

LISSON GALLERY

Artplugged

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Ding Yi Turns His Crosses Toward the Cosmos

Shanghai-born artist Ding Yi returns to London with new works that transform his signature crosses, moving from the geometry of China's urban skylines to the cosmologies and landscapes of Tibet and Yunnan.

By Len Gordon

When ***The Road to Heaven*** opens at **Lisson Gallery**, it marks **Ding Yi**'s first London solo exhibition in over five years. Best known for his long-running ***Appearance of Crosses*** series, the Shanghai-born artist has spent this interval turning outward, from China's urban sprawl to landscapes, cosmologies and spiritual systems rooted in Tibet and Yunnan.

Born in 1962, Yi came of age during the Cultural Revolution, when classrooms doubled as political stages. His earliest lessons in art were propaganda sketches, less brushwork than ideology. That imprint carried into formal training and was eventually reshaped into the radical abstractions that would define his career.



The creation of the Tibet series was a new opportunity for me, offering the possibility to observe local history, culture, and vast landscapes — Ding Yi

In recent years, he has shifted from observing Shanghai's skyline to engaging with Himalayan terrains and Naxi cosmology. Where his crosses once mapped the geometry of urban modernity, they now reach into animist traditions, mythic calendars and sacred mountain ranges.

The turn began during journeys through Tibet in 2021–22. At Everest Base Camp, 5,300 metres up, he felt abstraction merge with a sense of spiritual ascent. Soon after, repeated visits to Yunnan brought him deep into the Naxi people's Dongba culture, with its pictographic scripts, funerary scrolls and the epic cycle *The Road to Heaven*. Yi was struck by their belief in life's return to the ancestral land, a vision that resonated with his own attempt to create order in chaos through the cross.

The Dongba narrative, in which the soul travels from earthly struggle to transcendence, mirrors his own pursuit of abstraction. His grid of crosses, first conceived as cool, rational coordinates in 1988, has become a pathway to spiritual experience. That transformation demanded new materials. Dongba paper, handmade in Yunnan from bark and wolfberry grass, resists precision. Pigment bleeds into its fibres, giving his marks a raw, breathing density. For Yi, each material carries its own cosmology, extending his early fascination with papers and pigments across Asia.

The works feel rooted yet universal. Basswood reliefs, scarred with rhythmic grooves, echo mountain topography. Star maps of the Twenty-Eight Mansions expand his earlier constellation series, refracted now through Naxi cosmology. As Yi reflects, different cultures have long observed the same skies from entirely different perspectives, and he seeks to return these stars to the heavens.

If the cross once served as a rejection of emotion and ideology, it now carries the weight of nearly four decades of inquiry. What began as formalist detachment has evolved into meditation and homage. He frames his career in stages: steadying (formal abstraction), overlooking (urban modernity) and looking up (cosmology). Next may come looking inward. For now, his practice rests on what he calls "the miracle of encounter": learning from other cultures without exoticising them, bringing their knowledge into dialogue with his own.

"I don't want to become a fundamentalist abstract painter," Yi admits. "Each exhibition is a risk. But I still believe in discovery, in anticipation of the miraculous." For London audiences, *The Road to Heaven* is less a fixed cosmology than an experiment, an artist testing the limits of abstraction through cross-cultural encounter.

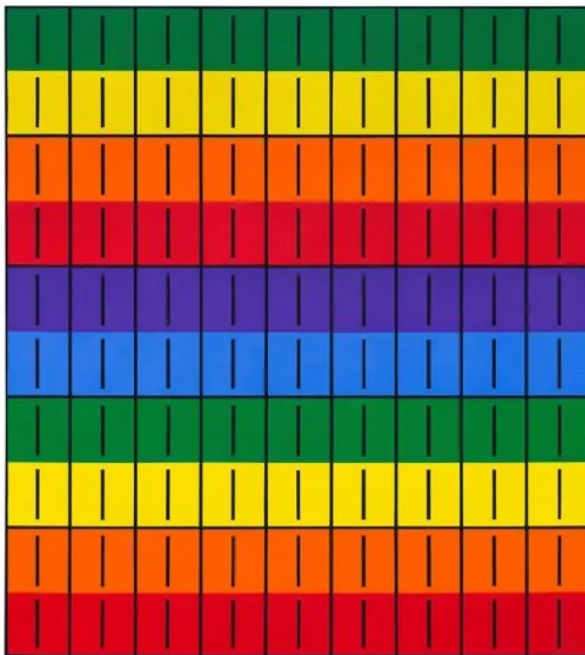
Ding Yi: The Road to Heaven opens on the 26th of September, 2025 until the 1st of November, 2025 at Lisson Gallery

Your exhibition *The Road to Heaven* at Lisson Gallery marks your first solo show in London in over five years. Why was now the right moment to return, and what do you hope London audiences will see differently in your work this time?

Ding Yi: In recent years, the focus of my work has shifted from the observation of urban landscapes to the exploration of old spiritual cosmologies. Recent travels centered around the Himalayas and encounters with the Dongba culture of the Naxi people have infused “Appearance of Crosses” with new energy and dimensions. With the opening of “**The Road to Heaven**” at Lisson Gallery, I believe now is a good time to present these phased outcomes to the London audiences.

My previous works might have been closely related to the urban fabric of Shanghai, while some works presented in “The Road to Heaven” originate from the mountainscapes of the Hengduan Mountains and the Naxi people’s spiritual contemplations.

I have extensively used Dongba paper, a local handmade paper from Yunnan. The audience should be able to perceive an intense, almost ritualistic materiality and spiritual density.



Left: “Appearance of Crosses II,” 1988, acrylic on canvas, 200×180cm; Right: Ding Yi at the “Exhibition of Today’s Art” at Shanghai Art Museum, 1988. Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio

This body of work grows directly out of your research trips to Yunnan and your engagement with

Dongba priests and scholars. What first drew you to the cosmology of the Naxi people, and how has that encounter reshaped your practice?

Ding Yi: If I were to trace the catalyst, it would be my trip to Tibet in 2021-22 and my solo exhibition held in Lhasa in 2022, which presented a series of new works influenced by Tibet. The creation of the Tibet series was a new opportunity for me, offering the possibility to observe local history, culture, and vast landscapes. I reached the Everest Base Camp at 5300 meters, fulfilling a dream I had since my student days in the 1980s.

Simultaneously, it was a spiritual turning point. The creation of the Tibet series allowed me to understand the local's spiritual beliefs and sense the sacredness latent in the landscape. Starting from this, my recent creations and exhibitions, from Lhasa, Qingdao, Ningbo, Shenzhen to Kunming, have revolved around site-specific travels, expanding the dimension of "spirituality" through in-depth investigations of regional cultures.

Last year, I traveled three times to the ancient Naxi region in Yunnan. I was deeply attracted by the animism, nature worship, the view of life returning to the ancestral land, the mysterious calendar of the Twenty-Eight Mansions, and the epic depiction of the soul's journey in *The Road to Heaven*. I decided to focus on Naxi and Dongba culture for this exhibition.

Dongba script is a pictographic script still in use today. Furthermore, classics like ***The Road to Heaven*** in Dongba culture construct a complete illustrative system about the soul's journey and reincarnation system. This resonated with my long-term work of constructing order and seeking transcendence through the "Appearance of Crosses". It represents an inspiration for "abstraction" from a completely different cultural tradition, one not filtered through the path of Western modernism.



Ding Yi: *The Road to Heaven* at Lisson Gallery Installation view
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

The exhibition title comes from the Dongba funerary scroll *The Road to Heaven*. How did the spiritual narrative of the soul's journey resonate with your ongoing artistic inquiry into abstraction, order and transcendence?

Ding Yi: *The Road to Heaven* depicts the soul's journey overcoming hardships to return to the ancestral land after death. This is essentially a narrative moving from chaos to order, from the earthly to the transcendent. This is similar to the propositions explored by "Appearance of Crosses" over the years: how to establish a coordinate through the rational order of art within an infinite, chaotic world, and through this coordinate, attempt to touch something eternal or transcendent.

The Road to Heaven unfolds a spiritual path for me. Each Dongba priest, while hand-painting *The Road to Heaven*, undertakes the mission of guiding others' souls while also embarking on their own spiritual ascent. *The Road to Heaven* constructed through the accumulation of crosses resembles more a soul's ascent in an abstract dimension. Order here is no longer the endpoint but the path leading to spiritual experience.

You've described the works on Dongba paper as a "translation" of cosmology into your cross motif. How do you balance homage with

transformation when working with such a culturally specific source material?

Ding Yi: “Homage” refers to a humble “looking up” in the face of culture, while “transformation” is essentially the artist’s inherent task. While preparing for this exhibition and the “The Winding Path” at the Contemporary Gallery Kunming and the Anthropology Museum of Yunnan University, I spent considerable time learning and feeling rather than simply appropriating imagery, so as to avoid the so-called anthropological or sociological lens of “colonial exoticism” or “Western-centrism.”

I did not deliberately imitate specific Dongba script or the motifs of “The Road to Heaven,” but sought to understand the underlying worldview – for example, how the Dongba people perceive the relationships between heaven, earth, humanity, and the divine. The unique texture of Dongba paper makes the crosses appear more rustic and powerful on this paper.

If the core of the “The Road to Heaven” exhibition is the awe towards the cosmos and spirit inspired by Dongba culture, the formal language of expression must remain purely personal. Taking the “Twenty-Eight Mansions” as an example, starry skies and constellations have been one of the key motifs through my recent work since the Tibet series.

The diagrams of the Twenty-Eight Mansions used for calendrical calculations and divination in Dongba culture introduced new developments to this theme. The graphical representations of the twenty-eight mansions in Han Chinese culture and Naxi culture are different; on the same land, different ethnic groups observed these celestial bodies from completely different angles at different historical stages.

I want to return these star charts to the sky, to observe these patterns anew. While paying homage to the original culture, if viewed in connection with my previous constellation series, these works actually present a flow of time and space.



Ding Yi Appearance of Crosses 2016-B10 2016 Chalk and charcoal on Japanese yuu grid paper, 500 x 1185 cm 196 7/8 x 466 1/2 in

The cross, both “+” and “x,” has been the heartbeat of your practice since 1988. After decades of repetition, what continues to surprise or challenge you about this deceptively simple form?

Ding Yi: “Appearance of Crosses” has a simple form and basic structure, yet possesses infinite capacity. It can carry my life experiences, observations, and thoughts from different periods. Initially, it carried the rationality opposing traditional Chinese art; later, it reflected the landscapes of urbanization; now, it can connect with ancient cosmologies and eternal spirituality.

Your cross began as a way to strip painting of emotion and ideology, yet in recent years you’ve spoken of moving towards intuition and feeling. How do you reconcile the rational origins of the cross with its growing spiritual dimension?

Ding Yi: In 1988, I attempted to use a purely formalist language to sever all possible connections with reality. After nearly 40 years of creating the “Appearance of Crosses” series, I needed to find new sources for my work.

It couldn’t be created out of nothing, nor could it be the early formalism; it had to be alive, synthesizing the history and culture of different regions and

ethnicities. Only by fully immersing myself and rediscovering and observing this world can a true source of “spirituality” emerge.

You’ve described your practice in three stages: ‘steading,’ ‘overlooking,’ and now ‘looking up’. Could you expand on how this current stage differs from the earlier ones, and how it changes your understanding of abstraction?

Ding Yi: Over the past forty years, the evolution of the “Appearance of Crosses” can roughly be divided into three phrases. ‘Steadying’ was the period of pure abstract idealism, where formalist research and exploring the origin of abstraction were the main direction.

The ‘Overlooking’ period discussed the sensory magical landscape of Shanghai’s urban transformation and China’s urbanization process from a neutral standpoint. ‘Looking up’ involves cosmological thinking, looking at the sky, the stars, and a larger world, shifting from a bipolar view of China and the West to a worldview encompassing more civilizations and regions. It focuses on the intersection of new phenomena of the era, the eternity found in ancient civilizations, and the primitiveness presented by nature, attempting to personally reconstruct cartology, the steles, and virtual worlds akin to online games.

The current stage might be the beginning of ‘Looking-Inward,’ but I’m not entirely sure yet, as ‘Looking-Inward’ is essentially another term for spirituality. The current ‘Looking-Up’ first signifies a change in stance. For ethnic minorities, the perspective adopted by external creators when representing their culture is crucial. Rather than using a top-down perspective to help or change them, appreciating their culture, recognizing it anew, and learning from it is the starting point of ‘looking up.’

During the actual process of understanding, I also discovered many things worth learning from. For example, the traditional natural view in Dongba culture advocates protecting nature and taking from it limitedly, which is actually a quite novel concept. Additionally, I interviewed the director of the Mosuo Museum, who discussed cases related to the “walking marriage” custom. In remote villages, this is a highly adaptable and quite advanced social system, playing important roles in property inheritance, wealth distribution, and population growth.

Many of the works in London are executed on coarse Dongba paper, whose texture resists perfect precision. How has this material altered the rhythm and density of your mark-making compared with canvas or wood relief?

Ding Yi: When I painted the first version of *The Road to Heaven*, I discovered Dongba paper in a shop in Lijiang. It’s made from beaten bark pulp, has long fibers, and doesn’t get soggy easily. Moreover, it contains wolfberry grass, which prevents insect damage. Dongba scriptures are usually written on this paper, which can be preserved for a long time. It also allows for a slight bleeding of the pigment. I utilized this characteristic

in the “Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions” series, using acrylic diluted with water to create a “bleeding” effect.

I have always been very interested in materials. Image and material are important ways to break through tradition. Early on, I conducted many material experiments, using various papers, pigments, and tools, including trying Anhui Xuan paper, Japanese paper, Indian paper in recent years... the most used is Canson.

I like handmade paper; it can bring me many new possibilities and inspirations, which in turn indirectly change my painting language. At the same time, I believe that to understand a local culture, it's best to find some relevant materials. The materials commonly used by an ethnic group can bring your creation into a scenario of dialogue with them.



Ding Yi: The Road to Heaven at Lisson Gallery Installation view, Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

In your relief paintings carved into basswood, there is a strong sense of mountains, geology and landscape entering your abstraction. Do you think of these works as extending the cross motif into architecture or topography?

Ding Yi: Yes, that's a very accurate observation. The composition of these basswood panels originates from the Hengduan Mountains. They are located in western Sichuan, Yunnan, and eastern Tibet. Geographically, the

Hengduan Mountains overlap with my two recent trips, one to Tibet and one to the ancient Naxi region.

I did intentionally extend the “Appearance of Crosses” into the field of topography. There is a “Himalayan culture” territory in my recent creations. The ancient Naxi region in Yunnan has a natural connection to Himalayan culture: one is the geographical connection formed by the Hengduan Mountains, and another is the cultural connection: the Dongba culture actually originates from Bon.

The Naxi are a migratory people, basically migrating from the northwest or the Ali Plateau. This thread runs through my previous connection with Tibet, becoming an extension. For this show in London and the ongoing “The Winding Path” in Kunming, I hope to incorporate more of Yunnan’s local culture. If possible, my next step is to expand the exploration of topography to South America.

Your grids and systems are often linked with Western abstraction, yet your work is also rooted in Chinese contexts. Do you feel closer to a global lineage of abstraction, or to a specifically Chinese visual tradition?

Ding Yi: Initially, my abstract system originated from Western modernism. This foundation in abstraction has developed over nearly 40 years, incorporating elements facing traditional Chinese culture, as well as elements facing China’s urbanization process. Today, we understand that Western abstraction has also undergone grafting and development in different regions and from different cultures during globalization. The lineage of a century of abstraction requires perspectives to explore new possibilities. This might be a personalized, unique perspective, a hybrid perspective. Therefore, I will not define myself, or rather, limit myself to belonging to a specific lineage or tradition.



Ding Yi: The Road to Heaven at Lisson Gallery Installation view, Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Your early works mirrored Shanghai’s frenetic modernisation, while your recent work seems to search for older cosmologies. Do you see this shift as personal, generational, or perhaps a response to broader changes in Chinese society?

Ding Yi: An artist’s growth is based on the continuous expansion of thinking and horizons. After an artist experiences intense reactions to the present, they inevitably turn to more fundamental, more eternal questions. When young, with limited experience, the world seen is partial. As age and knowledge grow, the world one can see approaches a fuller picture. Therefore, one doesn’t confine oneself to the micro-changes of a single city or place but tries to take a broad overview, seeing how the entire world is constituted, and attempting to express this constitution through works. So, this is a process of growth and change. I stopped using fluorescent colors ten years ago, actually realizing the so-called “thousand cities with one face” in Chinese and many similar drawbacks in urbanization, thus trying to broaden my perspective.

In Tibet and now Yunnan, you’ve engaged deeply with specific cultural geographies. Do you see these projects as a way of anchoring abstraction in lived history, resisting the idea of it as purely universal or placeless?

Ding Yi: The artistic explorations in recent years have made me realize that universality must be reached through specific, profound re-understanding of different civilizations and hands-on, site-specific exploration. The projects in Tibet and Yunnan are precisely meant to provide a solid “anchor” for my abstraction. I am like someone working on a jigsaw puzzle; the Tibet and Yunnan pieces are parts of the puzzle. In the future, this puzzle might include more and more pieces, eventually forming a large system.

The same applies to the perception of the “universal” in abstraction. One must open the door for more and newer things to pour in. I do not wish to become a “fundamentalist” abstract artist. Creators of abstract art can easily become formalists, clinging stubbornly to old sets. At a certain stage, so-called stylistic recognizability becomes an artist’s market guarantee, but this guarantee is equally dangerous.

The key lies in how to view it and adjust it: creation cannot lack passion and be mere repetition. I still hope to uphold an exploratory spirit to accommodate larger things, maintaining a vibrant state. For each exhibition, I take risks. Even though the outcome is unknown, I am happy during the process, anticipating miracles every day. This feeling is the state an artist needs.



Ding Yi: The Road to Heaven at Lisson Gallery Installation view
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

In engaging with Dongba religion and other cosmologies, do you see your work as a form of spiritual practice, or is it primarily an intellectual exploration?

Ding Yi: I believe that in the best state, the two are united. Intellectual exploration is the entrance, the foundation for understanding. Without serious study and thought, so-called “spiritual practice” can become superficial mysticism.

But when you go deeper, the process of painting itself does indeed become a form of spiritual practice. The process of depicting crosses in the studio is one of high concentration and meditation. It allows me to detach from daily trivialities and enter a quieter, broader state of consciousness. This state is essentially similar to the concentration of a Dongba priest during rituals. Therefore, it is a spiritual experience ultimately achieved through intellectual guidance.

When viewers encounter *The Road to Heaven* at Lisson, how would you like them to respond? Should they see it as a cosmological map, a spiritual meditation, or simply as painting?

Ding Yi: Will the reactions of audiences in Yunnan and London to the exhibition be the same? I have both questions and expectations about this. I hope this exhibition can show London audiences, European audiences, a new angle – a unique response made by a contemporary artist to the themes of Dongba culture within his works.

©2025 Ding Yi



Alfredo Cramerotti maps meaning to method in artist Ding Yi's practice

The curator discusses the Chinese artist's first institutional survey in Europe, at Château La Coste, in a video interview with STIR.

by Ranjana Dave

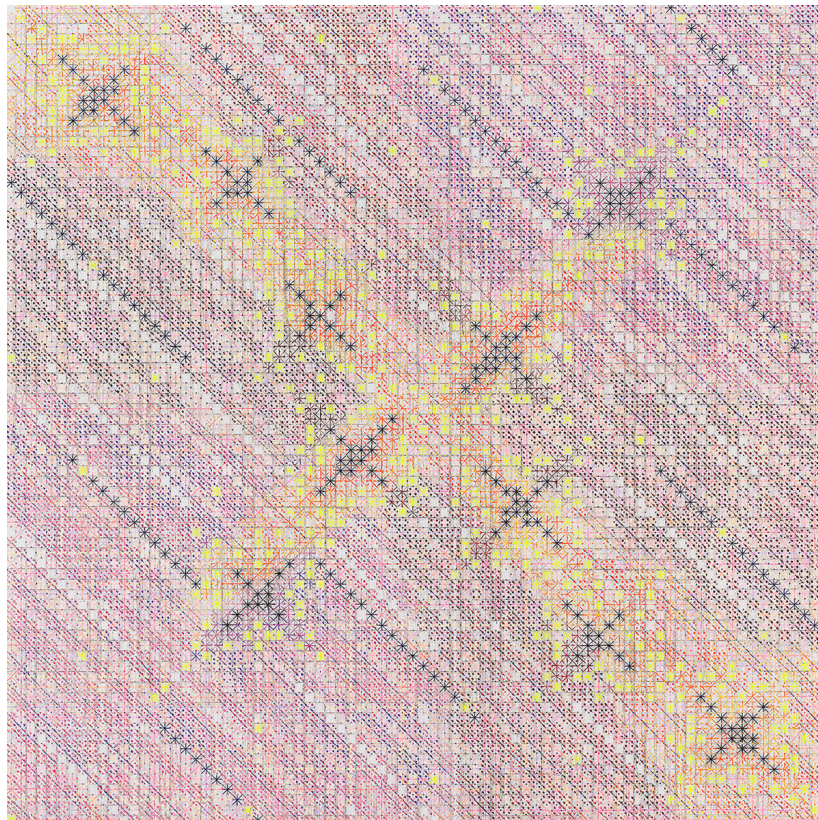
In the sterile environs of the Oscar Niemeyer Auditorium at Château La Coste, Chinese artist Ding Yi's works seem to pop off the walls, their bold swathes of red, blue and yellow at odds with the gently undulating landscape of the 600-acre vineyard and art complex in southeastern France. *Prediction and Retrospection* is the first significant institutional survey of the geometric abstractionist's work in Europe. Curated by Alfredo Cramerotti, director of Media Majlis at Northwestern Qatar, the exhibition showcases around 30 works on canvas, wood and paper and is on view from July 3 - September 15, 2024. STIR's conversation with Cramerotti highlights the significance of presenting a large body of Ding Yi's work in conversation with the European institutional art scene.



Appearance of Crosses 2023-18, mineral pigment, pastel, and charcoal on linen, 2023, Ding Yi. Image: © Ding Yi; Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio and Timothy Taylor

Ding Yi's works across a period of 40 years are built on two iterations of a cross-like symbol: x and +. These symbols multiply to form intricately intersected patterns in a series of nonrepresentational paintings. All the works carry the same title—*Appearance of Crosses*—and are numbered by year and month, with decades of practice organised across a single series.

The repetitive symbols, combined with the continuous evolution of colour, materials and techniques, form my personal artistic language — Ding Yi, artist



Appearance of Crosses 2021-26, acrylic and woodcuts on basswood, 2021, Ding Yi
Image: © Ding Yi; Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio and Timothy Taylor

Ding Yi has worked through tumultuous periods in China, his early years marked by the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and later, by China's emergence as a manufacturing hub for global conglomerates. "Both '+' and 'x' are symbolic tools. Since the 1980s, I have been reflecting on the entire social structure and the abstraction of art. I hope my work can depart from the mainstream ideological level and present a logic that connects with the larger reality of our times. I use the grid as an initial framework to evolve the meaningless symbols of '+' and 'x' into the strokes of my creation," the artist said about his work in a response to STIR.

While Ding Yi's works are abstract, given over to complex choreographies of repetitive crosses, the artist does use his work to reflect on changes in Chinese society – mapping these developments to stylistic elements. He said, "It is a continuous evolution, development and conflict, with new perspectives and ways of thinking constantly emerging. The repetitive symbols, combined with the continuous evolution of colour, materials and techniques, form my personal artistic language...[this allows] my works to connect with the history and space of this era through constant innovation."



Artist Ding Yi at Château La Coste, France, 2024 *Image: Stephane Aboudaram*

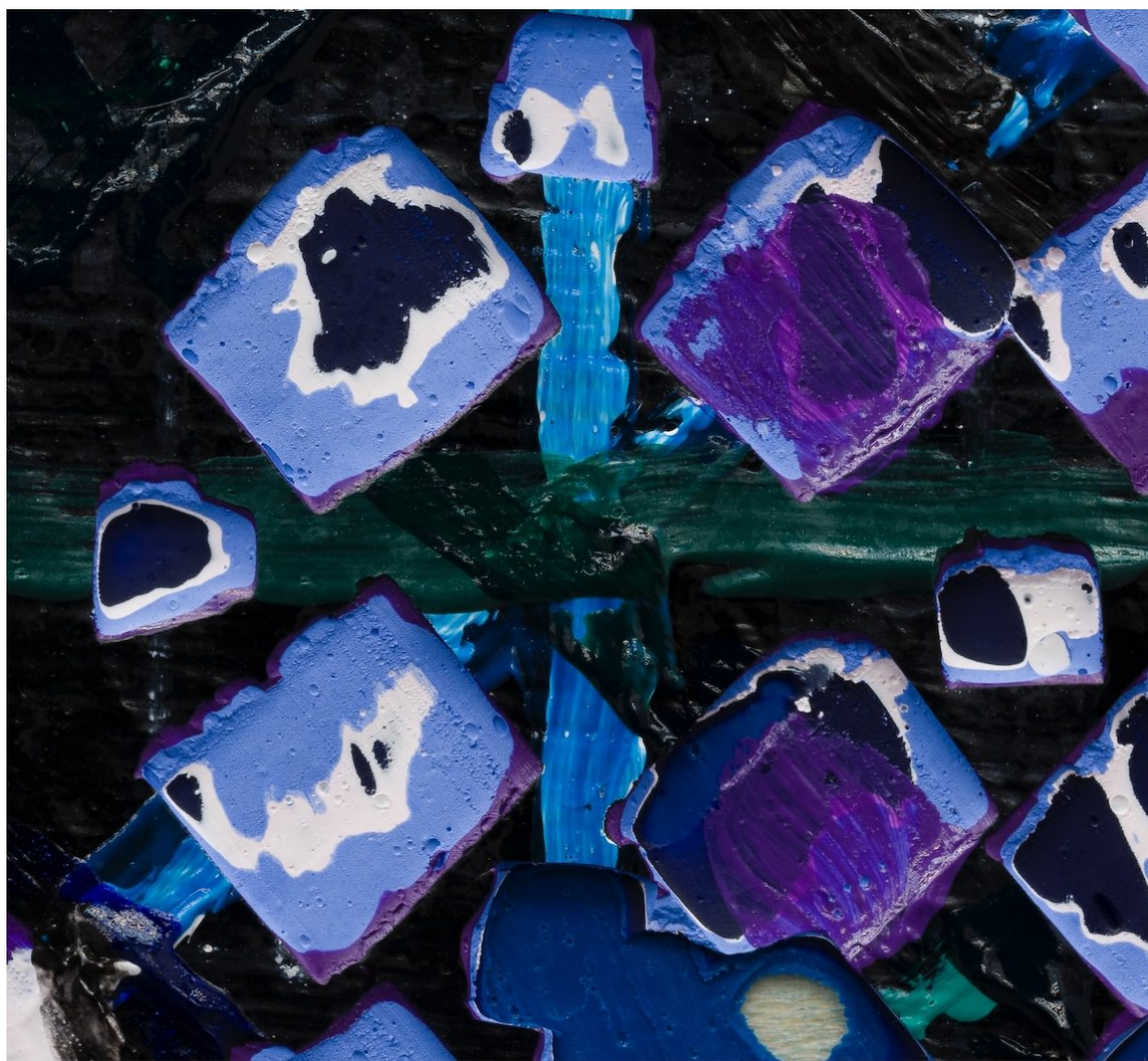
The Oscar Niemeyer Auditorium at Château La Coste, the renowned Brazilian architect's final project, is a notoriously challenging exhibition space with its curved design, devoid of L-shaped corners. Cramerotti enjoyed working with the architecture of the space, using black floor-to-ceiling bars that dot the space to place the works. As multi-centred compositions which invite the viewer's gaze to drift across the canvas instead of looking at fixed centres, Ding Yi's works complicate singular ways of seeing. He said, "This form relates to the rich spiritual connotations my work aims to express. I hope my works can accommodate and represent different regional cultures, individual and collective emotions, social changes and even transcendental cosmology and spiritual landscapes."

