, four channel four monitor video installation (sound)
耿建翌，〈視覺的方向〉，1996年，4視頻4畫面錄影裝置（聲音）
5. Geng Jianyi, *A Complete World*, 1996, video installation (sound)
耿建翌，〈完整的世界〉，1996年，3視頻，3畫面錄影裝置（聲音）
6. Li Yongbin, *Face 1*, 1995, single channel video (no sound), 36 minutes
李永斌，〈臉1〉，1995年，單視頻錄影（無聲），36分鐘
7. Qian Weikang, *Breathe, Breathe*, 1996, seven screen video installation (sound)
錢喂康，〈呼吸，呼吸〉，1996年，7畫面錄影裝置（聲音）
8. Qiu Zhijie, *Present Continuous Tense*, 1996, four channel video installation
邱志傑，〈現在進行時〉，1996年，四視頻四畫面錄影裝置
9. Tong Biao, *The Afternoon of August 30th*, 1996, four channel four monitor video installation (sound)
佟飆，〈8月30日下午〉，1996年，4視頻4畫面錄影裝置（聲音）
10. Wang Gongxin, *Baby Talk*, 1996, video installation (iron bed frame, milk, projector)
王功新，〈嬰語〉，1996年，錄影裝置（鐵床，牛奶，投影儀）
11. Wang Gongxin, *Old Bench*, 1996, installation
王功新，〈老凳〉，1996年，裝置
12. Yan Lei, *Absolutely Safe*, 1996, video installation
顏磊，〈絕對安全〉，1996年，錄影裝置
13. Yang Zhenzhong, *Fish Tank*, video installation
楊振中，〈魚缸〉，1996年，錄影裝置
14. Zhang Peili, *Uncertain Pleasure*, 1996, four channel twelve screen video installation, 30 minutes
張陪力，〈不確切的快感〉，1996年，4視頻12畫面錄影裝置，30分鐘
15. Zhang Peili, *Focal Distance*, 1996, eight channels eight screen video installation, 15 minutes
張培力，〈焦距〉，1996年，8視頻8畫面錄影裝置，15分鐘
16. Zhu Jia, *Forever*, 1994, single channel video, 30 minutes
朱加，〈永遠〉，1994年，單視頻錄影（無聲），30分鐘

Appendix II

<u>"Image and Phenomena" Bookl ets Table of Contents</u>
<u>Image and Phenomena: Documents in Video Art (Vol. I)</u>

"Video Art: What's TV Got To Do With It?" by Kathy Rae Huffman*

"Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form: Great Expectations and the Making of a History" by Marita Sturken*

"Watching is a Type of Religion: Arts in Television" by Kathy Rae Huffman^

"Image and Form" by Dorine Mignot ^

"The Medium is the Mess…age" by Bruce and Norman Yonemoto*

"The Cultural Logic of Video" by Maureen Turim*

"The Art of the Possible" by Francesc Torres*

"Video Installation Art: The Body, the Image and the Space-in-Between," by Margaret Morse*

"Performance, Video, and Trouble in the Home" by Kathy O'Dell*

"Television, Furniture, and Sculpture: The Room with the American View" by Vito Acconci*

"Video in Relation to Architecture" "by Dan Graham* (excerpts as published in *Illuminating Video* from Graham's artist book, *Video-Architecture-Television: Writings on Video and Video Works 1970-1978*)

"Video Black – the Mortality of the Image" by Bill Viola*

"And if the Right Hand did not know What the Left Hand is doing" by Gary Hill*

"Phototropic" by Tony Oursler*

"Behind the Image" by Muntadas*

"Directions/Questions: Approaching a Future Mythology" by Rita Myers*

"Fantasy Beyond Control" by Lynn Hershman*

"Video in Situ" by Eleanor Heartney (from Art in America, October 1995)

(*) denotes inclusion in Hall, Doug and Sally Jo Fifer. Illuminating Video: an Essential Guide to Video Art. New York, N.Y.: Aperture in association with the Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990.
(^) denotes inclusion in Huffman, Kathy Rae and Dorine Mignot. Arts for Television. Los Angeles, Calif.: Museum of Contemporary Art; Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1987.

Image and Phenomena: Art and The Historical Conscious (Vol. II)

"Art Has No History: The Making and Unmaking of Modern Art!" by John Roberts (introduction from Roberts, John ed. *Art has no history!: the making and unmaking of modern art*. London and New York: Verso, 1994) /《藝術沒有歷史：對藝術和歷史 唯物主義的反思》

"Moved, Concerned, Art" [感人，關切，藝術] by Chen Jiaying

"On Duchamp's Legacy" [關於杜桑的遺產] by Gao Shiming

"The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory" [電影理論中被忽視的現象學傳統] by Dudley Anderson (from Nichols, Bill. *Movies and Methods: an Anthology Volume II*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985: p. 625 – 631.; includes Nichols' brief introduction)

"Wittgenstein's Aesthetics: The Problem of Demarcation" [維特根斯擔美學：劃界問題] by Zhao Tingyang