SURFACE
15 August 2024

Ding Yi Draws Lines in the Great Expanse

The Chinese painter further widens his already macroscopic view to the universe at large, finding certain expression via coded abstractions in a realm of deep uncertainty.

BY RYAN WADDOUPS



Detail of "Appearance of Crosses 2024-1" (2024) by Ding Yi. Image courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio

An interesting feature that's not immediately noticeable: This work brings different visual experiences when viewed from a distance and up close. Looking at it from a distance, the whole picture looks like a night sky with geometrically deformed constellations arranged

diagonally on the blue-black background. The image brings a certain diagonal dynamism and power. When you look closely at this work, you will feel the unique texture of the material—the multiple layers of acrylic have been carved from different angles, depths, and shades. Each brushstroke and unit presents a unique visual effect with infinite variations.

How it reflects your practice as a whole: This work belongs to the *Appearance of Crosses* series that I've been working on for nearly 40 years. In the past decade, my creations have been in a stage of “looking up,” adopting a more macroscopic and comprehensive perspective to observe the world. The works in this stage reflect my understanding and expression of the global multiculturalism and conflicts in this era, as well as my understanding of the macrocosm and the spiritual world. *Appearance of Crosses* has also gradually moved from the pursuit of absolute rationality to freedom and sensibility. This work is a continuation of the characteristics of the recent *Constellation* series. The collision of purple, blue, and green gives the picture a sense of undulating breath, creates a deep and quiet atmosphere, and reflects my thoughts on nature and the unknown.

Observer
31 July 2025

ARTS • ART REVIEWS

Taking a Journey Into Minimal Abstraction With Artist Ding Yi at Château La Coste

"The show was five years in the making, but I'm glad we got there in the end," curator Alfredo Cramerotti told *Observer*.

By Elisa Carollo • 07/31/24 7:30am



Château La Coste, a vineyard in the south of France, is also home to a renowned art center and sculpture park. [Château La Coste](#)

In the luxurious south of France, between Aix-En-Provence and the Luberon National Park in one of the oldest winemaking regions, there is a sprawling vineyard where exceptional wine, art and architecture coexist harmoniously.

Château La Coste, which opened to the public in 2011, is a bucolic art center offering a complete aesthetic experience: visitors can sip the vineyard's finest wines, stroll along the wooded art walk that winds through the 500-acre estate and explore five indoor exhibition spaces that host shows of works by some of the most acclaimed names in the contemporary art scene.

There are pieces by Fernand Léger, Louise Bourgeois, Alexander Calder, Damien Hirst and Tracy Emin, just to name a few. Among the shows on view this summer are a presentation of vivid and humorous paintings by California-born artist Joel Mesler in the beautifully designed Renzo Piano Pavilion and a display of dreamy works by French painter Claire Tabouret. Hirst's latest series "Secret Garden Paintings" are on view through December in the Bastide Gallery, while his "Cosmos Paintings" and sculptures from the "Meteorites" and "Satellites" series are on view in the Old Wine Storehouse.

Château La Coste's striking glass Oscar Niemeyer Auditorium, meanwhile, is hosting the first major retrospective of the work of Chinese artist Ding Yi, "Prediction and Retrospection." This show marks the artist's first European survey and provides a significant opportunity to discover his visionary practice. The exhibition curator, Alfredo Cramerotti, told Observer that the show is intended to present a significant 'slice' of Ding Yi's career, as not many people in Europe are familiar with his work.



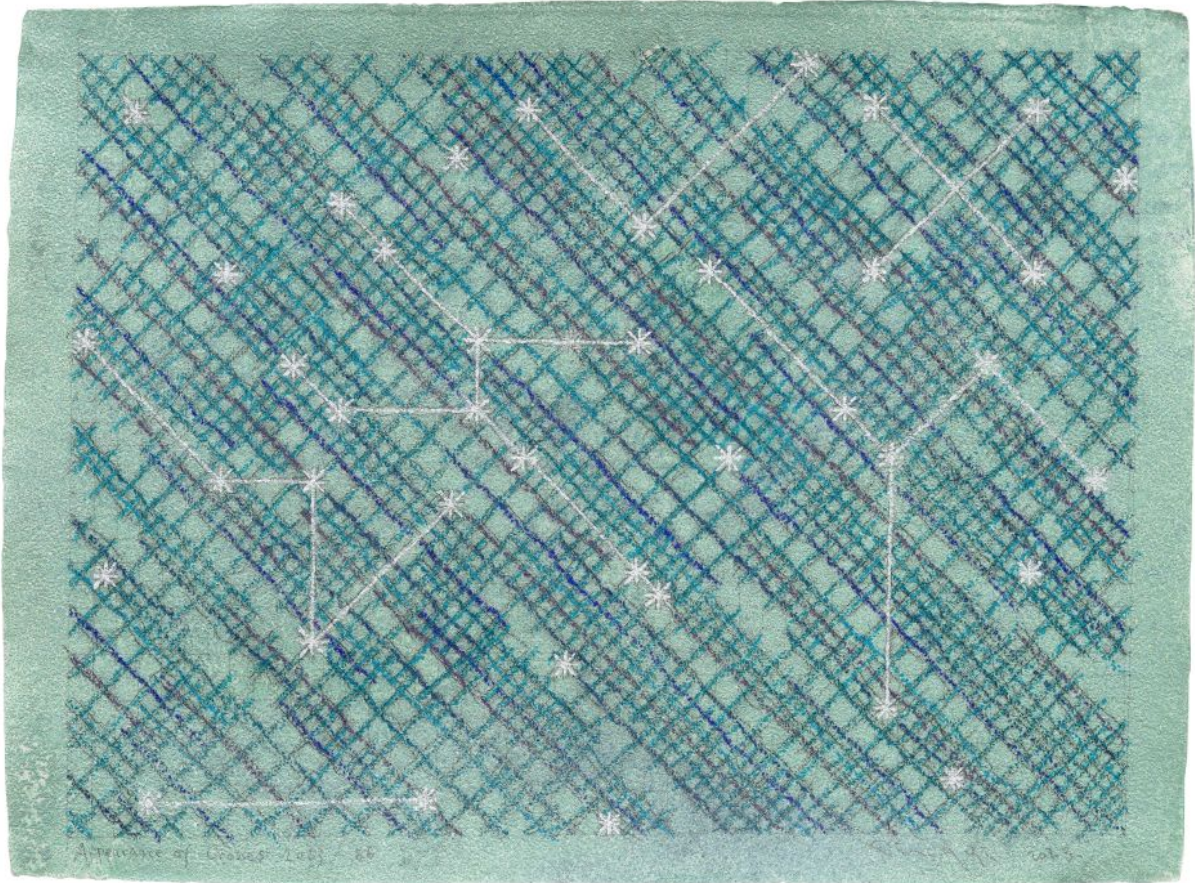
Ding Yi's major institutional survey features thirty works on canvas, wood and paper created over the last forty years. Stéphane Aboudaram | WE ARE CONTENT(S)

"The idea was to select several works that represented different eras of his career, the four decades of work, and the various bodies of work that the artist went through," Cramerotti said. "It was a long time in the making because his works are not readily available—most of them are in public institutions or

private foundations, and some of the more historical ones from the 1980s and 1990s belong to his private archive and are not allocated for exhibitions. It was important to create a journey in terms of the viewer's experience in the space and time trajectory through the works, and I'm very happy we managed that."

Observer also spoke with the artist to learn more about the show's leading themes and how he and Cramerotti established a meaningful conversation with this beautiful space. The title of the show refers to the "absolute matrix" that Yi uses, linking his practice to both the most advanced technological developments and ancient symbologies humans have achieved over time. As Cramerotti explained, the title was inspired by the artist's signature gridded framework, standing as a symbol of rationality and rules, which provided the curatorial rationale for the show.

At the same time, this idea of the grid is also the basic structure for today's digital realm, the foundational element whereupon everything else is built, connected, experienced and circulated. "The mathematical pattern of the digital layers of our hybrid lives are both reflected (in retrospect) and anticipated (in advance) through the paintings presented. The exhibition is a fascinating space/time traveling experience through the lens of non-representation," Cramerotti said. Ultimately, the works by Ding Yi traverse cultural revolutions, economic booms, societal changes and technological achievements of his home country, China. While not showing them specifically, all those events are evoked through the patterns created by the symbols x and +.



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 2023-B6*, 2023; Mineral pigment, pastel, acrylic, water-acrylic color pencil, and pencils on Indian paper, 56 x 75.5 cm. Courtesy of Ding Yi Studio and Timothy Taylor

Over the years, the artist was able to reduce his pictorial language into an extremely minimal code, limited to a single signature symbol: a rudimentary cross depicted alternately as x and +. When asked how he reached this minimal code and what it meant for him to paint just those two signs into new constellations, the artist elaborated on the historical reasons behind his language. "Chinese painting has been influenced by former Soviet socialism and realism since the 1950s," he told Observer. "Starting in the 1980s, during my student years, I began to reflect on the entire social structure and the ideological aspect of art. I wanted my work to keep away from mainstream ideological narratives. For me, using such symbols is a way to dismantle the inherent mechanical framework of representing subjects with realism, but instead, to bring art back to a state of non-representation or meaninglessness." It was, he said, an attempt to restart the search for the origins of art, to return to the beginning and to redefine painting where the x and + can be symbolic substitutes or merely just strokes and parts of the painting. "Painting, through the construction of an integrated visual language, expresses connections with the real world and resonates with the changing of times."



A work on display in “Prediction and Retrospection.”. Stéphane Aboudaram | WE ARE CONTENT(S)

His work is dictated by a strict set of rules aiming to abstract completely the resulting paintings from any representation, as well as from any meaning and emotion, and so to archive instead what he describes as representations of spirit. All this makes his artistic practice sound more like one of self-discipline and self-annihilation, such as what philosopher Saint Augustine described,

claiming that self-discipline was crucial for spiritual growth and living a virtuous life. An idea, or ideal, that was anticipated even before by the stoics, with Epictetus saying that true freedom comes only from self-mastery, achieved through discipline and control over one's desires and actions.



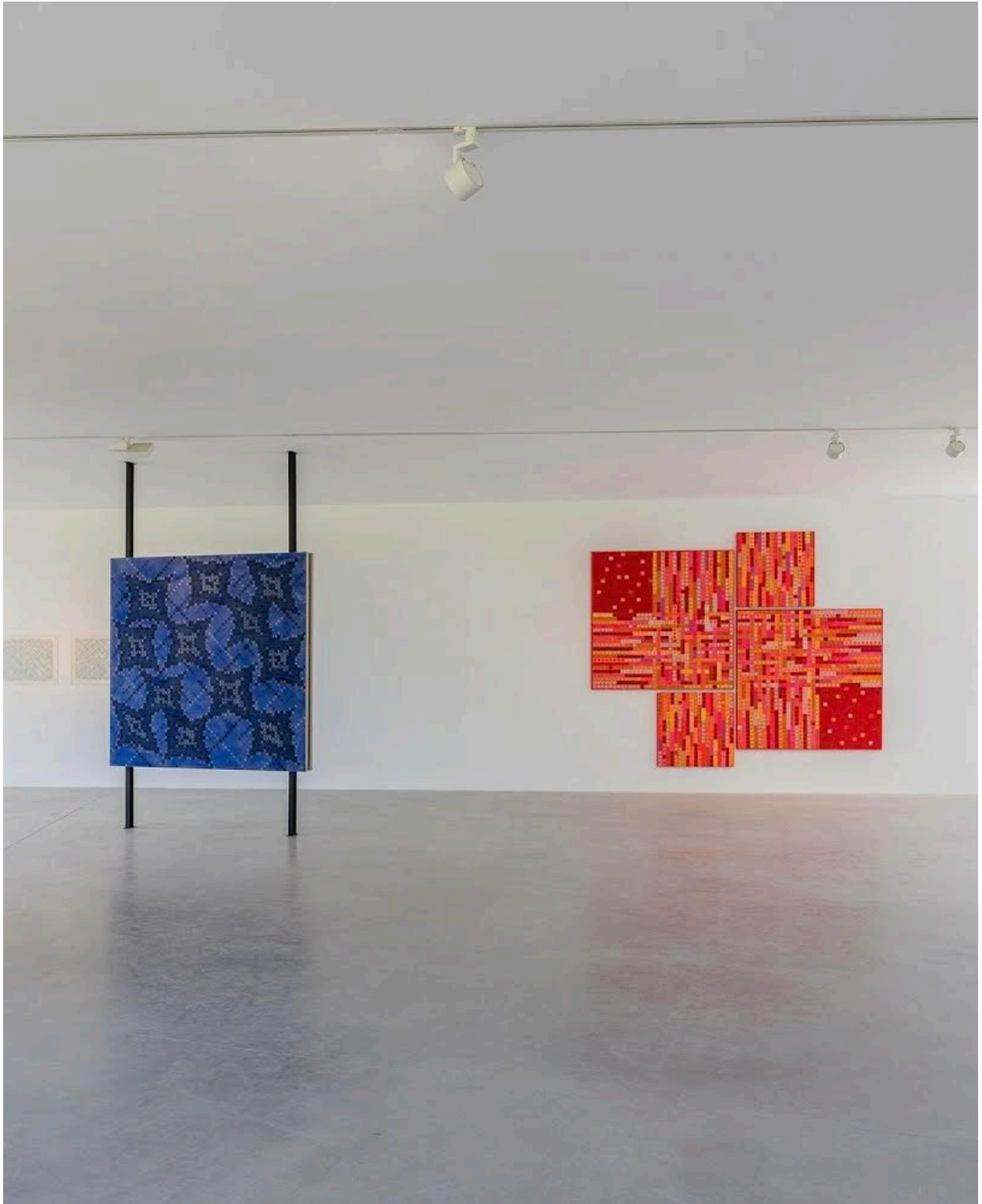
Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 2023-18*, 2023; Mineral pigment, pastel, and charcoal on linen, 180 x 180 cm. Courtesy of Ding Yi Studio and Timothy Taylor

The artist spoke about this process of reduction and control more as a relationship between rationality and sensibility. Continuing our conversation, Yi explained that all of his works are based on a gridded framework, which represents rationality and rules, but that framework allows for infinite freedom and can accommodate sensibility while infinitely extending. “My working method is never to draft before I start work,” he said. “Facing the grid, sensibility, and randomness are needed to enhance the vitality of the painting. Vitality is an important element of painting, while unexpectedness is

the driving force of creation. Some critics, when commenting on my work, draw parallels to Buddhist meditation or the duality of relationships in the traditional Chinese board game Go.”

In the confined grid, when white and black intersect, they create contradictions, conflicts, resistance and competition. However, according to the artist, they are also mutually relational and balanced with a chess-like rule, contributing to harmonic unity. Combined and in sequence, these signs can look like pixels, reminding one of a digital aesthetic, anticipating or abstracting into art the binary code that rules it.

When asked about this relationship to the digital realm, Yi clarified: “Using the grid as a foundation is the most basic structure for all digital art today. This structure originates from mathematics. Consequently, my works are also filled with a so-called mathematical relationship. For painting, mathematical relationships are a kind of rhythm, representing a certain relationship between growth and restraint. These relationships can either be infinite or fragmentary. Furthermore, these mathematical relationships are also reflected in the scattered center composition of the paintings. It also refers to a multi-dimensional center with multi-layered aggregation and multi-cluster relationships.”



Ding Yi's aesthetic combines the fast-paced rhythm of the new urban life in China with something timeless and ancient. Stéphane Aboudaram | WE ARE CONTENT(S)

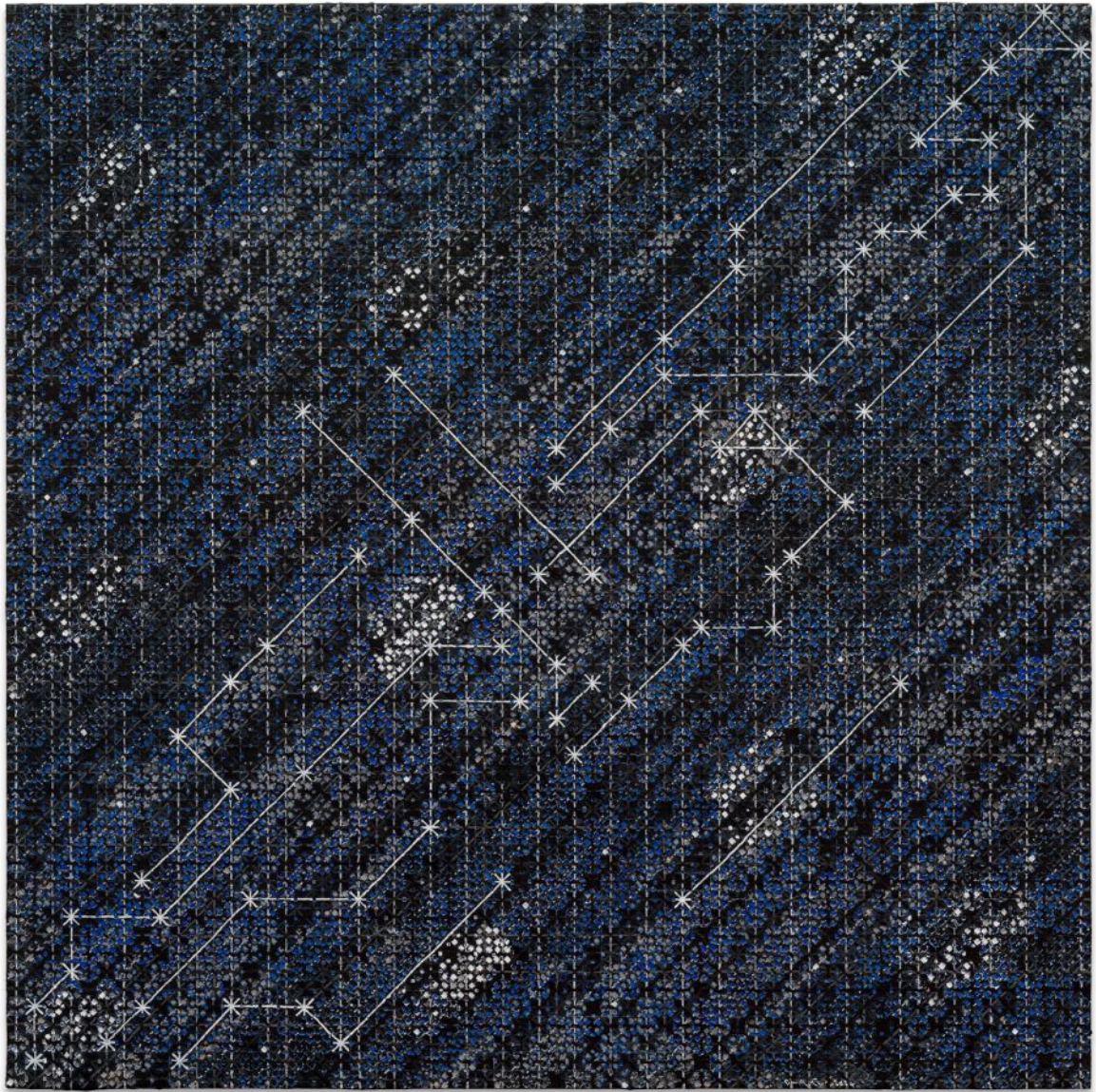
Considering this hyper-technological aspect, which stands in contrast to the profoundly manual aspect at the heart of his practice, we asked Yi if there was a relationship between the work and the extremely accelerated process of modernization China went through in a few decades, first becoming the

“factory of the world” and then also a leader in technological innovation and electronics.

Ding Yi confirmed that most of the inspiration for this work comes from the trajectory of China’s development. “This journey has unfolded in a state of acceleration, full of clamor and contradictions,” he explained, “I hope my work connects with the reality of development in China and the world. Rapid development changes our ideas and thinking, so I always aim to reflect a concept change through my creations. Whether it stems from the urbanization process or the rapid development of the digital artificial intelligence industry, these changes in social and life experiences have led to continuous iteration and development in my paintings over the past forty years.”

Yi’s aesthetic combines the fast-paced rhythm of the new urban life in China, the constant flow of data and information of the digital realm, with something timeless and ancient, the primordial symbol of a cross or an attentive practice connecting minds and hands in meticulously drawing them on canvas. We also asked Cramerotti how he would describe this relationship between innovation and tradition within the artist’s work.

“Ding Yi is an innovator not in technique but in critical thinking; his practice steered away from propaganda and social realism from the start and instead channeled the changes in society, economy, culture, and worldview through a system that let him explore and include many perspectives, reducing them and distilling them to their essence,” he said. “Distillation is probably a key work in talking about his artistic journey. The ‘digital matrix’ that visually hits the viewer at first from his work is precisely the result not only of time mapping but also of those societal codes that inform our lives now when we are both physical and virtual at the same time. It’s like when you open the ‘code version’ of a website page in your browser—you see symbols and ciphers, and you know that they lead to visuals, texts, and sounds, even if you cannot see them in that form. Ding Yi’s work is the same in that sense—and that’s what is thrilling about his work about innovation and tradition.”



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses* 2024-6, 2024; Acrylic and basswood, 120 x 120 cm. Courtesy Ding Yi Studio and Timothy Taylor

Presenting Ding's work for the first time in Europe reveals some unexpected parallels between his aesthetic and other artists in the 1970s who, in France and elsewhere in Europe, explored new ideas of geometric and optical abstraction inspired by new technology and the space race. "We know much about optical art and abstraction from Western artists, much less from Asian artists," Cramerotti said. "We do, of course, have movements like the Dansaekhwa artists in South Korea, but for the most, we refer to optical and abstraction through a Western lens. That was 'undone' for me by Ding Yi, whose work is well-known in Asia. Still, it is relatively unknown in Europe, for instance—and I discovered someone who not only worked on non-representation from the beginning of his career but actively has approached societal and cultural changes through this focused practice. It reminded me of the work of Giorgio Morandi, for instance, someone who still had lives of cups,

bottles and vases for most of his career and yet managed to transfer all the societal upheavals of Italy throughout his time. Different visuals, same consistency and focus.”



The artist speaks about his process of reduction and control as “a relationship between rationality and sensibility.” Stéphane Aboudaram | WE ARE CONTENT(S)

As with most of the shows at Château La Coste, the works are installed in the space in close conversation with the architecture and its natural surroundings. Cramerotti's curatorial approach was deeply informed by the architectural features of the Oscar Niemeyer Auditorium, which offered opportunities to relate works to details that might otherwise go unnoticed. "During one of my early site visits, I noticed the lines of the joints of the concrete floor to be at odd angles, more like 60/70 degree angles than the customary 90-degree, and that gave me the idea for a framework, for positioning the works in the space, rather than on the walls, a part of the architectural volume," he said. "The external walls are mostly made of glass panes, floor to ceiling, with a black joint running vertically to connect one with the other; that gave me the idea for the black frames designed to support the eight pairs of paintings shown in the middle of the space, which pairing from a different era and body of work but having the same size. It was a long conversation with Ding Yi's studio to secure those 'pairings' as some belong to his private archive and are not usually available for exhibitions. The show was five years in the making, but I'm glad we got there in the end."

"Prediction and Retrospection" by Ding Yi is on view through September 15 at Château La Coste, Le-Puy-Sainte-Réparate, France.

Sixth Tone
27 January 2024

SIXTH TONE

The Contemporary Artist Using Crosses to Push Boundaries

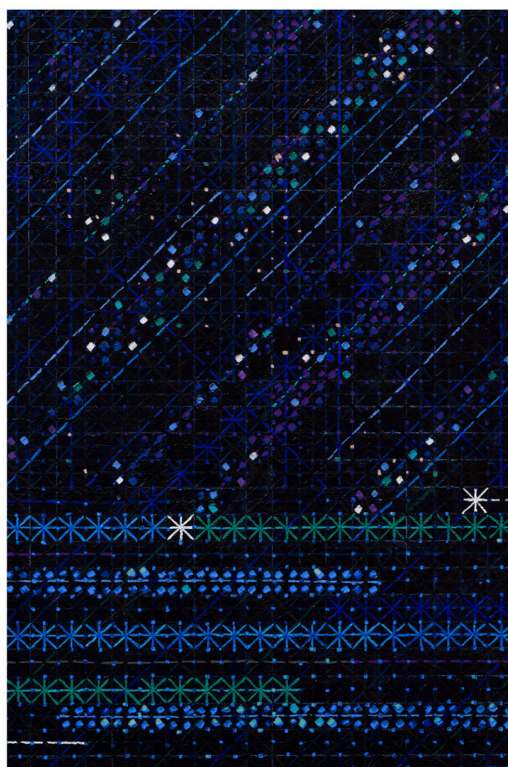
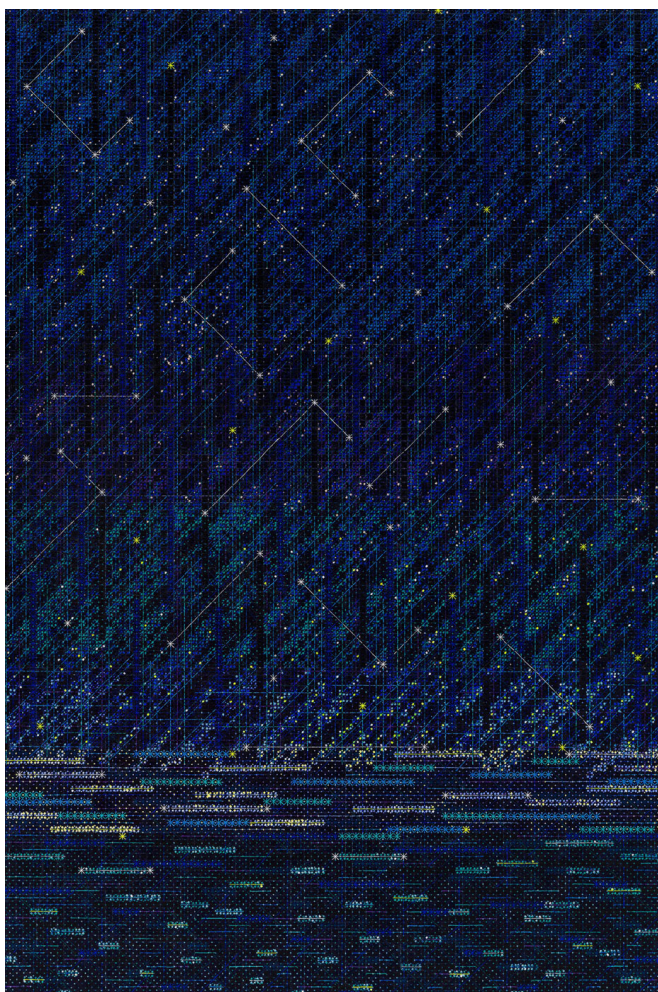
Over 35 years, Shanghai artist Ding Yi has developed a distinctive style using fluorescent colors and crosses.

By *Ding Yining*

ZHEJIANG, East China — Artist Ding Yi still remembers the starry nights of his childhood. Every year, during the annual Spring Festival holiday, he would take a night boat with his father from Shanghai to Ningbo, his ancestral home in the eastern Zhejiang province. The bright stars, drifting sea, and swaying ship all feature in his latest work, with its shining constellations and deep-blue strokes.

Take a closer look and you will notice that every element has been created using only one basic symbol: crosses.

One of the leading figures in China's abstract art movement, Ding has spent more than 35 years creating pieces using only “+” and “x” marks. The 61-year-old's work spans many artistic styles — maximalism, minimalism, experimental, post-modern, and formalism, to name a few. Yet, his style is completely his own.



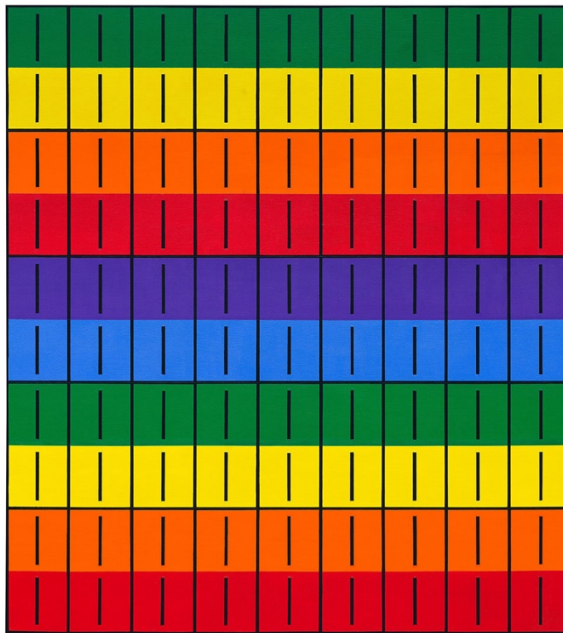
Left: "Appearance of Crosses 2022-17," acrylic and woodcuts on basswood, 360×240cm; Right: Details of "Appearance of Crosses 2022-16." Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio



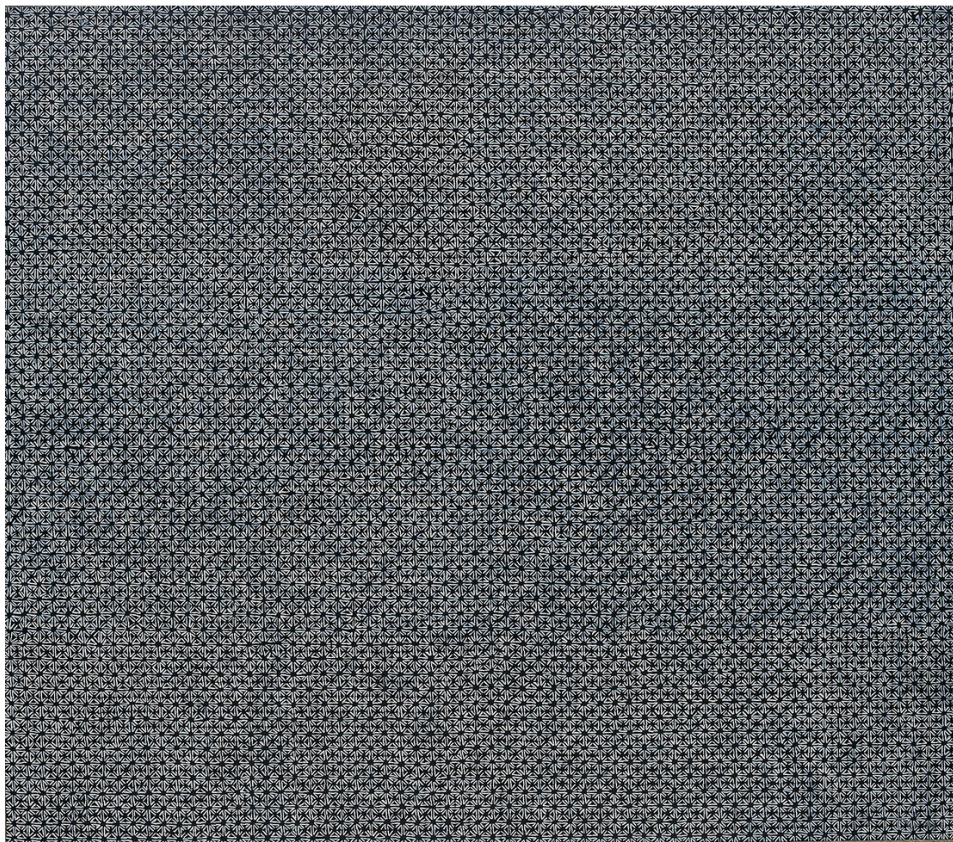
Ding Yi in 2022. Courtesy of Wang Wenlong

His use of crosses was originally inspired by his experience working as a designer at a toy factory in the 1980s. There, he would use registration marks, which look like plus symbols, to assist with the alignment of different colors on printing screens and plates. It was then that the young artist decided to make “rational” artworks, using rulers and tape to create straight lines, bucking the mainstream trends of expressionism and surrealism that had existed since 1985.

Ding’s peers and teachers thought little of his maverick approach at the time, but he insisted on forging his solitary path. “I knew very well that my art was going to be like long-distance running; I wasn’t going to instantly burst onto the scene like some brilliant star,” he tells Sixth Tone. “For abstract artists, art is a lifelong mission.”



Left: “Appearance of Crosses II,” 1988, acrylic on canvas, 200×180cm; Right: Ding Yi at the “Exhibition of Today’s Art” at Shanghai Art Museum, 1988. Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio



Top: Ding Yi's work exhibited during the 1993 Venice Biennale; Bottom: "Appearance of Crosses 1992-17," Acrylic on canvas, 200×240cm. Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio

In 1993, Ding was invited to present his work at the 45th Venice Biennale in Italy, but his pieces didn't prove popular. Although Western art circles were making efforts to introduce Chinese contemporary art to the world, most audiences appeared to prefer works with more obvious Chinese elements. "It was at this point I realized I was an artist outside the mainstream, and as such, I needed to distance myself from it as much as possible," Ding says.

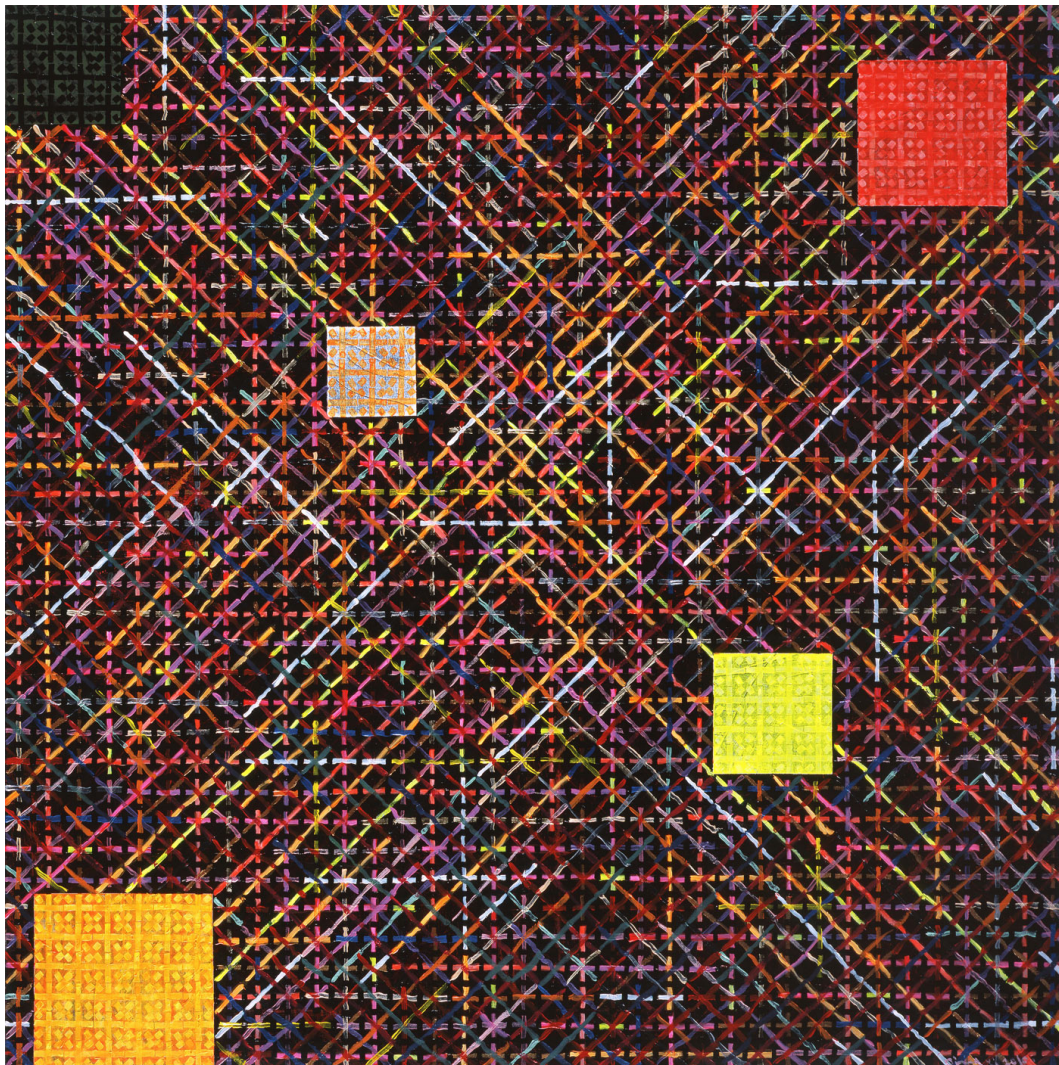
Ding initially spent 10 years practicing formalism, a style that emphasizes visual and material characteristics rather than external context or content. However, in 1998, he began to rethink his artistic process after being asked by the art historian Serge

Guilbaut, during a dialogue in the artist's studio, why he hadn't reacted to the drastic changes happening in Shanghai.

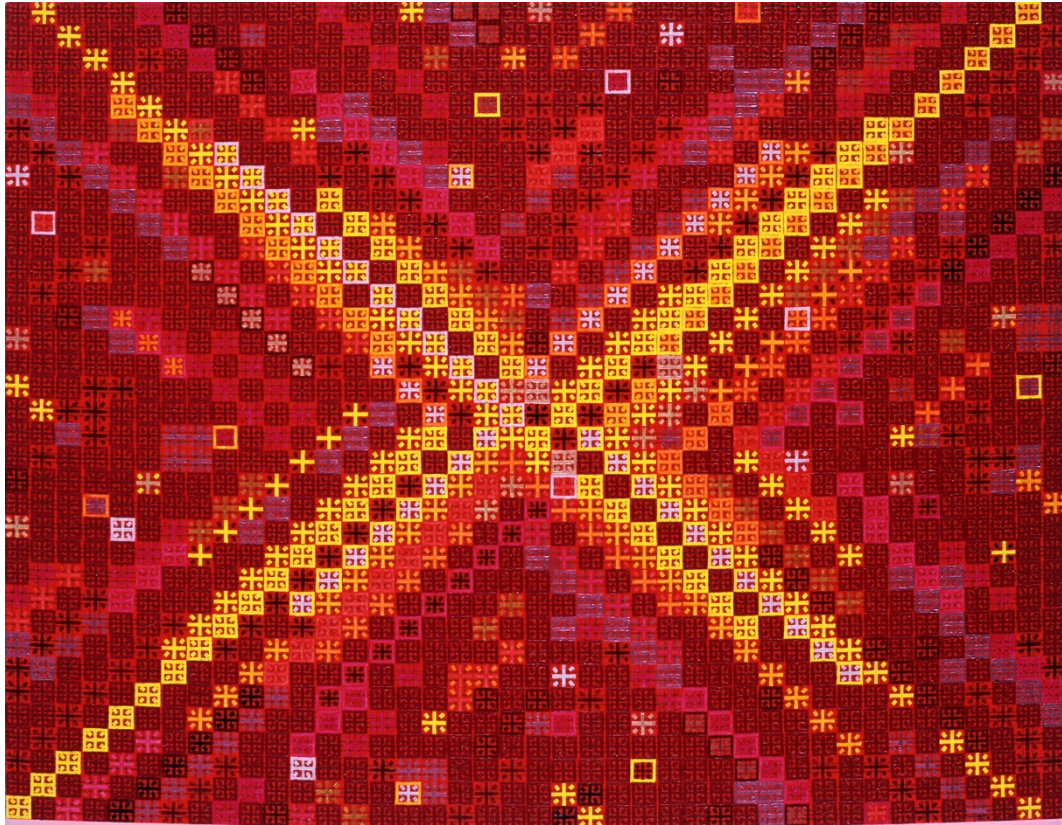
Urbanization and its effect on culture, society, and the aesthetics of the time have long been a source of inspiration for artists. In the 1940s, a few years after relocating to New York City, the Dutch painter and pioneer of abstract art Piet Mondrian created one of his most famous works, "[Broadway Boogie Woogie](#)." Using vivid colors and squares, the artist evokes the city's neat grid layout and vibrant jazz scene.

"I think Mondrian tried his best to choose the brightest colors available at the time," Ding says. "He was stimulated by urbanization, and his painting shows what life is like in a metropolis."

Six decades later, when Ding re-examined the city that he had lived in for decades, Shanghai, he found that traditional pigments were not vivid enough to reflect reality.



"Appearance of Crosses 2010-13," acrylic on tartan, 90x90cm. Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio

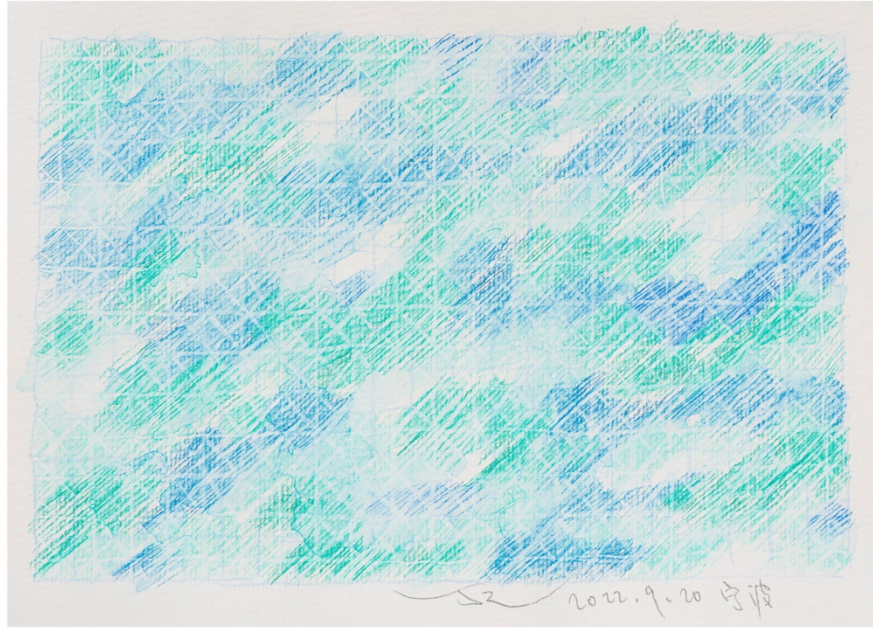


“Appearance of Crosses 2010-13” from the “Fluorescent” series, acrylic on tartan, 90x90cm. Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio

So Ding started using fluorescent pigments to depict city lights, changes in the skyline, and the urbanization process. The intense colors of the works in his “Fluorescent” series capture both China’s booming development and the ensuing homogeneity as many cities began to look the same.

After 12 years of working with fluorescent colors, Ding was starting to feel overwhelmed. He began to reduce his use of dazzling pigments and instead introduced darker tones and woodcuts to explore his inner perspectives.

This change in style could be seen at a recent [exhibition](#) in Ningbo. In addition to memories of his ancestral home, on display were sketches Ding made while visiting cities around the world. In this “Travel Sketch” series, Ningbo appears as soft as water vapor, Hong Kong is busy and bright, Bangkok is conveyed in orange and maroon, and meteors streak across the sky in New York City.



"Traveling Sketch, Ningbo," 2022. Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio

After 35 years of practice, Ding has developed a distinct visual language. However, unlike some artists, he sees little to worry about when it comes to generative artificial intelligence programs, which can produce artistic images in Ding's style in a matter of seconds. "It's just a novelty. Easy come, easy go," Ding tells Sixth Tone. "AI can't replace human thought. For me, an artwork is meant to resonate with its audience. Only if someone devotes themselves to their work can emotional resonance be achieved. A computer can't do that."

Editor: Hao Qibao.

(Header image: Details of "Appearance of Crosses 2018-2." Courtesy of Ding Yi Art Studio)

LISSON GALLERY

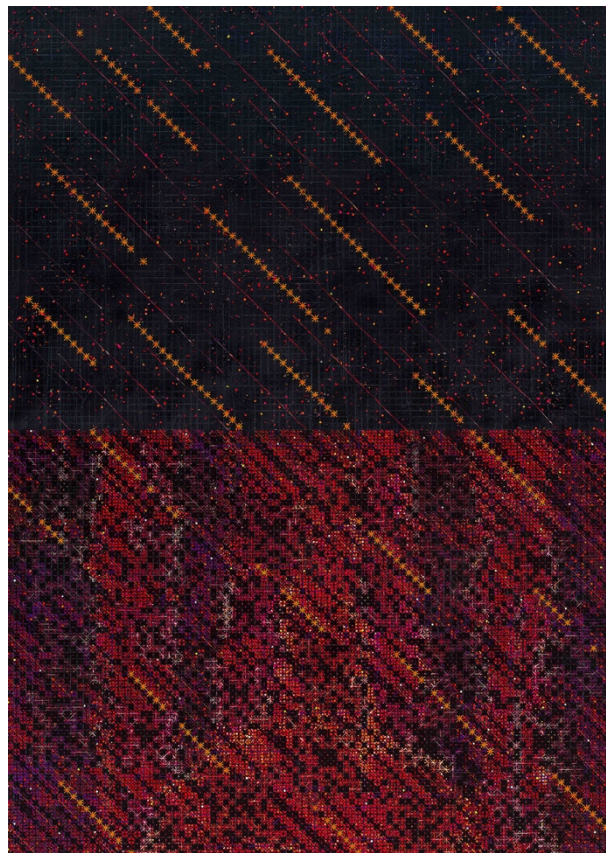
e-flux

18 August 2023

e-flux

Ding Yi: *Cross Galaxy*

Shenzhen Museum of Contemporary Art and Urban Planning (MOCAUP)



Ding Yi, Appearance of Crosses 2023-2, 2023.

Acrylic on woodcuts on basswood, 360 x 240 cm. Courtesy of Ding Yi Studio. ©Ding Yi.

Ding Yi is well known as a geometric abstract artist who uses the character “+” and grids. These symbols, reminiscent of mathematical formulas, have become an aesthetic label for Ding Yi’s art over the past 30 years.

The reason why Ding Yi employed signs familiar to the public as a medium of expression for painting is that he believes that the symbolism of these signs themselves is much less than that of other materials. And thus, the works produced contain anti-aesthetic intentions to make the audience see “art that is not art-like.” In other words, it is to prevent the revolution of identity in which ordinary objects or

materials are transformed into completely different objects of worship by the aesthetic baptism injected by the artist.

His abstract art was born in 1988. The 1980s of Chinese contemporary art was a huge laboratory in which all kinds of avant-garde and experimental art forms emerged, riding the wave of reform and opening-up policies. Witnessing a break with the past and a subversion of values in which newness itself is considered a virtue, Ding Yi distanced himself from the frenzy. He began to search for trivial things that are small, humble, and insignificant, and difficult to be regarded as art materials. He found the symbols “x” and “+”, which are familiar to the public but do not carry specific meaning. These symbols can be seen as a rejection of the expression of value-centeredness and the conventions that claim it. In other words, it is a meaningless alternative to the age of meaning.

Over the past 30 years, his cross aesthetics have sometimes appeared as social signs that allow us to read the progress of history, and as a medium of color and form expressing China’s modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. Ding Yi’s continuing interest in art lies in emphasizing pictoriality rather than the spiritual message or mental sensibility that most abstract paintings imply. The hand-painted symbols cover the entire surface of the large canvas, requiring great precision and skill. The amount of artistic labor is doubled by that much, and since changes in the concept and theme may occur in the process of work, no one can assist in the painterly work.

His paintings intentionally avoid establishing a center. Each corner of the canvas becomes the center. In abstract paintings as well as realistic paintings, the audience’s eye is drawn to the center of the painting according to the concentration of images, colors, and illumination that the artist intends. However, Ding Yi’s painting intentionally distracts the viewer’s habitual orientation to the center or desire to find the center. Instead, it makes the audience find visual elements of interest while studying the canvas. Therefore, the composition does not lead to a center but reifies the periphery, allowing the audience to find their own viewpoints. This is the reason why audiences stay in the exhibition for a relatively long time.

The pictorial liberation provided by Ding Yi’s painting and the message that guarantees and induces the viewer’s selective freedom seem to read the artist’s message, “Do not look for the meaning of the painting, but rather look, feel, and contemplate for yourself.” In this sense, Ding Yi art is a very social message embodying equality.

Ding Yi’s solo exhibition, curated by **Yongwoo Lee** with curatorial team Feng Jing Fan, Wang Liyin, Xu Zixian, held at the Shenzhen Museum of Contemporary Art and Urban Planning is like a kind of autobiography that shows the entire process of Ding Yi’s art over the past 35 years, from its beginning to the present.

On the occasion of the opening of the exhibition, an international forum was held under the title of “Aesthetic Hybridity in Contemporary Art”. The speakers included Karen Smith (chair), Cui Cancan, Gong Yan, Martin Guinard, Lorenz Helbling,

Yongwoo Lee, Carol Yinghua LU, Shao Shu, Shen Qilan, Shen Yubing, Tatehata Akira, Yan Weixin, and Yang Fudong.

L I S S O N G A L L E R Y

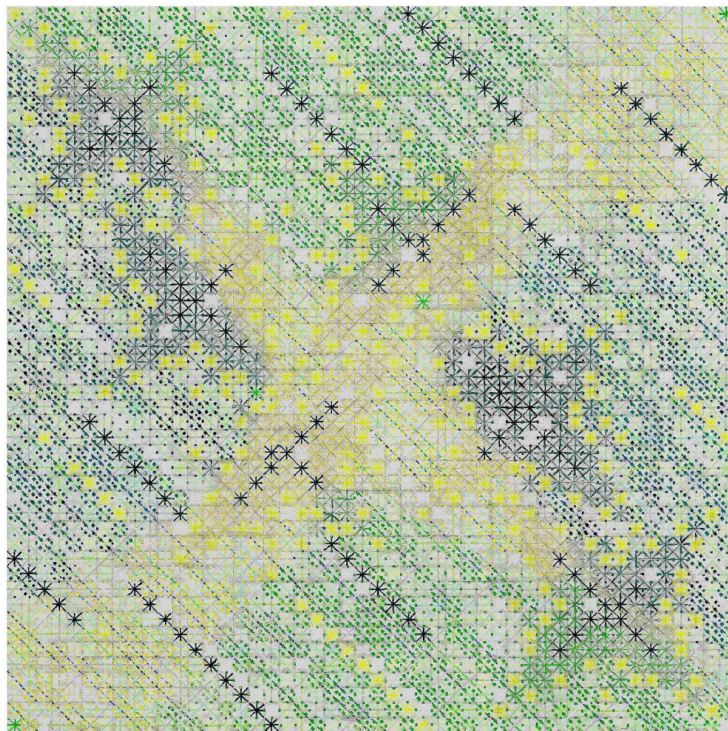
Artnet News
4 June 2021

artnet

Gallery Network

Chinese Artist Ding Yi Finds Inspiration in Buddhist Philosophy and the Game of 'Go' — Watch Him Explain His Iridescent New Art Here

"Ding Yi: Lightscapes" is currently on view at New York's Timothy Taylor.