"Why I Created A Work This Good – Methodology of Linguistic Experimentation" [我為什麼做出了這麼好的作品 - 語言實驗方法論] by Qiu Zhijie

"Historical Challenges and Opportunities: The Domestic Status of Video Art" [歷史的困境與機遇 - 國內錄影藝術狀態] by Lin Zhonglu

Artist Statements (accompanied by illustrations of exhibited and previous works)

"*Beginning with 30 x 30*" [從《30x30》開始] by Zhang Peili

"*Eye Rectifier*" [視力矯正器] by Chen Shaoxiong

"*Sleepers, Observed*" [被注視的實驗] by Tong Biao

"*The Machine as Physical Test*" [作為身體試驗的機器] by Qiu Zhijie

"*Moisture*" [水分] by Chen Wenbo

"*My Private Album*" [私人照相簿] by Feng Mengbo

Appendix III

Image and Phenomena: A Curatorial Perspective
by Wu Meichun

There has never been a tool so seductive, and therefore so dangerous, as television. Television offers emancipatory freedoms that has little difficulty capturing us as slaves. Television's seductive charms transform its inventors into the instruments of its invention. The proliferation of the image has already become the most startling of contemporary phenomena. The shock isn't just the sheer profundity of images, but also our life-world has been transformation into a world of images.

Since its rise in the 1960s, video art has become one of the most powerful and ubiquitous contemporary art forms. In selecting "image" and "phenomena" as its subject, this exhibition explores the following concerns: video as a medium brings with it what kind of possibilities? Does video art exist as phenomenal image or is it a phenomenon that exists in the form of an image? The camera focuses on its subject in a manner analogous to the relationship between perceiver and the object of perception, but knowledge is never purely the image objectively captured by the mechanized lens. Therefore, I would rather approach contemporary art phenomenologically as an ur-phenomenon, a present materiality continually brought into being and given form. This type of phenomenal appearance is embedded in contemporary reality, but does not function as its passive reflection. It is reactive rather than reflective. Contemporary art cannot function as a documentary device, even when it deploys the photographic lens in its service.

From the perspective of iconography, the so-called mechanical image should be understood as a formal manifestation, a coming into being, of disparate phenomena. The photograph is not simply the product of mechanical processes, but assumes meaning within a specific situation and a context. Only after recognizing this can we begin to consider: what type of possibilities vis a vis the image does video as a representational phenomena propose? How do we exist in a world increasingly turned into images? Such questions demand a synthesis of different fields in order to establish a dialogue between video art and phenomenology, iconography and sociology, a dialogue we believe is overdue insofar as the grounds for its occurrence were laid in the course of creative activity.

Video art arose as an artistic practice in the 1980s. When we elected to do an exhibition of video art, we knew the works selection was extremely limited, and so we decided to adopt an activist attitude towards the current situation, electing to take action now rather than wait for the quality and quantity of video work in China to improve and become commonplace. We wanted to use the act of exhibition to promote and launch an exploration of video as art, and propose our activities and the works as both reaction to and reflection of reality.

Much as knowledge has its subject, a camera always has its object. Because of this, video can easily degenerate into mere reproduction, but it is this risk that allows us to explore the nature of the art through its most radical form.

Our work with video art reflects our general attitude towards media and technology. We reject the technologically deterministic and neo-futurist discourses, but philosophical differences are no reason to reject new media or to cling to staunchly conservative ideas. Television is a Pandora's box of sins and desires, but media is neither the land of unbridled opportunity nor a land of absolute restriction. I have no interest in debating these two extremes because, even in the information age, I believe that the emotions and insights of artists are what continue to resonate through all media.

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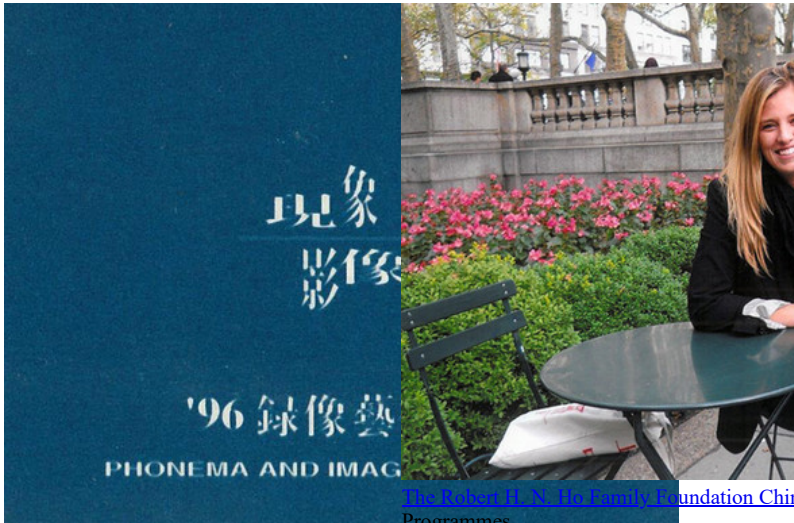[Katherine GRUBE](#)

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