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 2021-5 (2021)*. Courtesy of Timothy Taylor.

by Artnet Gallery Network • June 4, 2021

Since the mid-1980s, Chinese artist Ding Yi has crafted a distinctive visual language centered around crosses and grids. His often colorful abstractions consider the rise of Shanghai as a global metropolis and the radiance of the city's neon lights.

Right now, Timothy Taylor is presenting "Lightscapes," a solo exhibition of Ding's latest works featuring three paintings and six drawings. (The works are simultaneously presented in the Frieze Viewing Room.)

The paintings represent an important new development for Ding: In order to create them, the artist layered colors of paint and then cut intricate dot-like crevices into the wood with a fine blade. The resulting images give the impression of shifting, glistening lights in shades of vibrant vermilion, magenta, lime green, and acid yellow.

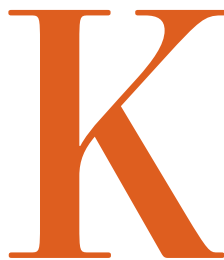


Installation view "Ding Yi: Lightscapes" (2021). Courtesy of Timothy Taylor.

In conjunction with the new exhibition, the artist sat with curator Alexandra Munroe for an interview. "There are systems of thought and perspective that can shake our idea of a monolithic culture, and Ding Yi's work is critical

to this conversation. It has an insight that is unique, a sublime space and an emotion beneath the abstraction,” Munroe notes.

The discussion between artist and curator is wide-ranging. They talk about the changing role of Chinese art in the global sphere, the thirty-five years he’s worked on “Appearances of Crosses,” and why his approach to painting is similar to the board game Go.



KULTUR REGION

News

CHUR

Margrit Sprechers Reportagen in der Churer Klibühni

Am heutigen Dienstag, 27. April, um 20 Uhr ist in der Klibühni in Chur eine Begegnung mit den Texten der vielfach ausgezeichneten Journalistin Margrit Sprecher zu erleben. Sie schreibt Reportagen ohne Verfalldatum, heisst es in der Mitteilung. Sie gehe dorthin, wo es weh tut, greife Stoffe auf, bei denen es sich andere zu leicht machen. Eine objektive Reportage gebe es nicht. Und die, die so tun, als seien sie objektiv, sind langweilig, sagt Sprecher. Die Schauspieler Graziella Rossi und Helmut Vogel lesen aus ihren Texten, die nun in Buchform unter dem Titel «Irland» erschienen sind. (red)

GALLARDA

Musikfestival Demenga muss ein zweites Mal verschoben werden

Das traditionelle Festival der Musikerfamilie Demenga im Calancatal kann auch in diesem Jahr nicht stattfinden, wie die Veranstalter mitteilen. Die beschränkten Raumverhältnisse in den Kirchen des Tales und die Vorschriften zur Bekämpfung des Coronavirus verunmöglichten die Auftritte der Bündner Kammerphilharmonie und des Orchesters der Italienischen Schweiz, deren Konzerte den feierlichen Auftakt und Abschluss des Festivals markieren sollten. Deshalb hat die zuständige Kommission die Verschiebung des Festivals auf die Zeit vom 30. Juli bis 6. August 2022 beschlossen. (red)

CHUR

Film «Los Lobos» im Kinocenter

In der Arthouse-Reihe des Kinocenters in Chur läuft am Dienstag, 27. April, um 18.30 Uhr die mexikanische Produktion «Los Lobos» in spanischer Originalfassung mit deutschen Untertiteln. Zum Inhalt: Nachdem die Brüder Max und Leo von Mexiko in die USA emigriert sind, müssen sie zunächst einmal in ihrer neuen Heimat ankommen. Und sie müssen sich an die sieben Regeln halten, die ihre Mutter ihnen auferlegt hat. (red)

Das Kreuzzeichen als Mass aller Dinge

Die St. Moritzer Galerie Karsten Greve zeigt unter dem Titel «Highlight» Arbeiten des chinesischen Künstlers Ding Yi. Die Art, wie er seine Bilder aus kleinen Zeichen aufbaut, ist verblüffend.

von Marina U. Fuchs

Ding Yi ist in St. Moritz kein Unbekannter. Die Galerie Karsten Greve präsentiert hier mit «Highlight» schon die zweite Einzelausstellung des 1963 in Shanghai geborenen Künstlers. Welche Wertschätzung Greve dem Künstler entgegenbringt, lässt sich darin ablesen, dass er ihn bereits 2006 in einer Gruppenausstellung in Köln zeigte, der fünf weitere Einzelausstellungen folgten.

Nach den beeindruckenden Arbeiten von Louise Bourgeois während des Winters begegnen einem in der Galerie in St. Moritz nun einundzwanzig ganz andere, überaus qualitätsvolle abstrakte Werke auf Holz und handgeschöpftem Papier.

Subtile Anziehungskraft

Wenn man sich der Galerie nähert, übt eine Arbeit aus der Serie «Appearance of Crosses» von 2019 durch das grosse Fenster zur Fussgängerzone hin eine regelrechte Sogwirkung aus, verströmt positive Energie. Die Ausstellung heisst nicht von ungefähr «Highlight», also Glanzlicht. Wenn noch die Sonne passend am Himmel steht, dann strahlt und leuchtet das Bild besonders intensiv und lässt einen unwillkürlich lächeln. Man will mehr von diesem Künstler sehen, mehr über ihn erfahren.

Während des Studiums setzte Ding Yi sich mit dem sozialistischen Realismus auseinander, wandte sich verstärkt der westlichen Kunst zu und befasste sich mit Künstlern traditioneller und zeitgenössischer chinesischer Malerei. Bereits 1993 war er auf der Biennale Venedig vertreten, weitere wichtige Ausstellungen folgten. Heute ist das Werk Ding Yis der auch in China zu den wichtigsten Positionen gehört, in internationalen



Es leuchtet von innen: Zwei der Arbeiten des chinesischen Künstlers Ding Yi, die alle mit «Appearance of Crosses» betitelt sind, in der Galerie Karsten Greve in St. Moritz.

Pressesbild

len Sammlungen vertreten. Seit 2005 ist der Künstler Professor am Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, wo er auch lebt und arbeitet.

Ohne religiöse Bedeutung

Im Zentrum seiner Arbeiten steht seit Anfang der 1980er-Jahre das Kreuzmotiv in immer wieder verblüffenden Variationen und Farben. Das Kreuz steht aber nicht etwa für ein religiöses Symbol. Es hat in China die unterschiedlichsten Bedeutungen und wurde seit jeher als rein dekoratives Muster auf Stoffen und Porzellan verwendet. Ding Yi liess sich von Druckverfahren inspirieren, wo Schnittkanten kreuzförmig markiert werden. Die ersten Kreuze entstanden aus Tusche auf Papier. Öl auf Leinwand und Holz folgten. Alle Bilder bestehen ausschliesslich aus den Zeichen «+» und «x».

Es ist interessant, den Gesprächen der Galeriebesucher zu lau-

schen. Wohl je nach Persönlichkeit und Interessenschwerpunkten sehen die Betrachter grafische vom Computer generierte Muster, Landkarten oder den Sternenhimmel. Keines der zahllosen Kreuze gleicht dem anderen, jedes einzelnes setzt der Künstler mit der Hand. Er arbeitet mit Rastern, mit vielen verschiedenen Schichten übereinander, die dann die beeindruckende Bildwirkung voller Kraft und zugleich Subtilität ergeben.

Durch die zahlreichen Farbschichten und das Überlagern von aufeinandertreffenden Kreuzformen entwickelt der Künstler eine Vielzahl von Farbnuancen und räumliche Tiefe. Ding Yi arbeitet im Negativverfahren. Die Maloberfläche zeigt ein grossflächiges von Hand geschnittenes Gitternetz dessen in unterschiedlicher Form und Stärke geschnittene Linien, Pigmentstrukturen, Texturen und Farbtöne freilegen. Hellgrün und

Zitronengelb in all ihren Schattierungen dominieren in Verbindung mit schwarzen, hellgrauen oder weissen Akzenten. Neonfarben und Glitzerpigmente werden zur Darstellung von Licht verwendet, setzen sich mit optischen Effekten von Neonlichtern, Scheinwerfern, Autokolonnen und Werbetafeln auseinander.

Man möchte schier endlos vor den Arbeiten verweilen, immer Neues herausfinden, das sich mit Standpunkt und Lichteinfall zu dem immer wieder verändert. Die Bilder sind interaktiv, laden dazu ein, sie ebenso mit Abstand zu betrachten, wie auch von ganz nah und so immer wieder zu neuen überraschenden Entdeckungen und Erkenntnissen zu kommen.

Die Ausstellung «Highlight» in der Galerie Karsten Greve, St. Moritz ist noch bis zum 19. Juni zu sehen.

Geschichten aus dem Bündner Boden – 24 archäologische Entdeckungen 2020

Eine Barbiepuppe aus der Zeit Albrecht Dürers

Der Archäologische Dienst Graubünden (ADG) ist seit über 60 Jahren verantwortlich für den Schutz von mehreren Tausend archäologischen Fundstellen im gesamten Kantonsgbiet. Wenn diese durch moderne Baumaassnahmen bedroht sind, führt der ADG sogenannte Rettungsgrabungen durch – pro Jahr immerhin 80 bis 100 davon! Was nach einer solchen Notgrabung bleibt, sind die geborgenen Funde, die wissenschaftliche Dokumentation und neue Erkenntnisse zur Geschichte von Graubünden. Davon erzählen 24 spannende archäologische Entdeckungen aus dem Jahr 2020 in dieser Reihe.

von Hannes Flück*

Zuweilen gelingen archäologische Neuentdeckungen auch im Fundarchiv des Archäologischen Dienstes Graubünden. Von 2017 bis 2020 führte ein Team aus drei Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern eine Aktualisierung und Digitalisierung des Inventars aller bekannten

archäologischen Fundstellen von Graubünden durch. Dabei wurden immer wieder Funde aus dem Archiv hervorgeholt, die zum Zeitpunkt ihrer Auffindung nur wenig Beachtung fanden. Damals wusste man mitunter gar nicht, worum es sich handelt, oder erkannte ihre Bedeutung nicht. Letzteres ist beim folgenden Beispiel der Fall.

Die Beschreibung in den Akten klingt unspektakulär: 1975 übergab eine Privatperson aus Cazis dem Archäologischen Dienst einige Keramikscherben sowie das Fragment einer Tonstatuette, die sie im Garten eines Hauses in der Flur Caischens gefunden hatte. Anlässlich der Neubearbeitung dieser Fundstelle wurde das Stück aus dem Archiv genommen. Wie überrascht waren die drei Wissenschaftler und Wissenschaftlerinnen, als diese adrett gekleidete Frau sie geheimnisvoll anlächelte. Sie trägt eine Haube, von der ein Stoffband über ihre rechte Schulter fällt. Eine Umfrage bei Experten zeigte, dass es

sich dabei um eine um 1500, wohl in der Gegend von Augsburg hergestellte Figur handelt. Darauf deutet die Tracht, wie sie auch im Bildnis der Mutter des berühmten Renaissance-malers Albrecht Dürer zu sehen ist. Solche Tonfiguren – gängig waren

neben Frauen auch Reiter/Ritter, Narren, Jesusfiguren und Tierdarstellungen – wurden in zweischaligen Formen hergestellt und waren damit ein Massenprodukt. Ähnliche Objekte sind aus dem gesamten süddeutschen und nordwesteuropäischen Raum



Aus derselben Region: Die Tracht der in Cazis gefundenen Tonstatuette gleicht derjenigen von Barbara Dürer, gemalt 1490 von Albrecht Dürer.

Bilder ADG / Germanisches Nationalmuseum

bekannt, bisher aber nur wenig erforscht. Aus Graubünden ist es der erste Fund. Die Figuren wurden zum einen als früher Nippes auf den Fenstersimsen gestellt. Gerade die Frauenfiguren, immer in der neuesten Mode dargestellt, waren zudem lange vor der Barbiepuppe ein beliebtes Spielzeug für Kinder.

Wie das Stück damals von Augsburg an den Heitzberg kam, ist unbekannt. Denkbar wäre eine Verbindung zum seit dem Frühmittelalter bestehenden Kloster Cazis. Unter den Augustinerinnen, welche von 1156 bis 1570 in diesem Kloster lebten, waren auch adlige Frauen aus dem süddeutschen Raum. Vielleicht hat eine von ihnen dieses Figürchen als Andenken an ihre Kindheit ins Kloster mitgenommen. Nachdem es zerbrochen war, landete es im Abfall, welcher ausserhalb von Cazis entsorgt wurde.

* Hannes Flück hat von 2017 bis 2020 im Projekt «Bestandesaufnahme Kulturgut» beim Archäologischen Dienst Graubünden gearbeitet.

LA GAZETTE DROUOT

LE MONDE DE L'ART | **EXPOSITIONS**

Paris-Bruxelles

Les amateurs d'expositions pourront (re)découvrir
un artiste chinois méconnu et un cubiste oublié à Paris,
ou un festival photo original sur le thème du confinement à Bruxelles.

Paris

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

Ding Yi : Highlight

Au début du nouveau millénaire, les artistes chinois sont apparus en nombre sur le marché international de l'art contemporain, le meilleur côtoyant souvent le pire. Ding Yi appartient à la première catégorie. Si la galerie Karsten Greve représente celui-ci depuis 2006, le travail du peintre est bien antérieur : son œuvre s'est développée près de deux décennies avant l'engouement qui a bénéficié aux créateurs chinois. Dès 1988, l'artiste a mis au point le dispositif autour duquel s'articule toute sa démarche : agencer une multitude de petites croix, disposées sous forme de + ou de x, qui suivent des lignes, sur différentes épaisseurs de pigments. Vingt œuvres de 2020 sont ici présentées, en regard d'une sélection de peintures plus anciennes. Les grands formats ont pour support des panneaux de bois qui sont gravés avant d'être peints. Les plus petits sont des œuvres sur papier artisanal. Alors

que le procédé peut sembler assez minimaliste, le résultat révèle son lot de surprises. Le fait de se rapprocher ou de s'éloigner des œuvres permet à la lumière de jaillir, anime celles-ci, en suggérant plus ou moins fortement des motifs : on peut y voir, concurrentement ou simultanément, des imprimés de tartan, des étoiles et des constellations, des réseaux informatiques, des cartes topographiques ou la vue qu'offrent les hublots d'avion la nuit, en survolant des métropoles éclairées. Des motifs les plus élémentaires naît une grande richesse visuelle.

ALAIN QUEMIN

Galerie Karsten Greve, 5, rue Debelleye,
Paris III^e, tél. : 01 42 77 19 37,
www.galerie-karsten-greve.com
Jusqu'au 20 mars 2021.

Ding Yi, Appearance of Crosses
2020-13, 2020,
technique mixte sur bois,
120 x 120 cm (détail).

© DING YI COURTESY GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE PARIS,
KÖLN, ST. MORITZ



The British Museum

Circles and crosses



Yu-ping Luk
meditates upon a
major new acquisition
of Chinese abstract art

The album *79 Grids* by the artist Ding Yi (b. 1962) opens with a small circle in the middle of a black page. The circle is composed of layers of crosses, grids and dots in greyscale, like a piece of woven fabric. As we move through the pages, the circles vary in number and change in size, pattern and configuration. The painting conveys a sense of matter evolving, weaving and weaving.

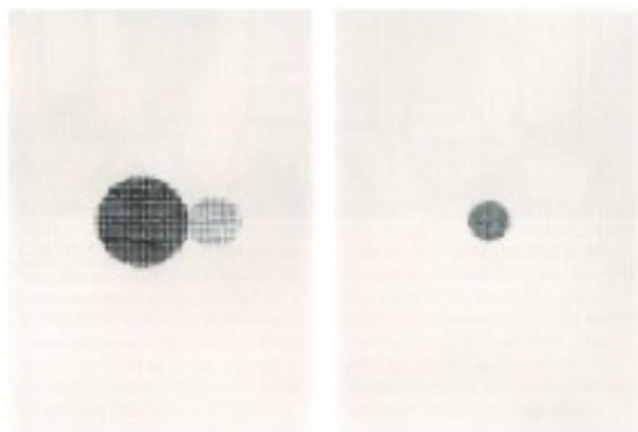
In some ways, the pared-down quality of this album is typical of Ding Yi's work. The Shanghai-based artist is best known for his large-scale paintings on stretched fabric, or more recently plywood, that are almost visually overwhelming in their physical build-up of materials, patterns and colours that cover the entirety of the painting surface. However, *79 Grids* is

also unmistakably by Ding Yi in that it uses '+' and 'x' and the resulting grid as its basic building blocks, which have been the artist's signature style since the 1980s. With few exceptions (his album being one of them), Ding Yi's paintings are always named *Appearance of Crosses*¹ in reference to these marks. Connected to the cross in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Ding Yi's '+' and 'x' are marks that are unfenced by meaning and tradition.

Ding Yi's turn to abstraction in the 1980s occurred in the midst of rapid socio-economic changes in Shanghai and China more broadly. His decision to devote himself to an extremely simplified visual idiom can be interpreted as a response to the legacies of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) on



Sheng Yi Shi, 300 Chong
Cheng Road, 20013, Shanghai
People's Republic of
China; e-mail: shengyi@shu.edu.cn
200.0 x 200.0 x 20.0 mm



well as the sudden influx of artistic and cultural influences from outside China. In a time of intense and confusing change, Ding Yi sought an independent path, which he has carried on diligently in the decades that follow regardless of trends. Through the repeated use of 'crosses', Ding Yi explores the possibilities of colour, composition, material and technique, as well as his perception of the highly industrialised environment of the Shanghai metropolitan.

As 78 Cider was painted gradually in the privacy of Ding Yi's home rather than in his studio, it arguably reveals another facet of the artist, one that engages with history and the passage of time. Elements linked to traditional Chinese brush-and-ink painting that Ding Yi studied in art school are

observable in the work. The album with its brocade cover, inscribed title slip and sheets of rice or silk paper is one of the formats the traditional Chinese painting. In the concertina form, the album can be fully opened like a handscroll. Whether going through the painting page by page or in its entirety, the format requires the viewer to experience the work slowly and in detail, section by section.

Paper has been used for writing and painting in China since the early centuries, while the painting's acrylic and pencil marks in greyscale are reminiscent of ink, their transparency revealing the artist's hand and creative process. The series of circles with their evolving patterns in the painting also recall Daoist philosophical ideas

where nature is perceived to be in a constant state of flux while following an underlying order. Although the title of the painting, *70 Gully* refers to any claim to meaning, Ding Yi has nonetheless wondrously combined his modernist approach with his own Chinese cultural heritage in this work, leaving viewers to reflect on the significance of the past in the present, and the potential for the future to reveal the universal.

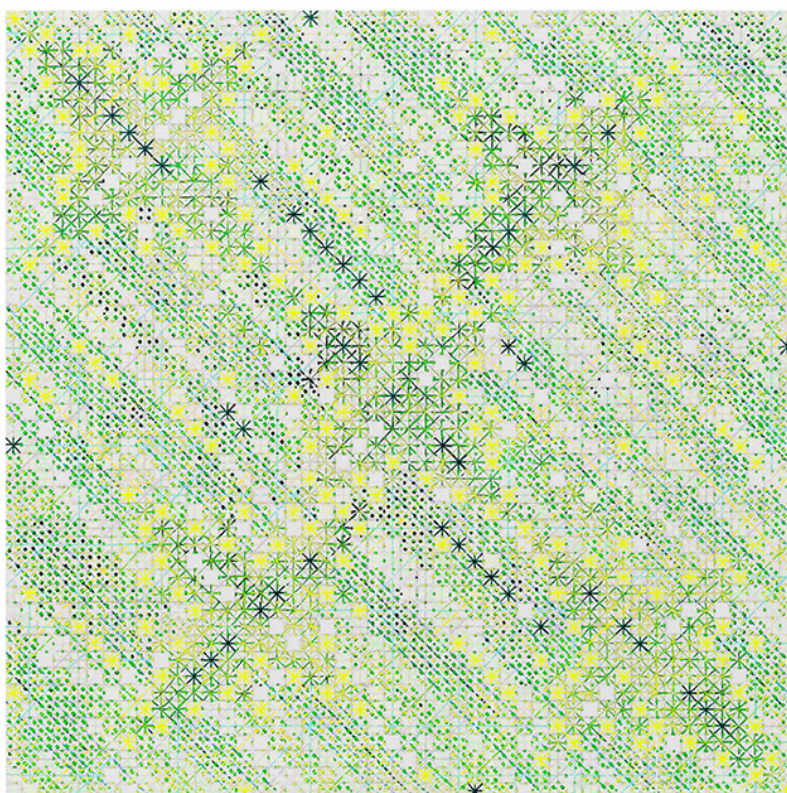
The acquisition of Ding Yi's 78 Glims, purchased with the British Second Permanent Fund, is part of continued curatorial efforts to develop the contemporary Chinese collections at the British Museum. The album will go on display in a future rotation in the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia (Room 33).

LISSON GALLERY

Art Daily
7 September 2020

artdaily.com

Galerie Karsten Greve opens a solo exhibition featuring new work by Chinese artist Ding Yi



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 2020-13*, 2020. Mixed media on wood, 120 x 120. cm / 47 1/4 x 47 1/4 in. YD/M 47© Ding Yi. Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln Paris St. Moritz.

COLOGNE.- To open the 2020 autumn season, [Galerie Karsten Greve](#) is showing a solo exhibition featuring new work by Chinese artist Ding Yi in Cologne. Karsten Greve first presented the artist in 2006 as part of his Contemporary Chinese Art group exhibition, followed by five subsequent Ding Yi solo exhibitions in his galleries in Cologne, Paris and St. Moritz. This is Ding Yi's tenth exhibition staged in partnership with Galerie Karsten Greve. Nineteen new pieces on wood and handmade paper, including *Appearance of Crosses 2020 13*, created during the global coronavirus lockdown in the spring of 2020, are on show. The color range is dominated by nuances of bright lime and lemon chrome, interspersed with black, light gray, and white speckles of color. Ding Yi's color combinations call to mind neon lights, marker pens, or oscillating billboards. At first glance, the surface that is entirely covered with crosses appears as if it were a two-dimensional, computer-generated printed or stitched composition or a color screen. In general, the artist's latest works are increasingly characterized by use of special types of color such as neon color or glitter pigment, which also involves a breach with traditional color systems. In his latest pieces, we see Ding Yi explore the depiction of light and his interest in the

emergence of unfamiliar optical effects created by neon signs , head and tail lights, lines of vehicles, billboards. The harsh contour plot of the pattern of crosses functions as a fluorescent aureole , and serves to express reflected gleaming light Highlight.

Born in Shanghai in 1962, Ding Yi completed his studies at the Shanghai Arts and Crafts Institute in 1983 , before going on to study traditional Chinese painting at the Fine Arts Department at Shanghai University , graduating in 1990. Following his explorations of Socialist Realism, during his time as a student Ding Yi increasingly found inspiration in Western art, while also examining the work of artists dedicated to traditional and contemporary Chinese painting. Ding Yi was one of the first Chinese abstract painters to become famous in the West . In 1993, he participated in the Venice Biennale as well as in China Avant Garde!, an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art presented at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin; he was invited to take part in the Yokohama Triennale in Japan in 2001 and in the Guangzhou Biennale in China in 2002. In 2008, the Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna in Italy dedicated an important solo exhibition to the artist. On a regular basis, Ding Yi's works are presented internationally in solo and group exhibitions, for instance in the recent solo exhibition Appearance of Crosses at the Nova Contemporary Gallery in Bangkok, and currently in the group show On Sabbatical at the West Bund Museum Gallery 0 in Shanghai. His works are included in the collections of international institutions such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Daimler Collection in Berlin, and the Long Museum in Shanghai. Ding Yi has been a professor at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts since 2005. The artist lives and works in Shanghai.

During the early 1980s, Ding Yi developed his first complex series of works with a multitude of variations and different colors of crosses. In China, the cross is associated with a wide range of non religious connotations. Since time immemorial, the cross has been used as a decorative pattern on porcelain and fabrics ; today, the cross is a ubiquitous sign which appears in non religious contexts in China's everyday life. Cross shaped crop marks for the cutting lines in printing served as a direct source of inspiration for Ding Yi.

In 1988, he painted his first pieces from the Appearances of Crosses series, initially in ink on paper, soon to be followed by pieces in oil on canvas or wood. His pictures are entirely made up of + and x marks. Several layers of paint and conglomerations of superimposed cross shapes were the basis from which the artist developed a rich and varied range of color nuances and spatial depth. To create his works using a negative process, Ding Yi relies on mixed media on wood (American basswood). The painting surface is incised by hand with an all over grid. Lines in different widths and shapes uncover layers of pigment, texture, and shades of color. Both the way the piece is created and the manual working process involved are exact opposites to the appearance of the artwork. Ding Yi's panels are interactive in that the viewer can perceive the depth effect of the piece in its entirety, while he is also invited to scrutinize the work at close range to explore the depth effect of its incised surface and the mapping of imaginary cities.

Accompanying the exhibition, two publications will be available at Galerie Karsten Greve in Cologne:

DING YI. Texts (Chinese; English; German): Barbara Catoir, Ding Yi, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne 2008, 50.00 euros

DING YI. Scintillement, Text French; English): Bianca Bozzeda, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris 2014 . 10.00 euros

Die Kunst meldet sich zurück

„DC Open“: Ab diesem Wochenende zeigen viele Kölner Galerien neue Programme

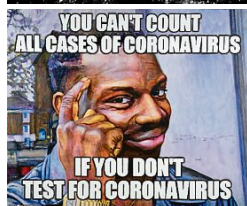
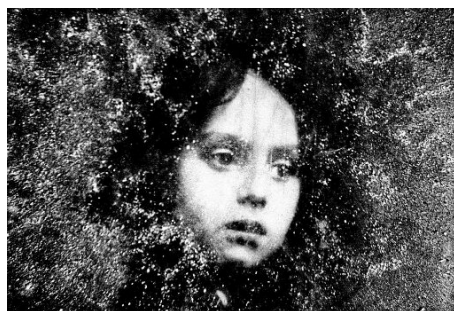
Die gemeinsamen Eröffnungen der Kölner und Düsseldorfer Galerien am ersten September-Wochenende sind gute Tradition; daran hat sich auch in Zeiten der Corona-Pandemie nichts geändert. Hanna Styrie zeigt an fünf Beispielen, dass das Spektrum bei „DC Open“ von musealen Positionen bis zu jungen Künstlern reicht.

›Karsten Greve triumphiert mit teils atemberaubenden Werken des Chinesen Ding Yi auf, dessen Arbeiten von Kreuzmotiven beherrscht werden. Diese erscheinen auf handgeschöpftem Papier und Holz in immer neuen Variationen und Farbkombinationen.

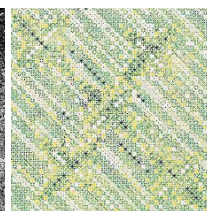
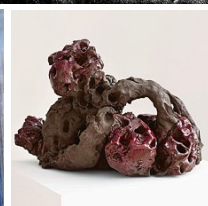
Mit Stiften, Pinsel und Stempeln bringt der Künstler die Kreuze auf, die sich rasterförmig über den Bildgrund erstrecken und je nach Farbklang unterschiedliche Wirkungen hervorrufen.

Die schwarz-weißen Werke erinnern an Schaltpläne, während Hellgrün und Gelb Naturindrücke suggerieren. In den jüngsten Mischtechniken verwendet Yi Neonfarben und Glitzerpigmente, die den Eindruck vermitteln, als blicke man aus der Vogelperspektive auf ein flirrendes Lichtmeer (Drususgasse 1-5).

›Christine Wang widmet sich höchst aktuell dem Virus und seinen verheerenden wirtschaftlichen Folgen in den USA bei Nagel/Draxler. Das politisch motivierte Schaffen der Amerikanerin (Jg. 1985) ist von Cyberkultur, Internetphänomenen und digitaler Bildsprache beeinflusst. In der neuesten Werkgruppe mit dem Titel „Coronavirus Memes“ greift sie auf Material zurück, das sie bei Instagram gesammelt hat. Die Motive aus der digitalen Bilderflut bilden die Grundlage für monumentale plakative Gemälde, die sie um Texte ergänzt, die die Bildinhalte kommentieren und Betrachter unmittelbar zur Auseinandersetzung auffordern.



Vielfalt ist Trumpf: Fotografien bei van der Grinten (o.l.), Malerei bei Karsten Greve (o.r.), Nagel/Draxler (u.l.) und Priska Pasquer (u.r.). Rehbein widmete dem Bildhauer Heinz Breloh eine Einzelausstellung (u.M.).



Fotos: Galerien

Maskenpflicht, Gesundheits- und Sozialpolitik werden dabei ebenso thematisiert wie die massenhafte Arbeitslosigkeit als Folge der Pandemie. „I miss working“ ruft einem da eine verzweifelte Frau von einem Großformat entgegen. Christine Wangs Werke und ihre suggestive Bildsprache üben eine starke Wirkung aus und zwingen Besucher, Position zu beziehen (Ellisenstr. 4-6).

›Radenko Milak befasst sich ebenfalls in seinen jüngsten Werken mit den Auswirkungen der Pandemie, auch er hat aus Reportagen und Pressebildern Motive herausgefiltert, die exemplarisch den Schockzustand vermitteln, der die Welt nach dem Ausbruch erfasste: verwaiste Städte, Flughäfen und Bahnhöfe, Krankenhäuser und Leichenhallen. Der Künstler ver-

Eröffnung

31 Kölner Galerien sind bei „DC Open“ beteiligt, in Düsseldorf machen 21 Kunsthandlanger mit. Geöffnet ist Freitag von 11 bis 22 Uhr, Samstag von 11 bis 18 Uhr. Auf die gewohnte Abschlussparty wird coronabedingt verzichtet. Mehr Informationen unter www.dc-open.de (sty)

sucht in seinen Bildern, „das eigentliche Unvorstellbare zu erfassen und zu dokumentieren das eigene Erschrecken und Erstaunen darüber künstlerisch zu verarbeiten“.

Priska Pasquer zeigt die kleinformatige Aquarelle in ihren neuen Räumen am Konrad-Adenauer-Ufer 85 in der ersten Eta-

ge, wohin sie von der Albertusstraße gezogen ist.

›Thomas Rehbein erinnert mit einer Einzelausstellung an den 2001 verstorbenen Künstler Heinz Breloh, dessen Nachlass er übernommen hat. Markenzeichen des Kölners war das prozessuale bildhauerische Arbeiten. In dessen Verlauf trug er Schicht um Schicht mit den Händen Gips oder Ton auf, bis sich eine Grundform erahnen ließ, die er vielfach bearbeitete und dabei auch den eigenen Körper in den weichen Gips drückte. Breloh begriff seine Arbeit als gesamt-körperliches Ereignis, bei dem das eigene Maß bestimmend für die Ausdehnung seiner Plastiken im Raum war. Der enge Kontakt zum Material wurde für den Künstler zum existenziellen Erlebnis von Wahrnehmung und Ausdruck (Aachener Str. 5).

›Van der Grinten stellt mit Michael Ackermann einen Fotografen vor, der dem Medium ganz neue Seiten abgewinnt. Der 1967 in Israel geborene Künstler, der mit 18 Jahren die Fotografie als persönliche Ausdrucksform für sich entdeckte, gebraucht die Kamera auf unorthodoxe Weise und lässt daraus folgende Beobachtungsfehler, Überblendungen, Unschärfen und Bewegung bewusst zu.

Seine schwarz-weißen Landschaften und Porträts, die während seiner vielen Reisen entstanden sind, bezeugen seine Sensibilität für historisch aufgeladene Orte wie den jüdischen Friedhof in Warschau oder eine jüdische Kindergrabsstätte. Die vermeintliche Fehlerhaftigkeit verleiht den Fotografien eine unverwechselbare Ästhetik, in der die Zeit aufgehoben scheint (Gertrudenstr. 29).

Erstickt am ignorierten Trauma

Analogtheater mit „Geister ungesehen“

VON THOMAS LINDEN

„Wir freuen uns, nach sechs Monaten endlich wieder, endlich wieder, endlich wieder im Theater zu sein.“ Ein wahrer Stoßseufzer entfuhr Dietmar Kobboldt, dem Chef der Studiobühne, als er 25 (t) zugelassenen Besuchern unter strengsten Sicherheitsvorkehrungen Eintritt gewähren konnte. Theater als Hochsicherheits-trakt, das drückt auf die Stimmung.

Daniel Schüller und sein Ensemble vom Analogtheater ließen jedoch alle Corona-Beschränkungen elegant an sich vorbeiziehen angesichts eines stringenten ästhetischen Konzepts. Die Produktion „Geister ungesehen“ – Ein deutsches Trauma“ blickt zurück auf ein Ereignis, das sich zum Kriegsende vor 75 Jahren zu trug. Innerhalb von sechs Tagen nahmen sich mehr als 1000 Menschen in der Kleinstadt Demmin in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern das Leben.

Diese Welle des Todes ging einher mit der Vernichtung der historischen Altstadt. Ein Ereignis, das eine tiefe Wunde hinterließ, die aber nie angechaut wurde.

Verzweifte Generation

Gleich mit der ersten Szene wird die Diagnose gestellt, dass ein ignoriertes Trauma irgendwann alle Lebendigkeit erstickt. Neben fiktionalen Kurzmonologen der Bürger setzt die Inszenierung durchweg auf eingelebte Bildmaterial der Stadt und ihrer Umgebung. Unter der Hand wird Demmin zum Symbol für ein Deutschland, das gerne das Wort „Heimat“ im Munde führt, die Vergangenheit aber verdrängt und die Natur weiterhin zerstört. Hier verzweigt eine Generation an der Sprachlosigkeit von Eltern und Großeltern und deckt damit das unterschiedliche Geschichtsverständnis der Generationen auf. Eine kompakt recherchierte Produktion mit ebenso bitteren wie süffisanten Untertönen.

90 Minuten, nächste Vorstellungen 4., 5., 6. Sept. Jeweils 16 und 20 Uhr, Universitätsstr. 16a

Ermordet auf dem Weg zum Ruhm?

Artothek: Brigitte Dunkels „Memorial for E.S.“ erinnert an ein Opfer Hollywoods

Sie war jung, schön und hungrig auf ein Leben, das gewaltsam endete: Elizabeth Short. Der brutale und nie aufgeklärte Mord, verübt im Jahr 1947 an der damals 22-jährigen, beschäftigte in der Folge surrealistische Künstler, Autoren und Filmemacher. Als „Black Dahlia“ wurde die schwarz gelockte Schönheit posthum zur Ikone, um die die früher Hype entbrannte.

In der Artothek erinnert nun Brigitte Dunkel an die leichtlebige junge Frau, die grausam verstümmelt aufgefunden wurde. Man sieht eine medienübergreifende Installation, in der sich Fakten und Dokumente, Mythos und Spekulationen verbinden. Wie Settings zu einem Trashfilm

hat die Künstlerin einige Bestandteile des großangelegten Gefüges arrangiert. Dabei scheut sie vor Grusel-effekten nicht zurück, wenn sie ein golden bemaltes Skelett mit Langhaarperücke zwischen Schmetterlingen und Libellen auf grünes Moos bettet. Ähnlich verstörend ist der Gedankenraum auf der ersten Etage. Mir rotem Samtvorhang und Sitzgelegenheit aus schwarzem Lackleder wird das schwülstige Ambiente eines Nachtclubs in den 1940er Jahren zitiert; daneben ist ein Trauertisch mit Kondolenzbuch platziert, in das sich Ausstellungsbesucher eintragen können.

An das Glamourleben, das sich „Black Dahlia“ erträumt ha-



Die Grabplatte ziert das Porträt der ermordeten Elizabeth Short alias „Black Dahlia“. Foto: Thomas Brill

ben mag, erinnert der mit extravaganten Kleidern bestückte Gepäckwagen. Sie wollte Schauspieler werden; Orson Welles gehörte kurzfristig zu den Tatverdächtigen.

Neben den installativen Elementen benutzt Brigitte Dunkel dokumentarisches Material aus dem Internet: eine Polizeifoto von Elizabeth, Aufnahmen des vermeintlichen Tatorts in Los

Angeles und der Fundstelle der Leiche.

Dunkels „Memorial for E.S.“ ist aber vor allem als Denkraum zu verstehen, in dem Fragen gesellschaftlicher Normen, festgelegter Rollenzuschreibungen und deren Gegenwürfe aufgeworfen werden. (sty)

Bis 17.10. Di bis Fr 13–19 Uhr, Savon 13–16 Uhr, Am Hof 50

Fulminanter Start

„Forum Alte Musik“ beginnt Sonntag mit Dorothee Oberlinger und Andreas Scholl

Was für ein Auftakt! Im ersten Konzert ihrer neuen Saison treffen in der Reihe „Forum Alte Musik“ zwei veritable Stars aufeinander: Countertenor Andreas Scholl und Blockflötistin Dorothee Oberlinger, die ihr Ensemble 1700 mit ins WDR Funkhaus bringt. Gemeinsam begibt man sich auf eine musikalische Spurensuche durch Neapel mit Ari-

en und Concerti von Händel, Scarlatti und Porpora.

Das anspruchsvolle Musizieren in kleineren Besetzungen sei dieser Tage ja noch mehr in den Fokus gerückt, so Programm-chaerin Maria Spring. Insgesamt zehn Konzerte präsentiert sie bis Juni 2021 mit Künstlern aus vielen verschiedenen Ländern: Voces Suaves kommen aus der Schweiz (31.1.), Sängerin Hannah Morrison aus den Nieder-

landen (13.6.), die Cellisten Christophe Coin und David Mekonyan aus Frankreich resp. Armenien (11.10.), Kölner Beiträge leisten das Ensemble Vintage (8.11.) oder die Studierenden der Musikhochschule, für die Kai Wessel Giacomo Grebers Oper „Ergastos Armoren“ wiederentdeckt hat (10.1.). (EB)



Barockes Dreamteam: Dorothee Oberlinger und Andreas Scholl

LISSON GALLERY

Beisel Public Art Relations

4 September 2020



Ding Yi „Highlight“

Veröffentlicht am 1. September 2020

GALERIEN

[Galerie Karsten Greve](#)

4. September 31. Oktober 20 20

Vernissage: Freitag , 4. September 2020 , 11-22 Uhr

im Rahmen der DC OPEN Galleries 2020

Es spricht Magdalena Kröner, Düsseldorf

Die Galerie Karsten Greve freut sich, zum Auftakt der Herbstsaison 2020, eine Einzelausstellung mit neuen Werken des chinesischen Künstlers Ding Yi in Köln zu präsentieren. Karsten Greve zeigte den Künstler erstmals 2006 in seiner Kölner Gruppenausstellung Contemporary Chinese Art, der fünf weitere Einzelausstellungen mit Ding Yi an den Standorten Köln, Paris und St. Moritz folgten. Dies ist Ding Yis zehnte Ausstellung in Kooperation mit der Galerie Karsten Greve. Gezeigt werden neunzehn neue Arbeiten auf Holz und handgeschöpftem Papier, darunter Appearance of Crosses 2020-13, entstanden während des weltweiten Corona Lockdowns im Frühjahr 2020. Auf der Farbpalette dominieren Nuancen von grellem Hellgrün und Zitronengelb, durchbrochen von schwarzen, hell grauen und weißen Farbakzenten. Ding Yis Farbkombinationen lassen an Neonlichter, Textmarker oder oszillierende Werbetafeln denken. Auf den ersten Blick erscheint die ganzflächig von Kreuzformen übersäte Werk oberfläche wie eine zweidimensionale, computergenerierte, gedruckte oder gestickte Komposition oder wie ein Farbraster. Die neuesten Arbeiten des Künstlers zeichnen sich allgemein durch den verstärkten Einsatz von besonderen Farbmaterialien wie Neonfarben und

Glitzerpigmenten aus, die mit einem Durchbrechen traditioneller Farbsystem e einhergehen. In seinen aktuellen Werken experimentiert Ding Yi mit der Darstellung von Licht und manifestiert sein Interesse an der Entstehung von ungewohnten optischen Effekten von Neonlichtern, Scheinwerfern, Autokolonnen, Werbetafeln. Die harte Konturlinie der Kreuzstrukturen erfüllt dabei die Funktion eines fluoreszierenden Lichtkranzes, sie dient als Ausdrucksmittel für reflektiertes Licht, Glanzlicht Highlight.

Ding Yi, 1962 geboren in Shanghai, absolvierte 1983 ein Studium am Shanghai Arts and Crafts Institute, bevor er ein zweites Studium mit Schwerpunkt traditioneller chinesischer Malerei am Fine Arts Department der Shanghai University 1990 zum Abschluss führte. Nach der Auseinandersetzung mit dem sozialistischen Realismus wandte sich Ding Yi als Student verstärkt der westlichen Kunst zu und befasste sich mit Künstlern traditioneller und zeitgenössischer chinesischer Malerei. Ding Yi wurde als einer der ersten abstrakten Künstler Chinas bereits in den frühen 1990er Jahren im Westen bekannt. So nahm er 1993 an der Biennale in Venedig und an der Ausstellung zur chinesischen Gegenwartskunst China Avantgarde im Berliner Haus der Kulturen der Welt teil; des Weiteren war er 2001 an der Yokohama Triennale (Japan) und 2002 an der Guangzhou Biennale (China) beteiligt. Das Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna widmete dem Künstler 2008 eine bedeutende Einzelausstellung. Ding Yis Werke werden regelmäßig in internationalen Einzel- und Gruppenausstellungen präsentiert, so im Januar 2020 in einer Einzelausstellung der Nova Contemporary Gallery, Bangkok, und aktuell etwa in On Sabbatical im West Bund Museum Gallery 0, Shanghai. Seine Werke gehören zum Bestand internationaler Sammlungen, wie zum Beispiel des Centre Pompidou in Paris, der Daimler Collection in Berlin, des Long Museum in Shanghai. Seit 2005 ist Ding Yi als Professor am Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts tätig. Der Künstler lebt und arbeitet in Shanghai.

Die ersten komplexen Werkreihen, in denen immer neue Variationen und Farben von Kreuzmotiven auftauchen, entwickelte Ding Yi Anfang der 1980er Jahre. In China hat das Kreuz die unterschiedlichsten nichtreligiösen Konnotationen; das Kreuz wurde seit alters als ein dekoratives Muster auf Porzellan und Stoffen verwendet; heutzutage findet die Kreuzform in China überall im nichtreligiösen Alltag Verwendung. Die kreuzförmigen Markierungen der Schnittkanten im Druckverfahren waren die unmittelbare Inspirationsquelle für Ding Yi. Ab 1988 malte er die ersten Werke der Reihe *Appearances of Crosses* zunächst in Tusche

auf Papier, bald auch in Öl auf Leinwand und Holz. Seine Bilder bestehen ausschließlich aus den Zeichen + und x. Durch zahlreiche Farbschichten und das Überlagern von aufeinandertreffenden Kreuzformen entwickelt der Künstler eine erstaunliche Vielfalt an Farbnuancen sowie räumliche Tiefe. Für seine Werke, die im Negativverfahren hergestellt werden, verwendet Ding Yi eine Mischtechnik auf Holz (Amerikanische Linde). Die Maloberfläche zeigt ein großflächiges, per Hand geschnittes Gitternetz. Durch die in unterschiedlicher Stärke und Form geschnitzten Linien werden Pigmentschichten, Texturen und Farbtöne freigelegt. Die Herstellungsart und der damit einhergehende handwerkliche Arbeitsprozess stellen das genaue Gegenteil des Erscheinungsbildes dar. Ding Yis Werke sind interaktiv, indem der Betrachter sowohl die Tiefenwirkung der gesamten Erscheinung wahrnimmt, als auch aufgefordert ist, nahe an das Werk heranzutreten, um die Tiefenwirkung der geschnitzten Bildoberfläche und die Kartografien imaginärer Städte zu erkunden.

Begleitend zur Ausstellung sind zwei Publikationen in der Galerie Karsten Greve Köln erhältlich:

DING YI. Texte (Chinesisch; Englisch; Deutsch): Barbara Catoir, Ding Yi, Galerie Karsten Greve, Köln 2008, EUR 50,00.

DING YI. Scintillement, Text (Französisch; Englisch): Bianca Bozzeda, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris 2014. EUR 10,00.

ÜBER DIE GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

Karsten Greve, seit einundfünfzig Jahren erfolgreicher Kunsthändler, eröffnete 1973 seine erste eigene Galerie in Köln mit einer Einzelausstellung von Yves Klein. 1989 kam der Standort Paris (Rue Debelleye) hinzu und 1999 St. Moritz (Via Maistra). Die Galerie Karsten Greve zählte von Anfang an zu den weltweit führenden Galerien, sie ist regelmäßig auf Kunstmessen wie der ART BASEL, FIAC und TEFAF vertreten und zeigt bis heute wichtige Einzelausstellungen mit Werken international arrivierter Künstler wie Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Joseph Cornell, Willem De Kooning, WOLS. Ein enger persönlicher Kontakt des Galeristen mit Künstlern der Zeit wie Cy Twombly, Louise Bourgeois, Jannis Kounellis, John Chamberlain und Pierre Soulages schuf die Voraussetzung, dass von Anfang an Vertreter der internationalen Avantgarde nach 1945 das Programm der Galerie bestimmen sollten. Karsten Greves langjährige Zusammenarbeit mit Gotthard Graubner, Pierrette Bloch und Leiko Ikemura hat maßgeblich dazu beigetragen,

dass diese Künstlerinnen und Künstler heute weltweite Anerkennung finden. Die Galerie, die dreißig Künstler vertritt und ihr Programm um internationale Nachwuchskünstler wie Georgia Russell, Claire Morgan, Gideon Rubin und Raúl Illarramendi immer wieder erweitert, ist gleichermaßen führend in Einzelausstellungen sowie höchst anspruchsvollen begleitenden Katalogpublikationen, die von der Galerie Karsten Greve im Eigenverlag herausgegeben werden.

Bildnachweise:

Ding Yi , Appearance of Crosses 2020 13 , 20 20 Mischtechnik auf Holz 120 x 120 cm

Portrait Ding Yi, 2015 © Ding Yi Foto: Che Haonan Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln Paris St. Moritz

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NEWSPAPER FOR COLLECTORS, GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

2 Profile

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DING YI

By Olivia Sand

Compared to most of his peers, Ding Yi did not choose the easiest path to start his career as a painter in China back in the 1980s.

Where other artists of his generation painted figuratively, Ding Yi (b. 1962) set himself the rule of methodically filling his canvases with one single symbol: the cross.

Ironically, through the years, one needs to acknowledge that his work is by no means repetitive, as it has undergone major changes.

The cross, although still present, has turned from a seemingly mechanically made symbol to a vibrant sign bringing together life and colour. Exploring various media while emphasising perspective and depth, Ding Yi has managed a tour de force, keeping his paintings captivating throughout the 30 years of his career. Today, adding a carved element in his pieces, he still feels he can rely on the symbol of the cross, bringing in a different dimension. Discussing his latest work, he looks back on his trajectory that has led him to become the pre-eminent name associated with abstract art in contemporary art in China today.

Asian Art Newspaper: You completed a first degree in design and subsequently carried on with a degree in art. What prompted you to pursue a degree in art?

Ding Yi: My choice is primarily linked to historical reasons. In 1977, China decided to rehabilitate the baccalaureate and I was one of the first classes to benefit from these new regulations in order to graduate from high school. Back then at the university level, the design section was the one that offered the widest possibilities to young students. Of course, that had a major impact on my choice for applying in the design section at art school. In addition, in the beginning of the eighties as China was at the initial stages of its open-door policy, the design students had better access to information about Western art or about what was generally going on abroad than the art students. In my case, within three years in the design department, I discovered a lot about the outside world or about other art movements like abstract art for example.

AAN: Was there an artist, a movement, a particular work of art that triggered your interest towards the art department?

DY: In the 1980s, China had just started to open up towards the outside world. At that time, Chinese people were studying very closely everything that had happened in the West over the past one hundred years. During these three years in the design department, I had access to a great deal of information, like Cézanne and Mondrian who were both of great influence to me. Within the design department, I discovered the sign of the cross, the symbol that



Ding Yi in front of one of his paintings from 2018. Photo: Olivia Sand

was to accompany me in my art all throughout these years. Following my design studies, the very first job I held was in a toy factory where I was in charge of conceiving the packaging of toys: on every packaging, in every angle, one had to add by hand a cross designed for folding and cutting purposes. I ended up holding that job for two years and it is precisely the sign of the cross that has become the central element of my work.

AAN: Clearly within these two years, you had drawn endless amounts of crosses in your work at the factory.

What inspired you in your art to keep the cross rather than another symbol?
DY: When speaking about art, it is difficult not to address the context. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Soviet realistic painting had a major influence on China. I was trying to distance myself from that influence and set myself apart from Soviet-style realism. As a result, I came up with the symbol of the cross.

AAN: What does the cross mean to you?
DY: It does not bear any specific meaning. In a way, I feel that adorning

Continued on page 4

NEWS IN BRIEF

smaller structures, known as *huo*, or 'treasure houses', that once served as storage facilities for the village's rice and family treasures; other features to cover include stones, lanterns, and a bridge. It is hoped that the house will be open to the public in autumn of 2020, or early 2021.

PERANAKAN MUSEUM TO CLOSE, SINGAPORE

The museum, first opened in 1995 under the National Heritage Board, will close for redevelopment in April to refresh the infrastructure and content. The museum possesses one of the most comprehensive public collections of Peranakan objects and is located at 39 Armenian Street, formerly the Tin Nan School that was built in 1912. It is expected to reopen to the public in mid-2021.

NEW JAPANESE CURATOR, TORONTO

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) have announced the appointment of Dr Rosina Buckland as Bishop White Curator of Japanese Art & Culture. Dr Buckland will be responsible for developing and implementing strategy to build, manage, and interpret the ROM's world-class collection of Japanese art and culture, the largest collection of its kind in Canada.

Dr Buckland joins the ROM from the National Museum of Scotland where she was responsible for the institution's East and Central Asia

section and was the project lead on the museum's newly established permanent East Asia gallery. Previously, she was a curator of the British Museum's Japanese Section. Dr Buckland will take up her position later in 2019.

INDIAN PORTRAIT, SOTHEBY'S NEW YORK

There was a surprise lot at the Sotheby's Master Paintings Evening sale in January – the Portrait of Muhammad Dervish Khan (1788) painted by Elizabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun sold for US\$7.2 million, against an estimate of \$4-6,000. A new world auction record for a female artist of the pre-modern era.

QIANLONG'S GARDEN, BEIJING

The World Monuments Fund (WMF) has announced that architect Annabelle Selldorf will design an Interpretation Center at the Qianlong Garden within the Forbidden City in Beijing, making her one of only a few American architects to lead architectural projects at the site. For the first time, the public will have access to the Qianlong Garden through a new Visitor's Center, which is part of a comprehensive restoration in partnership with the Palace Museum that will be completed in 2020.

The interpretation centre will be located in an existing, restored structure within the second courtyard of the Qianlong Garden.

There will be three distinct halls surrounding an open pavilion, each of which will provide visitors with a unique perspective on the past and present of the complex. The west hall will serve as an exhibition space to present the 18th-century design and creation of the Qianlong Garden; the east hall will present the conservation of the complex; and the main hall will be an open space with an unobstructed view of the third courtyard gardens for visitors to contemplate the garden.

CROW COLLECTION OF ASIAN ART

The Trammell and Margaret Crow family has donated the entire collection of the Trammell and Margaret Crow Museum of Asian Art, together with US\$23 million of support funding, to the University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) to create the Trammell and Margaret Crow Museum of Asian Art of The University of Texas at Dallas. The university will continue to operate the current museum in its current space in the downtown Dallas Arts District, where it has been located for more than 20 years. The gift funding provides for the design and construction of a second museum on the UT Dallas campus in Richardson, which will allow for a wider range of the full collection to be viewed by the public.

The Crow Museum's growing permanent collection demonstrates the diversity of Asian art, with more than 1,000 works from Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan,

Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Tibet, and Vietnam, spanning from the ancient to the contemporary. The collection also includes a library of over 12,000 books, catalogues, and journals.

NORTON MUSEUM, FLORIDA

The Norton began as an Art Deco/Modernist edifice built by Ralph Norton in 1941 as a present to the citizens of Palm Beach County, Florida. The original configuration was well thought-out. There was a great expansion in 2003, but the 'flow' was poorly considered, both inside and outside and the windowless structure ignored the beauty of the lush landscape surrounding the Museum. This new masterpiece has corrected all of this and the floor space of the entire museum has increased by roughly 37%. The Chinese galleries have increased from 5,254 square feet to 6,250 with five separate galleries named after their donors. The Chinese collection itself has grown to over 700 objects, well beyond the original Norton 1941 donation of 55 later jades and 34 early jades in the 1950s, plus 28 later jade acquisitions and gifts.

MOMA, NEW YORK

The Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) is closing on 15 June for refurbishment and expansion. It will have one-third more exhibition space after the US\$400-million project and is scheduled to reopen on 21 October.

LISSON GALLERY

Asian Art News
4 November 2018

CHINA

Shanghai

Ding Yi at ShanghART

For the past three decades, Shanghai-based painter Ding Yi has remained faithful to the singular lexicon of two basic symbols: + and x. These two elements first appeared in Ding Yi's abstract painting and drawings during the late 1980s and, in his 30-year career, remain the essential components of his artistic practice and to his ongoing series, the *Appearance of Crosses*.

His recent exhibition *Interchange* marks the artist's first solo show with ShanghART in 12 years, following museum retrospectives at the Guangdong Museum of Art and the Xi'an Art Museum, and gallery shows in London and New York.

Occupying the spacious ground and the second floor galleries, *Interchange* featured recent paintings on canvas, drawings, and acrylics-on-paper, as well as paintings on basswood panels completed after 2015.

Hard-edged abstraction and minimalism do not adequately describe the complexity of Ding Yi's work: a combination of the two is more apt or even a welcome contradiction.

Guided by rationality, precision, and the interplay between order and disorder one feels that we are observing aerial views of urban sprawl or expansive macrocosms.

Yi's color in both his paintings and works-on-paper has always had an emotional tenor or carried moods while the all-over grid formations, composed by the repetitive (x) and (+) patterns, define specific spaces.

In newer works dynamic shapes emerge, ramping up the visual field and the rhythm or complexity of movement. A fine example of this is in the scroll-like, six-meter folded *Accordion Book*, in color pencil and encased in a long vitrine.



Ding Yi, *Painting Stand*, 2018, aluminum alloy & steel plate, 388 x 132 x 260 cm. Ed. 2 + 1AP. All images: Courtesy of ShanghART Gallery, Shanghai.

In several new paintings on basswood-panels the act of scoring or engraving the surfaces exposes areas of wood grain, a technique that Ding Yi began with monumental paintings made for his 2015 exhibition at Shanghai's Long Museum.

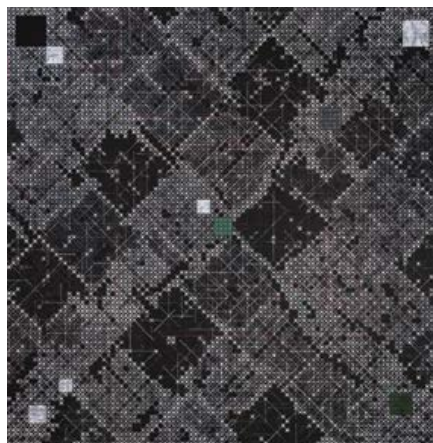
This show also features *Painting Stand* (2018), an outstanding new sculpture. Placed in the middle of the ground floor gallery space, at first glance the work appears as a large rectangular storage rack in the form of an open-aluminum grid.

Inside are steel plates, all similar in depth, fabricated to resemble stretched canvases; all pristine, blank, and primed in high-gloss fluorescent colors with a few black-and-white plates dispersed within.

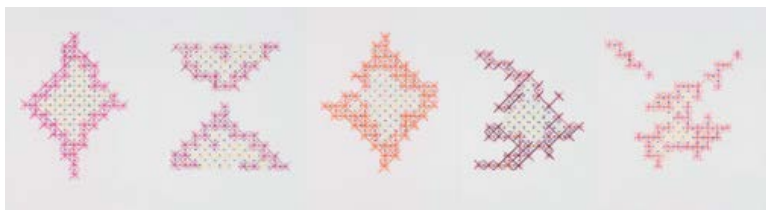
Smaller plates or facsimile 'canvases' lean against taller or wider ones with others stacked neatly upright side by side. One might conclude the object embodies the full range of colors used in nearly all of the new paintings in this exhibition.

Commenting in a recent interview published in the Guangdong Museum catalogue, Ding Yi wrote: "The evolution of my work could be in terms of my materials, the palette, and techniques. What doesn't change is the connection between one piece and the next, and the unanswered questions from the previous painting to the new one. It really is quite a deductive process—and it's been happening for three decades."

Painting Stand, along



Above left: Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 2017-B21*, 2017, acrylic on paper, 32 x 43 cm. Above right: Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 2012-9*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 300 cm.



Ding Yi, *Accordion Book* (detail), 2-17, color pencil and accordion book, 32 x 598 cm.

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

with the rest of this exceptional exhibition, not only asserts how far the conventions of abstraction and minimalism have come to be accepted in China, but it also makes clear how Ding Yi's singular vernacular and visual language endure.

Arthur Solway

...

INDIA

New Delhi

Jangarh Singh Shyam at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

In the *Jangarh Singh Shyam: A Conjurer's Archive*, co-curated by Dr. Jyotindra Jain and Roobina Karode, viewers are taken on a mesmerizing journey of a folk and tribal artist whose great talent is evident in his every piece. Among the works in the exhibition are paintings on paper and canvas, terracotta murals, digital photographs, prints, his letters, and reproductions of mural images and theater posters incorporating his art.

Jangarh Singh Shyam (1962–2001) brought to life gods and demons, shamans and priests, birds and animals, crabs, scorpions, lizards, and crocodiles as well as forests, trees, and shrubs. The simplicity and directness in indigenous folk art touches the soul and the senses. His energy and talent live in his inimitable visual language, which projects both 'the tribal' and 'the contemporary.' He is much discussed for his creation of a new style, which is named after him as 'Jangarh Kalam.'

Jangarh Singh Shyam was born into a Pardhan Gond family in the village of Patangarh in Mandla district, of Eastern Madhya Pradesh. A team of artists from Bhopal discovered his paintings and relief works that adorned the walls of his community's homes.

"Jangarh Singh, a young Pradhan artist with an inborn

genius for drawing and painting and middling ... was 'discovered' when the walls of his hut were found to be covered with paintings done by him," noted J. Swaminathan, director at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal.

Swaminathan found creative affinities between the

works of the folk and tribal artists and the Indian Modernists of the 1970s and 1980s. He saw in Jangarh a rare talent that combined both schools of art. He invited Jangarh to move to Bhopal. Jangarh's trajectory is full of changes as he embraced different forms of art

quickly, which was the envy of other artists. He learnt print-making quickly and his relief works adorn the walls and turf of Bharat Bhawan. He was excited when he first encountered poster colors, noting his first encounter with "bright poster colors in Bhopal [sent]



Above left: Jaarh Singh Shyam, *An Elephant-headed Crab; a character from the Pardhan myth of creation*, 1992, pigment on paper, 56 x 71 cm. Collection and image courtesy: Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bangalore (PTG.01754) **Above right:** Jaarh Singh Shyam, *Foreplay of Lizards*, 1993, pigment on paper, 141 x 180 cm. Collection and image courtesy: Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bangalore (PTG.0833).



Above left: Jaarh Singh Shyam, *An anecdote from the Gond epic: the annihilation of sanbarah, the boar*, 1992, pigment on paper, 144 x 162 cm. Collection and image courtesy: Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bangalore (PTG.0856). **Above right:** Jaarh Singh Shyam, *The Story of the Tiger and the Boar*, 1994, 182.5 x 151 cm, pigment on paper. Collection and image courtesy: Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bangalore (PTG.0840).



Jangarh Singh Shyam, *Portrait of a Barasingha*, mid-1980s, pigment on paper, 137 x 233 cm. Collection and image courtesy: Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bangalore (PTG.00061).

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

Montag, 13. Juni 2016

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

ART BASEL 15

«Ich habe fünf Monate lang jeden Tag 14 Stunden an diesem Bild gearbeitet.»



Unspektakulär-spektakulär: Der Künstler Ding Yi vor einer wandfüllenden Arbeit aus lauter Kreuzen und X-en.

DE WICHEN

MINH AN SZABO DE BUCS

Der zurückhaltende Maler gilt in der breiten Wahrnehmung als der wohl am wenigsten spektakuläre chinesische Zeitgenosse. Gänzlich unbekannt ist Ding Yi aber nicht. Letztes Jahr rangierte er laut Artprice auf Platz 463 unter den weltweit begehrtesten Künstlern auf dem Auktionsmarkt. 2011 wurde bei Sotheby's in Hongkong ein schwarz-weißes Gemälde von 1990 für über 1,9 Millionen Dollar versteigert. 2015 ehrte ihn das Long Museum Shanghai mit einer Einzelausstellung. Dieses Jahr zieht das Hubei Museum in Wuhan mit einer grossen Retrospektive nach. Und nun der Ritterschlag in Basel. An der diesjährigen Ausgabe zeigen die Galerien Shanghart (Shanghai) und Waldburger Wouters (Brüssel) in der Sektion Art Unlimited eine grossformatige Papierarbeit.

Freiheit durch Reduktion

Für seinen Auftritt am Rheinknie hat der 54-Jährige eine Zeichnung von enormer Grösse angefertigt: Die Arbeit misst beachtliche 5 mal 11 Meter. Das mit schwarzer Kohle grundierte japanische Reispapier ist mit Abertausenden kleiner Kreuze übersät, in leuchtend gelber, grüner, blauer und pinkfarbener Kreide freihändig und akkurat nebeneinandergesetzt. «Ich habe fünf Monate lang jeden Tag 14 Stunden an diesem Bild gearbeitet – mit einer fünfzehnmündigen Mittagspause.» Der Maler

Das Kreuz mit der chinesischen Kunst

Ding Yi zeigt an der Art Unlimited eine gigantische abstrakte Zeichnung

lichheit, als wäre ein solcher Schaffensprozess das Natürlichste der Welt. Ding Yi beginnt ohne Vorzeichnungen nur mit einer vagen Vorstellung vom Bildaufbau. Dann setzt er seine Kreuze nebeneinander, intuitiv und diszipliniert zugleich. Erst am Ende eines Arbeitstages tritt er zurück, um die Gesamtwirkung zu betrachten. Ding Yi Arbeitsweise zeugt von grosser Beharrlichkeit. Diese ist ihm reichlich gegeben. Seit 30 Jahren schon malt er seine abstrakten Bilder, die ausschliesslich aus den beiden Zeichen «+» und «x» bestehen. Ähnlich dem Binirode der Computersprache der durch unendliche Repetitionen und Abwandlungen alle nur denkbaren Informationen darzustellen vermag, erzeugen Ding Yis Kreuze vielschichtige Gebilde. Die radikale formale Beschränkung erlaubt Ding Yi ein Maximum an gestalterischer Freiheit. Er experimentiert mit verschiedensten Materialien und Untergründen, immer aber sind die

kleinen aneinandergereihten Kreuze sein Vokabular. Das Kreuz an sich hat dabei keine Bedeutung für ihn. «Ich benutze es wie einen Pinselstrich», demütiert Ding Yi trocken die Interpretationsversuche seiner Bilder mittels der aufgeladenen Symbolik, die das Kreuz in der westlichen Ikonografie aufweist. Auch die Ähnlichkeit mit chinesischen Zeichen hat keine Relevanz. Es geht ihm um reine ästhetische Reduktion, nicht um Sinn. Das geht so weit, dass er sogar seinen eigenen Namen von jeglichem Sinn befreite. Den ursprünglichen Namen Ding Rong ersetzte er kurzerhand durch Ding Yi, da das Zeichen für Yi nur aus einem einzigen Pinselstrich besteht und keinerlei Bedeutung besitzt.

Ding Yis Beharrlichkeit überschreitet mitunter die Grenze zum Obsessiven. So fing er zum Beispiel 1998 an, mit fluoreszierenden Farben zu experimentieren. Alle zwei Stunden musste er pausieren, weil ihm die Augen von der

Leuchtkraft schmerzten. Doch er ertrag es zwölf Jahre lang, ehe er zur Entlastung seiner Augen zu Schwarz und Weiss überging. Wenn man ihm in persona begegnet, ist jedoch von Besessenheit nichts zu spüren. Durch seine schwarz umrandete Brille blicken zwei klare Augen. Er strahlt heitere Ruhe aus. Woher nimmt er diese Kraft? «Das Arbeiten beruhigt mich. Für mich ist es wie Meditation.» So sind auch seine Bilder zu lesen: ein Ausdruck von Spiritualität und Einsicht, in monchischer Disziplin erschaffen.

Verkannt, stolz und dickköpfig

Er begann mit einem ersten Studium des Kunsthandwerks in Shanghai. Danach absolvierte Ding Yi ein zweites Studium in traditioneller chinesischer Malerei. Just in dieser Zeit fand die Öffnung Chinas statt. Westliches Gedankengut, Literatur, vor allem aber westliche Kunst-

strömungen gelangten nach China und wurden von den Kunststudenten gierig aufgesaugen. Die jungen Künstler befreiten sich vom sozialistischen Realismus, der zehn Jahre lang die Kunst der Kulturrevolution dominiert hatte, und experimentierten wild mit Pop-Art, Collagen, Installationen, Minimalismus, Performances und Happenings. Jeder hatte eine politische oder gesellschaftliche Botschaft mitzuteilen.

In dieser Aufbruchsstimmung malte Ding Yi 1988 seine ersten beiden abstrakten Bilder, die absolut nichts aussagen wollten. Obwohl er die Kritik seiner Kollegen auf sich zog, dass nämlich seine Arbeiten mehr Grafikdesign als Kunst seien, setzte er seinen Weg unbeirrt fort. «Ich war stolz und dickköpfig. Ich war überzeugt, dass nicht meine Kunst schlecht war, sondern dass meine Landsleute nicht bereit dafür waren», gesteht der Maler seine damaligen Beweggründe.

Es waren dann auch europäische Kunstkenner, die sein Potenzial erkannten. Hans van Dijk stellte ihn 1993 in der legendären Gruppenschau «China Avantgarde» im Berliner Haus der Kulturen der Welt aus. Im selben Jahr folgte die Teilnahme an der Biennale in Venedig. Der Schweizer Lorenz Helbling weihte 1996 seine Shanghaier Galerie Shanghart mit Ding Yis Werken ein. Die erste Einzelschau ausserhalb Chinas richtete ihm 2002 Patrick Waldburger in Berlin aus. Diesen beiden Männern, Helbling und Waldburger, hält Ding Yi bis heute seine Treue.



LISSON GALLERY

Time Out Shanghai
16 June 2015

TimeOut
SHANGHAI

Art

Mr X

One of China's most highly regarded abstract artists, Ding Yi grew up in an era of tumult and rapid development. With a new solo exhibition opening at the Long Museum, he tells **Nathan Jubb** how his experiences have made him the artist he is today

“
In the late '80s
art was often
political. I was
sick of it

If you were asked to picture the studio of one of China's foremost abstract artists, what would you see? Maybe a plush lanehouse in a leafy part of the Former French Concession? Perhaps a large, bright and clean unit in one of the art districts like Taopu or M50? Both likely options, but how about a single, huge warehouse in a cluster of six dilapidated units down a dirt track with potholes so big that they could swallow you whole, out in a remote part of Minhang? Oh, and you better throw in an enormous elevated road and children urinating on years worth of rubbish by the side of the road for good measure.

Illustrious surroundings these are not, so maybe Ding Yi lives elsewhere? 'I live in Jingan,' he says. That seems like a long commute. 'I'm spending 15 hours a day here so it's not so bad,' he replies. We nod politely, wondering how that's 'not so bad'. Once inside his studio you understand why Ding's out here; our eyes water at the mere thought of how much a space this big would cost anywhere close to downtown. Both Ding and his workbench are utterly dwarfed by the huge space. Hanging along one wall is a series of 10 paintings, each around five or six metres in height. These are Ding's latest works, the result of six months worth of 15-hour days and prepared especially for a new solo exhibition at the Long Museum, West Bund.

These paintings use the '+' and 'x' marks that has been Ding's visual language since 1988. So how do they differ? Ding sits down, lights a cigar, takes a sip of coffee and begins to quietly explain his thoughts behind this new series, his soft voice reverberating around the cavernous space. 'This is the first time I've painted on wood,' he says. 'I chose wood because the hardness relates to the hardness of the concrete walls in the Long Museum and in some ways confronts it.' Painting in many layers, Ding then used carving to reveal different colours in the paint. 'I don't really know where I got the idea to carve,' he says. 'Once I decided wood would be a good material to confront the

concrete space, it followed from there and I started experimenting with it.'

Ding's interest in art can be traced right back to his childhood. Of course in those times, there weren't any art galleries to stumble across in the city, so how did he get into art? 'I used to live across from a cultural centre,' he says, 'and within the plaza of the cultural centre there was a large board used for propaganda. Every six months an artist would come and paint this huge board, and you could see the process of it. At that time we didn't have to study as hard as today's children, so in the afternoons I would go and watch the artist at work. I thought it was great.'

By the time Ding graduated from school, only two universities in Shanghai had an oil painting course, so he ended up studying graphic design. Surprisingly though, it turned out to be a life-changing experience. 'At the time art in China was incredibly conservative,' he says. 'But for design, the teaching materials used a lot of foreign texts and magazines. The government wanted to develop design in the country and so was importing materials. It allowed us contact with totally new ideas.'

It is impossible to imagine how

dizzying that must have felt, being in touch with new and foreign cultures and ideas for the first time. 'It was incredibly exciting,' says Ding. 'China had just begun to open its door to the outside world, so there was a continuous influx of new books that had just been translated into Chinese.' Although for Ding, his supply was limited by his circumstances. 'My university was in the suburbs about three hours from my home, so every month I'd go back home only once. Every time I'd go to the Xinhua book store, I'd buy a few books and take them back to university, finish reading them, and then do the same the next month.'

In 1988 things came to a head for Ding, as he decided to adopt the '+' and 'x' marks he still uses today. It was a rebellious act, defying the climate he had grown up in. 'When I started in '88 pure Formalism was what I was pursuing because it opposed what art was in society at that time,' he says. 'In

the late '80s art was often political. Having grown up in such a political environment, I was sick of it and thought that art should be totally separate from political meddling.' Ironically, it's his very pursuit of Formalism that has imbued his art with meaning that reached beyond mere form and style.

Although improved in recent years, Ding's reception in China hasn't always been as warm; with audiences here still in the early stages of contact with abstract art he has often gone misunderstood. More surprisingly, Ding says he has often gone ignored in Western countries too, where the history of abstract art stretches back for over a hundred years. 'I've participated in lots of exhibitions about Chinese contemporary art abroad,' he says, 'but within each exhibition I occupy a strange position. Many of the media reports focus on the paintings of Mao and representations of Chinese people. So, once the exhibitions finish and I get the reports in the post, none of them have me in.' Why does he think that is? 'People think I don't represent Chinese art,' he says, laughing the laugh of a man completely content with his lot in life. With a career as long as his and a huge new solo exhibition about to open at the Long Museum, wouldn't you be too?

What's Left
to Appear is
at the Long
Museum
from
Saturday 6.

LISSON GALLERY

Art Asia Pacific
16 May 2015



SINGAPORE
ShanghArt Gallery

DING YI

IVORY BLACK



The cross is a universal symbol. It represents spatial orientation, real or imagined. Its intersection of vertical and horizontal axes may delineate the positive/negative, past/future, seen/unseen. It implies the bringing together of multiple dualities or planes; it suggests a human form, arms extended. Rotated, it is perceived as "x," both a multiplier and a negator. This is the elegant conceptual syllabary of artist Ding Yi, who obsessively paints crosses into spatial abstractions of his native city, as well as the self.

Ding, one of the first and most influential of China's contemporary artists working in abstraction, is a longtime Shanghai resident. The city is his muse and, over the span of some three decades, he has inscribed its various guises within rhythmic, exuberant layerings of tiny crosses in his work. Ding has described Shanghai's fierce entropy as making him feel "spiritually lost." His pedantic cross-patterns subdue the city's fervent, urban chaos, allowing him to reclaim a "calm" state of mind that is separate from the reality of the city.

Ding had previously used specific tools to make his early cross-grid paintings intentionally mechanical; he now renders his thousands of technically precise crosses in painstaking freehand. Observing how his gorgeous, labor-intensive canvases hover warily between rigorous technique and performative space, it is worth considering that Ding once experimented with performance art. He has, in fact, investigated various mediums, including paper, woodcuts and, most intensively, the latticed rigors of tartan fabric. Inevitably, Ding's powerful visual overload compels the viewer to make out connections in random patterns: his hectic abstractions have been variously described as evoking crowded cityscapes, neon advertising, aerial macro-pixelations of the metropolis and digital bitstreams.

Such clamorous visual referents, however, were not so discernible in "Ivory Black," Ding's recent exhibition at ShanghArt Gallery in Singapore. The artist presented one installation, one sculpture and 11 paintings from his career-long series "Appearance of Crosses," which includes his ongoing invocations of Shanghai. In a departure from Ding's usual leitmotif of vibrant and elaborate grids, the large-scale acrylics on canvas in this body of work, all numbered and similarly titled *Appearance of Crosses*, involve prim arrays of crosses in muted blacks and shadowy indigos. Two such pieces, *Appearance of Crosses* 2014-8 and 2014-9 (both 2014), are misty fields of color, appearing like streetlights seen through tears. Here, Ding still challenges the viewer's eye to generate form; in these two works, his amassed crosses resolve inexorably into faint recollections of tartan. Ding's brushstrokes warp and hesitate, and beneath their fundamental, vertical/horizontal orientation, spatial substrates glint with odd, brilliant bits of red, purple and green. At a distance, the brushworks reveal depth; observed more closely, they quiver with life. Ding's other paintings at ShanghArt were more placid and evocative of well-worn, hand-spun cloth. *Appearance of Crosses* 2013-13 (2012), for example, is the very essence of traditional Japanese *kusuri* (ikat (a fabric that has been woven with fibers dyed specifically to create patterns), with its slightly blurred geometrics and simple cross-patterning.

Ding's installation *Flying Stone* (2013) was a witty counterpoint to these self-contained works. Over 40 faceted, coal-black "stones" of varying sizes hung to the gallery's ceiling and walls like spatial fugitives escaping from the paintings, having been severed by the artist's decisive cross-strokes. These restive fragments, which are covered in faux fur, took on a silvery sheen under the gallery lights. Similar disruption resounded in *Pillar* (2014), Ding's precarious tower of interlaced, stainless-steel blocks that stood outside the gallery.

The exhibition title, "Ivory Black," refers to the carbon-based pigment preferred by the artist for its translucence, and which is traditionally produced from charred bone. This oblique allusion to cremation may suggest a sense of regret, or loss. Certainly, considering his years-long experimentation with fierce color and frenetic abstractions, Ding's restrained, meditative formality at ShanghArt was compelling. The profound and remorseless changes in Shanghai seem to have driven Ding, at last, to calm detachment. Perhaps the artist no longer recognizes his muse.

MARYBETH STOCK

See our website for Arabic and Chinese versions of this article.
معلومات إضافية باللغة العربية والصينية لهذا المقال
欲知更多詳情請參閱本報網頁或電報查詢

Opposite page

WINNER JUMALON

Halsbury Rescues (Recent First) /
2014
Epoxy resin, 50 x 30 x 30 cm.
Courtesy Yanu Gallery, Singapore.

This page

DING YI

Flying Stone
2013
Metal frame and fake fur cloth,
41 pieces, dimensions variable.
Installation view of "Ivory Black" at
ShanghArt, Singapore, 2015.
Courtesy ShanghArt, Singapore.

LISSON GALLERY

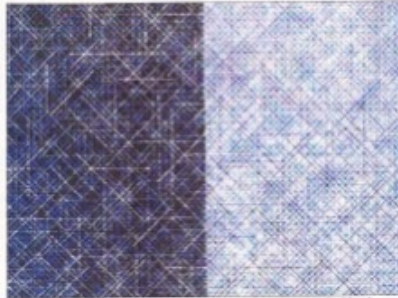
The Straits Times
28 February 2015

THE STRAITS TIMES

E2 LIFE!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2015

THE STRAITS TIMES



Artist Ding Yi's solo show in Singapore includes his *Appearance Of Crosses* series (above) as well as his latest art installation, *Flying Stone* (left). PHOTOS: SHANGHAI GALLERY

Scoring with crosses

Using crosses as his signature motif, Chinese artist Ding Yi creates abstract works that are textured and distinctive

Lee Jian Xuan

At first glance, Chinese artist Ding Yi's latest works look like aerial photos of cities after dark, lights twinkling on the urban landscape.

But around an almost-obsessive use of crosses, which grow and merge into spirals and starbursts, his recent abstract paintings are executed in black, purple and midnight blue.

Ding Yi, who started using the cross as a motif in 1984, says: "I wanted to break away from traditional Chinese art and create something with out obvious meanings and clear interpretation, to just without meaning between the lines."

"I wanted to make art that was not art-like."

The *Appearance Of Crosses* series is an show in ivory black, the 50-year-old artist's first solo exhibition in South-east Asia, at the Gillman Barracks.

Said, who a degree of imagination and the paintings could be a parallel rendering of his native city.

As a child during the Cultural Revolution, Ding lived in a small Shanghai stripped of expression.

Guthrie remembers displays of Mao Zedong and communist leaders' standard buildings facades.

"I remember watching the artists who painted at a cinema opposite my home, seeing how they went about their work," he writes in an e-mail interview. "The end products attracted me."

Adds the artist, who is a professor of visual arts at Shanghai's Institute of Visual Art, "During Shanghai's growth over the past 30 years, I'm very attached to this city."

Referencing a series of colour abstract paintings he made in the 1980s - all of crosses, in varying sizes and brilliant tones of yellow, green and red - he says: "For 32 years, I worked on a series that was fluorescent-themed, which depicted the city's energy and mystery as if translucent."

While regarded as a pioneer in abstract art on the Chinese scene, he spent his teenage years learning traditional Chinese ink and oil painting at Shanghai University before a professor exposed him to Western modernism.

After experimenting with different painting styles and studying the works of French painters such as Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse, he settled on the cross as his trademark style.

More than 60 per cent of his works have sold since the launch of *Ivory Black* on Jan 22 - the present being a 2014 painting from the *Appearance Of Crosses* set that went for \$120,000, a Singapore record for Shanghai Gallery told later.

Several of the paintings were displayed at Singapore's premier art fair, Art Stage, last month. Ding, who stopped by Singapore then, was among artists who exhibited at the Gillman Barracks' Art After Dark event.

His latest art installation, *Flying Stone*, also on display at his solo show, features a cluster of black "rocks" fashioned from metal (steel and latex for skull) that look more like heavily spaced volcanic discharge than art pieces.

He says: "The stones are a metaphor for the unknown. They could be seen as an extension beyond the paintings and this challenges the lines of reality - 3-D versus 2-D, objectivity versus subjectivity, black versus white. The viewer doesn't see my work only, but has to imagine more."

Despite using only crosses in his art, Ding's works are far from passive - he overles them on one surface, switching up colours and patterns to create textures with his grids.

As a result, his paintings sometimes resemble textile patterns, a comparison often made by critics.

Shanghai-based artist-curator Mathieu Boutevin, who contributes to artforum International Magazine, wrote in 2013 that Ding's work "has a masculine sense about it, almost reminiscent of gossamer in the West - fields and fields of crosses".

Ding, who is married and has a daughter, says: "When I conducted in this style, I sought to work art with a medium that was not-art. I wanted to expand the understanding of art, so I even painted on cloth itself. By looking design to art, we can push the boundaries of what art is."

Despite his accomplishments, he is not stopping - he has been working up to 12 hours a day in preparation for exhibition at home, and in Germany and the United States later this year.

"I wasn't so sitting down. I don't think I've let me push yet. When I create art, I'm filled with anticipation for the outcome," he says.

jianxuan@phs.com.sg



View it

IVORY BLACK EXHIBITION

Where: 8 Lock Road,

11 12, Gillman Barracks

When: 10 March to

14th 10th daily, 10am to 6pm

or go to www.shanghai-gallery.com

Time Out Shanghai
January 2012

TimeOut
SHANGHAI

Art

Edited by Sam Gaskin
art.shineonline.com



Crossedown traffic: Some of Ding Yi's paintings echo the movement of urban sprawl.

Why'd the artist cross the canvas?

More than 20 years ago, Ding Yi began his project of 'crossing out' representational art in China. He tells **Sam Gaskin** how his abstracts have become expressions of his home city, Shanghai

If you look for metaphors in Ding Yi's paintings there's a lot you can see. His paintings and drawings, which vary greatly although they're all painstakingly composed of small crosses, suggest woven fabric, circuit boards, flags, military camouflage, cultures brawling in a Petri dish and much more.

Although Ding first adopted the cross as a way to avoid representational painting, he doesn't recoil at the mention of these connotations. 'In 1988 [when he began his *Appearance of Crosses* series], I wanted to make art not look like art. So when others thought I was a cotton print painter, I felt happy because I was no longer a traditional painter. I had a new language and new technique, so I feel it's acceptable to me if people think my works look like carpets or wallpaper.'

Unlike most carpets and wallpaper, though, Ding's works are not only vibrant but full of movement – up and down, in and out, slowing at intersections, and slowly dilating, like creeping urban sprawls. The larger canvases, over two metres

by two metres, also choreograph the movements of their viewers, changing completely as we walk towards them, their intimidating mathematical complexity, like maps of DNA or Google Earth cityscapes at night, becoming much more human as individual brush strokes appear.

With almost no Chinese abstract painters before him, Ding has become one of Shanghai's most revered artists. He is praised by Zhou Tieshi, another of Shanghai's big name contemporary painters and the executive director of the Minsheng Art Museum, for the 'persistence and patience' evident in his solo show, which features 61 works spanning 25 years.

When he was starting out, Ding experimented with various methods, including performance art, but says, 'I had to choose my own artistic road. At that time, the whole of Chinese

contemporary art was expressive and discoverable. I wanted to make my works rational but without too much concrete explanation or connection with reality.' Taking the road less traveled, as advertised, made all the difference.

Ding chose crosses as the atoms of his oeuvre after noticing their use checking the alignment and colour in publishers' proofs. The publisher's cross is a formal construction, functional but meaningless, which is exactly

how Ding sees his own crosses. Five years after finding a cross to bear, in 1993 Ding represented China at the Venice Biennale, his first trip abroad. While the other participating Chinese artists' works were all representational (with the exception of Xu Bing's), Ding was exposed to other art that helped him sharpen his vision. In particular, he was

moved (and physically unbalanced) by German artist Hans Haacke's installation *Germania, Hitler's name for Nazi Berlin*, in which Haacke had the marble floor of the German pavilion smashed up.

It was a unique feeling when I stepped on that uneven marble floor since I had never experienced such works,' Ding says. 'When we reflected on the Cultural Revolution, we just drew distorted portraits of Chairman Mao. However, Haacke reflected his ideas through a whole environment. It was totally different.'

Ding's own defining idea, of making art that doesn't look like art, took on a new inflection following a discussion with an American art historian in 1986 who asked him why Shanghai artists weren't reacting to the dramatic changes the city was undergoing. 'My impression of Shanghai in the 1980s was industrialised, cold and dusty, and so my intention as an artist was to restrict feelings.'

That impression is apparent in the painting '1993-1', where white lines outlining the negative space between black crosses conspire to create the impression of endless concrete apartment blocks receding into the distance. Several of his works from the mid-'90s are also rendered in chalk and charcoal which, as well as allowing a slightly smoky confusion of colour, leave a detectable dust.

Thinking about Shanghai at the turn of the century, however, prompted Ding to squeeze moons onto his palette. In a wonderful essay on the work, critic Tony Godfrey describes the sprawling pink, red and yellow '2010-9', which is two metres tall and eight metres wide, as hitting him like heat, 'that moment when one opens the oven door,' and as a 'wall of sound'. Godfrey says many of Ding's pieces can be heard as a constant chord of urban noise, the combined sounds of Shanghai's inhabitants.

Among his most recent works, Ding has moved away from brilliant greens and pinks and painted a series of black and white paintings that are less loud but just as mouthy with suggestion; you could be looking up through the arms of a galaxy or over the surfaces of a field of solar panels.

We can't help finding similarities between things and consequently Ding Yi's works don't achieve their goal of not looking like art works – Josef Albers' square pictures, Jasper Johns' flags and Mondrian's grids all come to mind. The works look enough unlike other things, though, to free us up to enjoy seeing and sensing things in them that we know aren't there, nor were even intended to be conveyed. This more modest measure of uniqueness is something Ding clearly values. When asked what advice he has for rising artists, he says, 'every artist should be independent and creative in mind, thinking in his own way. We should not be influenced by elder artists.'

Specific Abstracted is at Minsheng Art Museum until Friday 27. See Listings for details.

“It's acceptable to me if people think my works look like wallpaper”

LISSON GALLERY

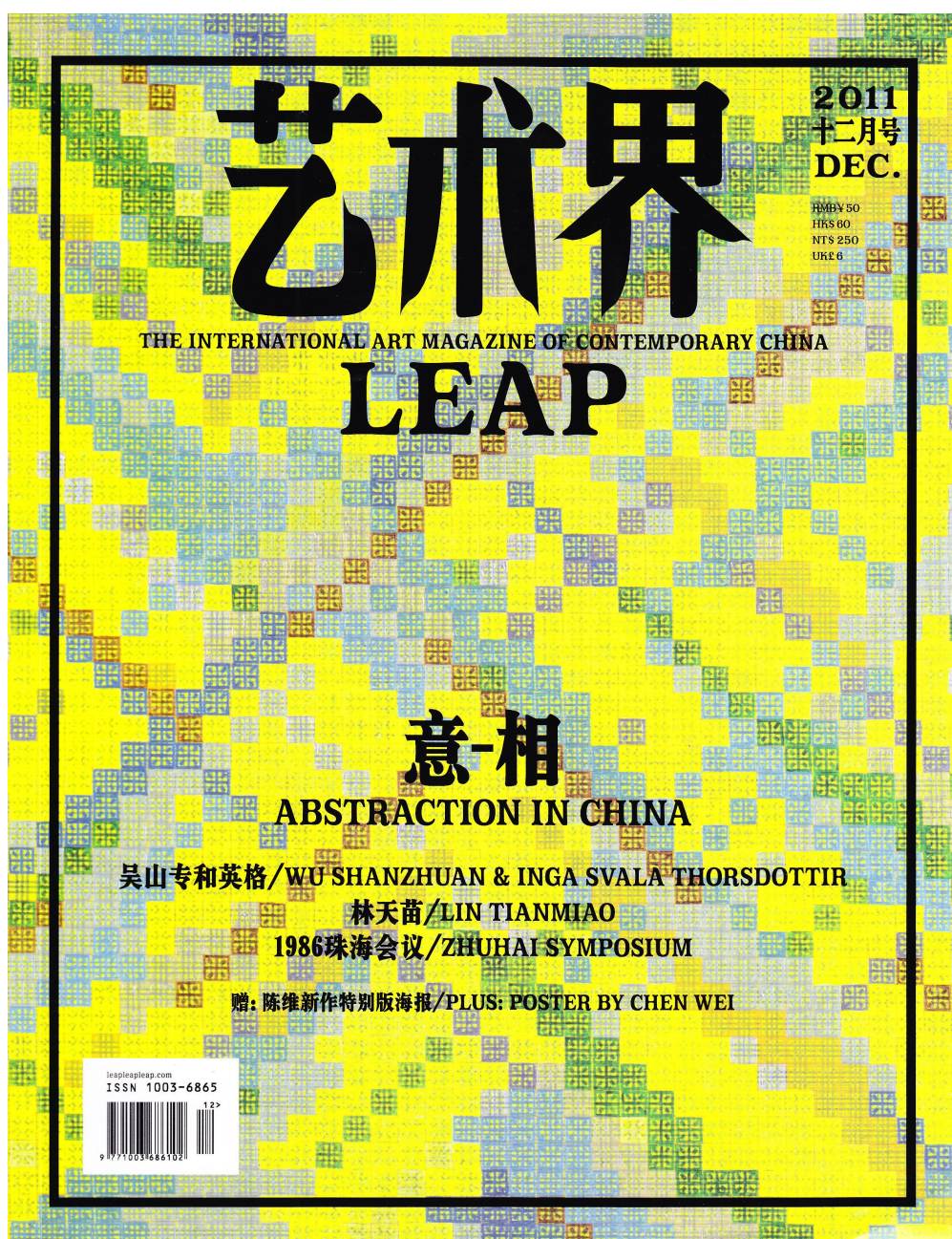
LEAP 艺术界

3 December 2011

艺术界

THE BILINGUAL ART MAGAZINE OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

LEAP



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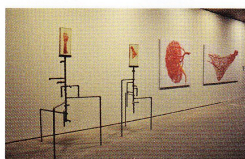
无题(第12届伊斯坦布尔双年展), 2011

UNTITLED
(12th ISTANBUL
BIENNIAL), 2011

借由菲力克斯·冈萨雷斯-托雷斯作品激发出的策展灵感, 使得展览从源头处就规避了千篇一律的双年展做法。 Although this year's biennial had its shortcomings, in drawing inspiration from the works of one artist—here, the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres—the curators managed to move the exhibition away from the stereotypical biennial format, something that is worthy of praise on its own.



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超有机
SUPER-ORGANISM

我们关注这个展览的理由有两条: 一是王璜生在担任“央美”美术馆馆长之后所启动的一个新的双年展, 二是展览的学院背景。

For this new biennale, we first take a look at the initiatives of newly appointed director of the CMAA Art Museum Wang Huangsheng, and then, at how the academy lurks behind it.

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第四届广州三年展
**THE FOURTH GUANG
ZHOU TRIENNIAL
INAUGURATION
EXHIBITION**

内容萎缩为形式、形式退守到态度, 与权力和资本的轻易合谋, 种种弊端都在这届三年展——得到显而易见的呈现。

Content atrophying into form, form regressing into attitude, and the complicit affair between the forces of power and capital: all kinds of grievous manipulations take place in this triennial, where they are visibly exposed one by one.

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谋断有道
THE SOLUTIONS

与同层展厅的“溪山清远”相比, 这个设计展不仅看上去显得更像“当代艺术”, 而且讨论问题时的态度也更为严肃。

Held on the same floor as “Pure Views,” “The Solutions” appeared not only more as an exhibition of “contemporary art,” but also as a more serious discussion of the issues at hand—even if the Chinese titles of the two exhibitions read as one and the same.

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小运动
LITTLE MOVEMENTS

三位策展人努力将“自我实践”表述为一种带有普适性的自觉行为, 也就在意识形态上否认了与那种常见的、以中国国情为表征的话语系统之间的联系, 哪怕只是修辞上的相通性。

Three curators strive to express “self-practice” as a universal, conscious behavior, and deny any connection between ideology and the oft-heard discourse characterized by an emphasis on the unique conditions of China, despite any rhetorical similarities.

曾梵志 -P/194
ZENG FANZHI

谢素梅: 时间的间隔 -P/196
SU-MEI TSE: LAPSES OF
TIME

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A DIALOGUE BETWEEN
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JIANHUA

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Q CONFUCIUS

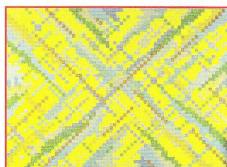
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(1974-1985) -P/212
BLOOMING IN THE
SHADOWS: UNOFFICIAL
CHINESE ART, 1974-1985



本期封面 ON OUR COVER

丁乙	Ding Yi
《十示 2007-10》	Appearance of Crosses
2007年	2007-10
丙烯、成品布	2007
200 × 280 厘米	Acrylic on tartan
	200 x 280cm

终极循环

“一天二十四小时是个终极循环。”克里斯蒂安·马克雷今年八月份的一天在横滨与我共进咖啡时说。这么说的时侯，他自然是指自己最近的惊世之作《钟》，该作品从上百部影片中提取现成的钟表镜头，剪辑成一个24小时走动的实时时钟。对于一个一辈子沉浸在蒙太奇和循环、被记录时间中的艺术家，他这句话听起来不止调皮，还有颠覆性；这是一件自觉地把机械和数码逻辑反过来运用于自然的作品。

当我们又回到十二月夹在迈阿密博览会和圣诞节之间的忙乱期时，一年的时间似乎才是一种更终极的循环。似乎今年是一个更富有终结意味的圈。《艺术界》的今年是漫长而又愉快的一年，我们努力地以新颖、别样的方式记录和推进围绕中国当代艺术的对话。第六期，也是最后一期蓝脊的《艺术界》总结了我们过往关注的众多话题，包括教育和设计，还有处在不同事业发展阶段的艺术家，从毕业生到已过世多时的创作者。

本期中，《艺术界》资深编辑孙冬冬收集组织了一系列文本——批判性的、描述性的——探讨中国新近艺术史中“抽象”的地位。关于抽象问题的争论，自从上世纪八十年代初在《美术》杂志爆发以来，就是中国当代艺术的关键问题之一，亦即非直接再现的表现方式的艺术史地位问题。在这次广泛的调研中，我们除了肯定早期上海抽象画家的价值（丁乙，他的作品出现在本期杂志的封面，他的大型个展将在本期杂志付梓之际在上海民生美术馆开幕），也审视了年轻一代的抽象画家，对他们来说，抽象的表面其实来自异常具体的形式和社会探索过程。

以此作为今年的尾声却也恰如其分，因为我刚刚结束作为《艺术界》编辑总监的两年任期，即将赴任尤伦斯当代艺术中心馆长一职。不过我还是希望能继续深切关怀《艺术界》的成长，尽管我已经将日常事务交接给我长期以来的合作伙伴林昱，并且将更多的责任移交给我的同事们。我们希望《艺术界》的明年会比过去更出色。我们已着手准备和调研一系列有挑战性的主题和艺术家。请继续留意有关中国艺术界的理论状况问题，以及对外交流在将艺术移入移出这个特殊语境时所扮演的突出角色。

过渡期总是有喜有忧的，不过我很乐观地相信，当2012年12月到来时，即将装点您书架的绿色书脊《艺术界》将比过去任何时候都出色。

田霏宇

二零一一年十二月一日

THE ULTIMATE LOOP

"The day is the ultimate loop," or so Christian Marclay remarked to me over coffee in Yokohama one morning in August. He was talking of course about his magnum opus, *The Clock*, which traces in real time the contours of a single twenty-four hour period using found footage from hundreds of films. The comment came off as cheeky, even subversive, given his career-long interest in montage and cyclical, recorded time; it was an application of the logics of the mechanical and the digital applied, self-consciously and in reverse, to the natural.

As we find ourselves back in December, in that fraught final window between Miami and Christmas, it seems that the year may be an even more ultimate sort of loop. This year at LEAP has been a long and happy one, as we have worked to document and where possible prod the conversation around contemporary art in China in new and different ways. Our sixth and final blue-spined issue wraps up a sequence in which we have looked at topics including education and design, and at artists at every possible point in their careers, from the freshly graduated to the long deceased.

For this issue, LEAP senior editor Sun Dongdong has assembled a collection of texts—some critical, others more descriptive—about the place of abstraction in China's recent art history. Since debate first broke out in the pages of *Meishu* in the early 1980s, this has been one of the key questions for contemporary art in China, namely the place of expression that is not directly tied to representation. In a wide-ranging survey, this package at once does justice to the early abstractionists of Shanghai (pace Ding Yi, whose work adorns our cover and whose major show opened at the Minsheng Art Museum just as we were going to press) and looks at a younger generation for whom abstract appearances are actually the product of incredibly concrete processes of formal and social inquiry.

It somehow seems a fitting note on which to end a year that also marks the end of my two years of exclusive involvement in LEAP's editorial direction. As I move into a new role as director of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, I look forward to maintaining a substantive involvement in the magazine's continued evolution, even as I hand the day-to-day editorial reins to my longtime deputy Aimee Lin and confer expanded responsibilities upon the rest of the LEAP team. Our hope is that next year will be LEAP's best yet, with an ambitious range of topics and artists already under research and preparation. Stay tuned for issues focusing on questions including the state of theory in the Chinese art scene and the distinct role played by diplomatic exchanges in moving art into and out of this special context.

Transitions are always bittersweet, but I am optimistic and confident that when December 2012 loops back around, and a yet-unwritten stack of green-spined LEAPs adorn your bookshelf, the magazine will be looking better than ever.

PHILIP TINARI

December 1, 2011

丁乙：概括的·抽象的 DING YI: SPECIFIC · ABSTRACTED

上海民生现代美术馆 MINSHEG ART MUSEUM, SHANGHAI 2011.12.10-2012.01.29



展览现场, 2011年
上海民生现代美术馆

View of "Specific · Abstracted," 2011
Minsheg Art Museum, Shanghai

1996年,一个24岁的年轻人做了两件事。其一,原名“丁荣”的他给自己起了个艺名:丁乙;其二,他在一张84厘米见方的画布上画上格子与X,取名为“禁忌”。这两件看似无关的事件,从个人意识出发,将对意义的压缩和简化付诸行动,成为丁乙艺术道路的重要转折。在研习了塞尚并深受其影响之后,受困于中西方文化夹击的丁乙感受到一种难以名状的、复杂的压力。他意识到无论东西方艺术,在传统面前循规蹈矩或依样画葫芦都是死路一条,应该“让艺术变得更陌生,没有绘画性,没有表现性”。

这种亟欲突出重围的心态可从《禁忌》一画中的一窥端倪。这张画被安排在美术馆主展厅的人口处,是整场展览中唯一一张“十示”系列以外的布面作品。它既是此次展览的一个隐性题眼,也可被视为丁乙艺术生涯真正的出发点。这张画看上去质朴沉实,还带有表现主义风格及1980年代特有的理想色彩。方格规划界限,黑叉表达决绝。画面传递出的仪式感——来自于手工而非形式,在接下来的二十几年

中,虽已在丁乙的绘画里改换颜面,却不曾淡化。展览主要回顾了丁乙1986年至今创作,其中包含35件布面绘画与26件纸上作品,对了解艺术家“十示”系列绘画的来龙去脉及其对中国抽象绘画的影响十分有益。

事实上,自1980年代末以来,丁乙的“十字画”对于中国抽象绘画的重要性不言而喻。他那简洁而著名的“+”与“x”,不仅易于辨识和记忆,更以其视觉的规定性和秩序感纾解时代的嘈杂与喧嚣,他以重复性的手工劳作放弃心理层面的幽冀,将绘画还原为最朴实的工作,消解人们对经典建构的愿景。由此去看《禁忌》之后的一系列以“十示”命名的画作,便可理解展览标题“概括的·抽象的”的要义,其提点的并非是物质形式的简化,也不是精神品性的提纯。意义的衰微、叙事的消失开启的是一种更为豁达的、开放的意识演绎方式以及日复一日劳作、用身体践行的日常观念。

丁乙曾提出“让画没有意义”,这在注重知识理

论、哲思启蒙的年代，在艺术界掀起文化批判大旗的语境中，若非戏言，实则需要有相当冷静与理性的洞察力。这种意识透露出丁乙对图像膜拜与观念漩涡的隐忧和警惕，随之而来的，是艺术家一种自然的、自觉的选择偏离。尽管丁乙的“十”来自印刷中用于校准坐标的十字线纹，并于1988年将之十分标准地画在第一张“十示”作品里（在红黄蓝三原色的背景下，它们看起来就像一个个准星儿），但他当时的选择与状态并没有被锚定到当时的主流艺术范畴。

丁乙如何以画家的身份自处？这个问题在此刻凸显出来。1980年代中后期，同在上海的许多年轻画家不约而同地参与抽象实验，产生了独具地域特征与美学旨趣的“上海抽象”，这是丁乙创作的背景之一。而在画“十示”以前，丁乙还做过行为艺术，关注当时中国的现代主义艺术运动。但他本分地回到画布前，用尺子、胶带和鸭嘴笔打格子，画十字，再填色。就绘画而言，丁乙曾受到关良、吴大羽、郁特里罗、塞尚、马蒂斯、蒙德里安、弗兰克·斯特拉等人的影响，后两者尤其是斯特拉的“硬边绘画”对他“十示”风格的形成意义重大。所以在早期的“十示”作品中，丁乙更注重对人工痕迹的消弭和画面机械质感的营造，由此形成其简洁、中立、理性的视觉语言。这种语言风格在后续创作的变化发展中得以不断强化。

丁乙绘画的转向，也许很难简单地归因于他对图像叙事和意义阐释的审慎，抑或回避对所处时代和社会环境的主观表达，也无法以某种抽象艺术的发轫来一言以蔽之。当把丁乙的绘画路径放入具体的历史时期与个人情境中去回溯时，更能理解艺术家不断在探寻与怀疑、内部与外部、吸收与继承之间找到平衡点，才是其艺术逐渐成熟的标志。结果是，对丁乙而言，直观、清晰的视觉叙述和规则比什么都重要。

丁乙绘画的另一个显著特点是对实验的热情，这恰恰是此次展览的一个统一要素。在他二十余年的创作中，他尝试运用各种媒介工具，除了常见的帆布、油彩与丙烯，还有麻布、成品布、瓦楞纸、扇面、木炭、粉笔、圆珠笔、油画棒、铅笔、马克笔等等。其实验的丰富性可在一个独立的小展厅中慢慢研究，这里以墙面和展柜的方式陈列了一系列丁乙的纸上作品与手稿。其中，以彩色铅笔和墨绘于宣纸上的长卷《23个圆》与《十字草》，以水墨表现十字研究，除了使人想起丁乙在上海大学美术学院学习国画的经历，亦看到他对中国传统美学的审视与思索。

其实，从早期的“硬触觉”，到开始徒手画画的“口语化”阶段，到多元的材料实验，再到用荧光色与金属色来表达上海的都市迷幻，丁乙的“十示”系列一直在变。它们清晰的轮廓下隐含着多样性与复杂性，其如细胞繁殖般的生长系统与丁乙掘进的作画方式以及随机的色彩原则息息相关。在这样的方式下，每一张画都拥有独特的基因密码，生命的坐标亦不相同，其绘画的当代意义在流动的景观里显现出来。

展览的重头戏是丁乙二十多年来创作的“十示”布面绘画。丁乙追求平凡色彩中颜色的光辉所流下来的笔触。他对颜色的运用遵从光的规律，色彩具有极其活跃的弥漫性。有趣的是，丁乙往往只能用

有限的颜色去模拟自然或城市的色调与光感，如粉笔的八色、荧光的四色，以及今年四幅新作中的黑白灰。这四幅新画在展厅后部一个敞开的四方空间里展出，如一个不连续的、暗哑的素色循环，淌过先前被五光十色浸染的眼睛，让身心清静。从彩色复归黑白，或可理解为丁乙对于城市与生命的感悟，繁花过眼，世事云烟，尘埃落定。

自始至终，丁乙都在面对限制。十字、格子布、色彩如是，连他创作的时间也要受制于身体和眼睛的状况。丁乙最近一次在国内的个展已是五年前的事情了，他不是一个多产的画家，他对作品的自律要求甚高，甚至会放慢作画速度以增加创作难度。对许多人来说，画“十”与“X”能有多难？在丁乙的画中，这不是一个有关语言、形式、构图与语义的问题，而关乎如何从杂乱无章的生活中整理出秩序，在某种受限的环境中突破限制。从简单到复杂再重回简单，其核心是观念，而非抽象，且观念亦不是深奥的黑洞。 吴蔚

In 1986, a 24-year-old youth did two things. First, he changed his name from Ding Rong to Ding Yi. Second, he drew a grid pattern with the letter X on an 84-square-centimeter canvas and called it *Taboo*. These two seemingly unrelated things, proceeding from the consciousness of this one person, would put into practice the compression and simplification of meaning, an important turning point in the course of Ding's art. After studying and being heavily influenced by Cézanne, the artist was attacked on both sides by both Western and Chinese culture, and he felt a complex and indescribable pressure. He was aware that no matter whether in Eastern or Western art, faced with the traditional options of toeing the line or mechanically copying, he was doomed, and that he must "make art more unfamiliar, without the characteristics of painting, without being expressive."

This mentality, with its anxious, expectant energy, can be glimpsed in *Taboo*. This painting—the only canvas not part of the "Crosses" series on display here—hangs at the entrance of the art museum's main exhibition hall. It is this exhibition's hidden gem, and could also be considered the true starting point of Ding Yi's artistic career. The painting has a look of both simplicity and gravity, with its expressionist style and notes of the idealism of the 1980s. Demarcated by the crosshatch pattern, the black X's convey resolution. The sense of ritual the picture plane exudes comes from a kind of handmade informality, and although on the surface it has since been replaced in the subsequent 20-plus years, it has not been diluted. Including 35

works on canvas and 26 works on paper, the exhibition serves as a retrospective of Ding's work from 1986 until today, and is instructive towards understanding the artist's "Crosses" series in detail, as well as its influence on abstract painting in China.

In fact, the importance of Ding Yi's "Crosses" to Chinese abstract painting since the end of the 1980s goes without saying. His simple yet celebrated "+" and "x" motifs are not only easy to identify and recall, but their visual regularity and sense of order mitigate the noisiness and chaos of the age. The manual repetition they necessitate serves to renounce despondence, restoring paintings to their simplest function, dispelling viewers' hope to see classical construction. After *Taboo*, then, seeing Ding's "Crosses" series offers an explanation of the exhibition's title "Specific • Abstracted," which is suggestive not of the simplification of material form, nor of purity of spirit. What the degeneration of meaning and the disappearance of the narrative initiate are an even more clear, open-minded method for deduction, and the idea of working with the body: the toil of manual labor, day after day.

Ding Yi once proposed "making painting meaningless." In an age that emphasizes theoretical knowledge and philosophical enlightenment, with the art world hoisting the banner of cultural critique, unless one works in jest, what is needed is very calm and reasonable insight. This kind of mentality reveals Ding's wariness of the worship of images and the whirlpool of ideas. With this wariness comes his natural and conscious decision to deviate. Even though Ding's "+" motifs are the product of the grids used for calibration and coordination in printing, his first "Crosses" painting in 1988 also featured the same standard of lines—against a red, yellow, and blue background, they look like the crosshairs of a gun—his decisions and state of mind were not at all anchored in the mainstream art categories prevalent at the time.

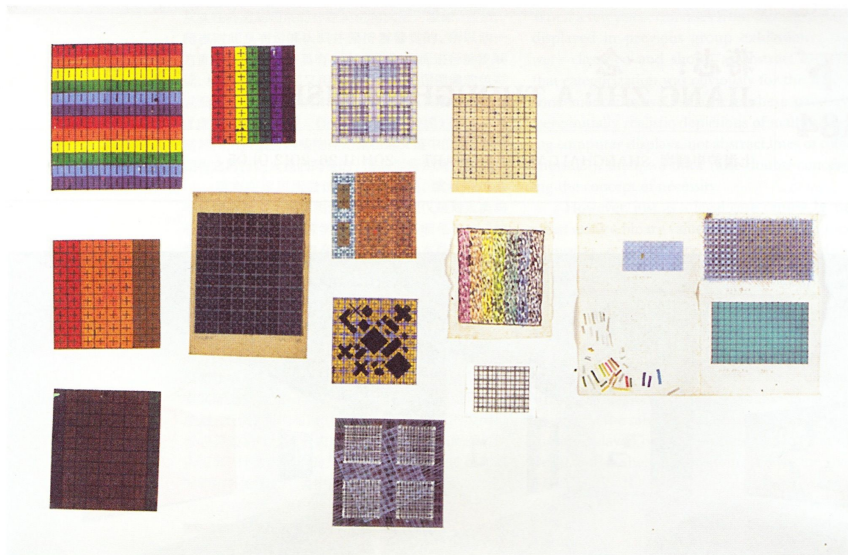
How does Ding Yi identify himself as an artist? This is a prominent question at the moment. During the mid- to late-1980s, many similar young painters in Shanghai inadvertently participated in abstract experimentation, leading to the unique, aesthetically-minded "Shanghai abstract" style. This forms part of Ding's background. Before painting "Crosses," he had also done performance art, following China's modernist art movement of the time. But before he was content to return to the canvas, he used a ruler, tape, and a pen to draw grids and crosses and then color them in. In terms of his

painting, Ding has been influenced by Guan Liang, Wu Dayu, Maurice Utrillo, Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, Frank Stella and others, the latter two—and this is especially true of Stella's hard-edge paintings—were of great significance to the formation of the style he used in "Crosses." In the early "Crosses" period, Ding paid extra attention to eliminating all traces of the man-made and to lending the picture plane a mechanical quality, thereby forming a very terse, neutral, and rational visual language. Through the transformation and development of his works that followed, this style of visual language came to be constantly strengthened.

It is perhaps difficult to attribute the turning point in Ding Yi's paintings to his caution toward pictorial narration and the interpretation of meaning, or to his evasion of the subjective expression of the surrounding time period and social conditions. There is no simple way to tidily sum up the origins of a certain kind of abstract art. When positioning Ding's paintings into a specific historical period and into the context of the individual, one may better understand the artist's incessant doubt and probing, both internal and external, for the balance between absorption and progress; herein lies the gradual maturation of the artist. What this means for Ding Yi is that the regulation and expression of a direct, clear visual sense is priority.

One other notable feature of Ding Yi's paintings is their display of his enthusiasm for experimentation; this is the essential unifying element of this exhibition. In his 20-plus years of practice, he has tried to use the tools of a variety of mediums. Other than the common canvas, oil paint, and acrylic, he has also used linen, tartan, corrugated paper, fans, charcoal, chalk, ballpoint pen, pastels, pencil, marker, and other materials. The richness of his experimentation can be slowly assessed in a separate space, his paper works and drafts presented on the walls and in display cases. Among these, the long scrolls done on *xuan* paper using colored pencil and ink, *23 Circles* and *Cross Sketches*, are studies of crosses in ink wash. Bringing to mind the time Ding spent experience studying traditional Chinese painting at the Fine Arts College of Shanghai University, the scrolls also reveal his examination of and rumination on traditional Chinese aesthetics.

From his early "hardened feelings" phase up to the start of his free-hand painting "colloquialization" phase and through his experimentation with different materials to his using florescent lights and metallic colors to depict a



《草图13件》
1987-1989年
丙烯、铅笔、纸，尺寸各异

13 sketches, 1987-1989
Acrylic, pencil, paper
Dimensions variable

hazy Shanghai, Ding Yi's "Crosses" series has undergone constant change. The diversity and complexity of the underlying implications of the works' distinct contour—reminiscent of cell reproduction and growth—are closely bound together with Ding's methods and random color schemata. In this kind of method, each painting has a unique genetic code—the coordinates of each life are different. And the contemporary significance of his paintings is now emerging in the mainstream landscape. The most important part of the exhibition resides in his "Crosses," which represent more than 20 years of work.

Ding Yi seeks brushwork that allows the brilliance of ordinary colors to flow forth. His utilization of color follows the rules of light, such that it comes to possess an extreme vigor. What is interesting is that Ding is able to simulate natural or urban light with a limited palette: here in eight chalk colors, there in four fluorescent colors, and the black, white, and gray of the four works from this year. These four new paintings are displayed in the back of the exhibition hall in a wide-open square space in non-continuous, muted and plain circulation, seeping into viewers' eyes previously contaminated by too much

color, purifying body and mind. Going from color back to black and white, it may be possible to understand how Ding feels toward the city and life—like flowers blooming before your eyes, there is the nebulous mass of human affairs, and then everything dies down.

From start to finish, Ding Yi constantly pushes the limits. His crosses, his grid patterns, and even the time he spends on these creations are all subject to the limits of the eyes and body. Ding's last solo exhibition in China was already five years ago. Far from being prolific, his self-discipline and high expectations ultimately slow down his painting speed and increase the difficulty of his work. Some wonder how difficult making his "+" and "x" symbols can really be. In Ding's paintings, this is not an issue of language, form, or composition and connotation, but one concerning how to give order to a completely chaotic existence—breaking through the restrictions of a constrained environment. From simplicity to complexity and then returning to simplicity, the core is the idea, and not an abstraction. Moreover, this idea is not some insurmountable black hole. **Azure Wu** (Translated by Cally Moss)

Shanghai Daily

上海日报

Vibe Sunday

A16

Shanghai Daily
上海日报

10 October 2010

X marks the spot

For 22 years, one of China's leading abstract painters Ding Yi has been making X marks and + plus signs — nothing else — inventing a daring new “meaningless” language to describe modern life. Liu Xiaolin decodes the x-treme art.

Entering Ding Yi's studio is like plunging into a world of crosses, mesmerized by “X”s and “+”s in dense formations on large-scale vibrantly colored canvases. There's not a figure or curve to be seen. Ding has reduced the world to simple “meaningless” elemental geometric code, creating a language of pulsating “data” flows and abstraction that speaks to the modern age.

Ding was part of China's New Wave Contemporary Art Movement of the mid-1980s and he was one of the 16 young artists who founded the artists' hub at 50 Moganshan Rd, now called M50, in 1986.

At first Ding's work — “X”s “X”s everywhere — shocked everyone: it was among the most defiant statements of the time. But today he's so popular that his “X”s appear on designer Hermes silk scarves and designers scramble to collaborate with him (but his heart is painting).

In his studio stands a towering model of “The Information Age,” a steel sculpture (by Ding and his Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts students) at the World Expo. It's covered with huge crosses, long and short, that punch outward like swords in various directions. There's a six-meter-high abstract Formica shelf in the center of the room, it's covered in shapes like strange stones from Taihu Lake and engraved with “X”s — it's a collaboration with the US home furnishings and surface materials manufacturer Formica. But collaborations are relatively few: painting is his work.

On the walls hang the famous huge x canvases; since 1988 all have been titled “Appearance of Crosses,” in many sizes, patterns, textures, materials and colors, even Scottish tartan and fluorescent paint. No title word of “meaning” gives viewers a hint. All are regimented and reduce the world to “X”s; none has “meaning” in the traditional sense. More are stacked in the corner of the studio at M50 on Suzhou Creek, a former textile warehouse.

Ding Yi, famed for his “cross-stitching,” is one of China's earliest and most influential contemporary artists; his works have been exhibited and collected worldwide. He first drew wide attention at the 1993 Venice Biennale, when his works were stunning examples of China's abstract art at the time.

Today his works sell for an average of 1 million yuan (US\$149,466), he said. The highest

price at an auction was on October 4 in Hong Kong. A work (3 x 3 cm) from 2005 fetched HK\$8.6 million (US\$1.11 million).

Ding has been busy: He gives lectures on his life and contemporary art and he teaches.

Since 2001, Ding has exhibited at Art Basel in Switzerland, one of the world's premier shows. In May two of his works were exhibited in Sino-Belgium art exchange show themed “The State of Things” in China Art Museum in Beijing. A 1972 work was shown in a retrospective of 30 years of contemporary Chinese art in Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum.

Ding is planning his third solo exhibition in Shanghai Art Museum next year (earlier shows in 1994 and 1997).

Bored by conformity

In the mid-1980s Ding was a forerunner in China's New Wave Art Movement, boldly going where others had not considered treading.

“Doesn't ‘forerunner’ refer to those who passed away?” joked Ding whose work is very much alive.

He sat down for a chat with Shanghai Daily in his studio.

“I appreciate the approval and feel much honored. But now it's like walking carefully on ice. I am working very hard to live up to it. After all, art matters most.”

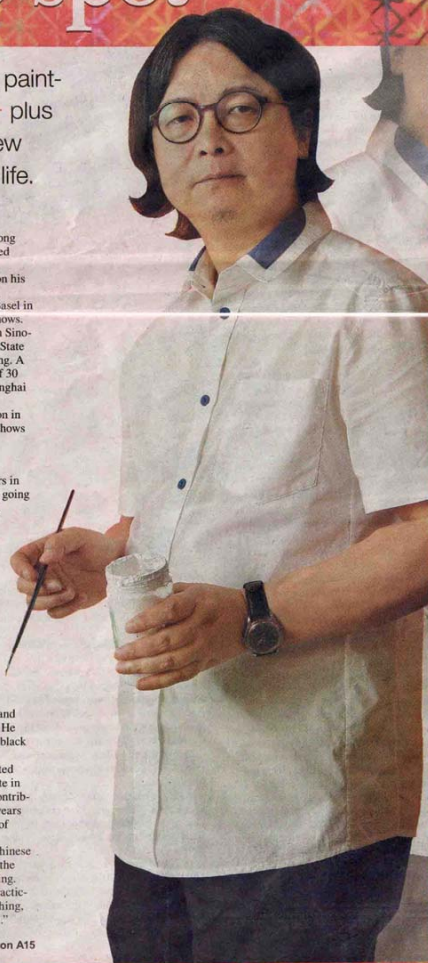
Unlike his more personally flamboyant contemporaries, 48-year-old Ding is rather restrained and keeps a low-profile. He looks more like a scholar with hair to the nape of the neck, a beard and black eyeglasses with big circular frames. He dresses simply in a casual white shirt and black trousers.

Born in Shanghai in 1962, Ding graduated from the Shanghai Arts and Crafts Institute in 1983 (his work in printing and graphics contributed greatly to his later works) and three years later studied at the Fine Arts Department of Shanghai University.

At that time he majored in traditional Chinese painting, but he quickly became bored by the conformity of literati and landscape painting.

“We could spend weeks learning and practicing various brushwork for one particular thing, like rocks,” Ding recalled. “It's pretty dull.”

Continued on A15



Master takes art to X-tremes

Continued from A16

In Ding's opinion, over thousands of years traditional Chinese painting has formed its own system of imagery so unbreakable that it becomes "routinism." He could see no breakthrough in that field and quickly abandoned it.

By that time it was the middle of the New Wave Art Movement (1985-89), a revolutionary period. Chinese artists broke the shackles of traditional artistic concepts and the socialistic realism of the "cultural revolution" (1966-76) and embraced Western modern arts with passion. They tried every possible style of Western modern art to express individualism, their personal emotions and ideas.

Ding was attracted by the language of modern abstract art, so he started to learn the Paris school himself, as access to materials and teachers was limited. Unlike other artists who focused on emotional expression, he was looking for his own stable artistic language, a language that speaks less about personal feelings and more about art itself. "We Chinese are used to endowing things with certain meanings, which gradually become stereotypes," Ding explained. "It is time for a change."

"I knew if I wanted to make a breakthrough, I had to come up with something different from the mainstream. So I tried to paint something simple, indifferent and rational."

"I hope people can focus on the color, stroke and structure of the painting rather than the meaning behind it. Only when people forget about the so-called meanings can they finally become open to new touches from the pictures," said Ding.

In this way, Ding borrowed the "cross" pattern from printing, and it would become his signature. During his three years as a package designer in a toy factory before college he became fascinated by x and +, the simple meaningless marks used to ensure precise placement of text on page by marking + on corners.

Viewers shocked

In 1988, Ding produced his first work in the ongoing series "Appearance of Crosses." Small black crosses were precisely painted on the canvas consisting of three vertical columns of color, red, yellow and blue. It appears to have been printed and Ding used ruler, masking tape and draftsman's instruments to make the drawing precise.

When Ding's professor and classmates saw his work, they were shocked and dismayed. "They found it unacceptable and hard to understand," said Ding who was pleased with the impact and the criticism.

"I knew I had succeeded," Ding recalled, with a grin. "I was walking ahead of the times."

For the next 22 years, Ding has been shaping his own Kingdom of crosses. He tried various materials and fabrics, such as corrugated paper, linen, paperboard, water paper, tartan and check gingham. He put aside the ruler and has been painting with a freer hand with pencils, ballpoint pens, chalk, marking pens, watercolor, charcoal, oil paint and acrylics.

Whatever adventures he undertakes, he always uses crosses. Insisting on simplicity and rationalism, he titled all his works "Appearance of Crosses," adding the year and a serial number "to erase every possible hint of existing meaning."

In his current works, Ding has added fluorescent colors, weaving complexity and



What critics say:

Lorenz Heibling, owner of ShanghaiART Gallery:

"Wu Guangzhong, the grand old master of modern Chinese art, stated that Chinese art often looks almost abstract. But, like kites in the sky, he says, there has always been a string that binds it to the Earth, to a recognizable object. Ding Yi's paintings are totally abstract, kites that fly without a string, beautiful, yet powerful."

Hans Ulrich Obrist, a Swiss contemporary art curator, critic and art historian:

"In revealing the cacophonous complexity of the contemporary urban experience, the artist forges an order amidst the chaos. And this is perhaps what is most inspiring: Ding Yi's unique practice offers a model for negotiating our own experience of the present."

Ding Yi in his studio on Moganshan Road. — Gao Jianping

At first, Ding hesitated, even decided to decline since he worried that he would not have 100 percent freedom in creating the design.

"There's no way I would compromise or change my style to cater to any brand. I wouldn't consider it," he said.

Then the fashion house invited him on a five-day trip to Paris where he saw Hermes' main store, studio, museum and scarf workshops in Lyon. Hermes' design manager drew a square 88.5cm x 88.5cm on a piece of paper, the exact size of his scarf. Inside in large letters he wrote "Freedom."

Ding agreed.

For three months he worked virtually nonstop on the scarf, completing his work in February 2007 with "The Rhythm of China," a dark-colored work of crosses, conveying his interpretation of the changing city.

In September, the scarf, together with another 45 historic scarves, was showcased as a retrospective finale to "The Tale of Silk" at the Shanghai Art Museum.

The scarf is only one of Ding's successful crossovers, including crossover into sculpture and furniture.

"My main focus is and will always be painting," he said.

Born to paint

Ding grew up in a working class neighborhood of Yangpu District. His apartment was across from the plaza where he watched painters at work on murals; and near the Yangpu Cinema where they painted movie posters.

His mother was a kindergarten teacher. Ding's father used to work in a department store. His addiction to art and painting was triggered by his father, who liked to make copies of illustrations in the spare time.

In his spare time he made copies of comic books with watercolors he bought with saved pocket money. He even colored the black-and-white photos he discovered at home — his parents were not pleased.

"At that time, I had a feeling in my gut that I had to do something related to art in

the future," Ding recalled. Since then, all his decisions were about painting.

In 1986, he resolutely resigned from the toy factory job designing packages and applied to the fine arts department of Shanghai University. His parents were strongly opposed, thinking he was risking his future. When he graduated four years later, he decided to be a teacher at the Shanghai Arts and Crafts Institute because the job gave him lots of opportunities and time to draw.

Today, Ding teaches in the Shanghai Institute of Visual Art, but spends most of the time, day and night and often holidays, in his world of crosses. He jokes that he's "the hardest-working creator."

But the creator also likes to visit art shows and vacation with his family. He also runs a furniture store near his studio, where he displays his favorite Art Deco furniture. Ding has slowed down his pace of creation and now spends more time on detail, often changing every work.

"The biggest challenge is how to make new breakthroughs," he said. "And I'm experimenting with every possibility to find the answer."



One of Ding's sculptures: the 8-meter-high "Age of Information" in front of the Expo Center.

LISSON GALLERY

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Ding Yi: The Magician of Crosses

Cao Weijun

The virtues of painting, therefore, are that its masters see their works admired and feel themselves to be almost like the Creator.

—Leon Battista Alberti¹



Ding Yi in his studio. Photo: Zhang Shuanglin

In many people's eyes, Ding Yi is a simple person: in his name, there are simply three brushstrokes;² in his works, he simply uses cross-shapes; and in his artistic career, some say he has simply never changed his style. "Simple," then, becomes something like a pronoun representing Ding Yi's unique spirit of self-discipline. In his paintings since the late 1980s, the crosshair—a shape most commonly represented as intersecting lines associated with precision devices such as telescopic sights and optical instruments used for astronomy, surveying, and graphic design—is the only visual element that he has allowed himself to use. Within each square inch of these markings, he leaves traces of his spiritual inner power on the canvas, stroke-by-stroke, layer-by-layer. But rather than say that this power is derived from his individual will, after twenty years of intense experimentation let us say that it originates from his own understanding and perception of life. Yet the dimensionality of these simple, seemingly boring, cross-shapes, as well as the grounds that support them, is constantly evolving. And it seems that this evolution, coupled with the artist's spiritual power that accumulates therein, expresses Ding Yi's reflection upon the era in which he lives.

Since 1988, Ding Yi has repeated the simple act of painting crosshairs again and again on his canvases every day, and this labour remains an extreme challenge for both his body and mind.

Ding Yi clings to this belief: painting is a gate that opens onto the contradictions of the real world, yet, truth is, in fact, impossible to attain. So the only thing that he can do is to experiment with myriad possible methods in order to seek a means of approaching truth,³ and the crosshair is the "fundamental doctrine" that he has chosen to employ in his attempt to open the gates to truth. The truth that Ding Yi seeks can only be attained through the complete liberation of the free will of the individual. Thus, for the past twenty years he has persisted in painting every possible variety of crosshair, and he has dedicated his life to pursuing the elusiveness of truth.

ARTISTIC ATTITUDES IN THE 1980s

When he was seven years old, Ding Yi, a naturally introspective person, began to develop an interest in art. In 1980, at the age of nineteen, he entered the Shanghai Arts and Crafts College. At that time, Chinese society was already being exposed to exhibitions of Western art which allowed the public to gain some knowledge of modern art from Europe and America. For example, it was at the exhibition *American Paintings from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts* that Ding Yi first saw works of American abstract art.⁴ Painting for the 80s, an exhibition of Chinese artists organized by the Shanghai "Grass Grass" group at the Luwan District Cultural Hall in February 1980, made apparent the desire of the Shanghai art community to experience new artistic styles.⁵ Joan Lebold Cohen has written that "this exhibition was remarkably strong: it included both Cubist and Expressionist experimental works, based on styles the artists had seen in books. . . . The exhibition . . . showed the [germination] of a new Chinese style."⁶ About that era, Ding Yi once reminisced, "At the beginning of the 1980s, I was studying at the Shanghai Arts and Crafts College. My classes were beginning to include a few imported elements of Western modern design. Naturally, some ideas of modern art also filtered in. This had an impact on me."⁷ At that time, groups of artists were spontaneously forming throughout China. The members of these groups were filled with illusions about the West—about Western ideologies, Western lifestyles, and Western artistic concepts. Wu Hung has noted that "the exhibitions of the Stars Group in 1979 and 1980 marked the beginning of post-Cultural Revolution experimental art by defining an unofficial position in the Chinese art world."⁸ From that moment on, the influence of Western art, in conjunction with the influx of new ideologies and transnational capital, began to inundate Chinese society. What Ding Yi felt was not merely excitement; in fact, to an even greater degree, he experienced perplexity, a perplexity derived from the conflict between the burdens of tradition and the self-expressive style of the West. To fulfill the aspect of self-expression, he desired to possess a personal language that would allow him to manifest his deep affection for art.

Over the course of both the history of modern China and its urbanization, Shanghai has always assumed the role of a pacesetter in the reception of Western culture. At the end of the 1970s, under the influence of the political and economic policies of openness to the West, Shanghai regained its past splendor. In reviewing Shanghai's embrace of foreign cultures over the course of its history, it became, during its time as a semi-colonial city, the most "international" metropolis in Asia. The modernist qualities that it began to accrue were never completely buried during the Cultural Revolution; they were merely waiting to be re-awakened. The consciousness fostered by this city's civil society—which possesses a tender and self-controlled temperament—has given rise to a cultural environment of independence and plurality among the city's intellectuals and artists.⁹ In truth, Ding Yi's works embody the artist's different emotions regarding urban culture, especially that of Shanghai, and the rapid transformations of this outer world merge with the artist's own inner experience of them and create a precise, comprehensive response to these phenomena. Since his youth, Ding Yi has constantly studied Shanghai's peculiarities both present and past, and this early research foreshadows his later works that take this city as their subject.

THE EARLY MELODIES OF "CROSSES"

Besides those painter-peers who often discuss their artistic viewpoints with him, there are two people who have had a particularly important impact upon Ding Yi's artistic practice. They are Yu Youhan and Hans van Dijk.¹⁰

In 1981, when Ding Yi was studying at the Shanghai Arts and Crafts College, he met Professor Yu Youhan, who was, without a doubt, a torchbearer on the path of Ding Yi's early artistic development. For example, Ding Yi first learned about the art of Maurice Utrillo when he borrowed a catalogue of paintings from Yu, and he immediately became fascinated with this French painter. For several years, Ding Yi was attracted to the depth of desolation in Utrillo's work from the early twentieth century; for, through Utrillo's brushwork, common Parisian street scenes received profound interpretation. If Ding Yi's study of the paintings of Utrillo allowed him to gain a deeper understanding of both painting and urbanism, then it was Yu Youhan's interpretation of the works of Paul Cézanne that truly opened the door to modern art for him. Ding Yi has noted that Yu Youhan "taught us to figure out what Cézanne was. At that time, to be able to understand Cézanne was a watershed. It was extremely important."¹¹ Studying and researching the art of Utrillo and Cézanne was something that many Chinese artists did when pursuing a manner of creating that would combine materials and philosophies from both China and the West. The artistic style that mixed Chinese traditions with Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Western influences—a style developed by Chinese artists of an earlier generation, such as Zao Wou-ki, Guan Liang, Wu Dayu, and others who traveled to France—also made a strong impression upon Ding Yi.



Ding Yi, *Heroism*, 1983, oil on canvas, 78.5 x 35 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghaiART, Shanghai.

Ding Yi, who has always maintained a certain distance from the mainstream, began to notice that the mainstream works being produced at this time (1980–85), and the questions about which he himself most cared, were becoming uncomfortably close.¹² Seeking to maintain his artistic independence, Ding Yi began to grow weary of following the well-trodden paths of others, be they the paths of Chinese tradition or of the West. He decided to rid himself of these burdens, resolving instead to use the simplest means of expression to communicate his inner perceptions. By 1983, the painterly elements taken from Utrillo and Cézanne were

already beginning to vanish. In *Heroism*, for example, an important early abstract work, he was influenced more by the rebellious spirit of Latin American revolutionary films, which constituted an attempt to create a stirring atmosphere of fearlessness and valour.

During the early 1980s, Ding Yi struggled intensely with confusion about his philosophy and art practice. This was a moment when everything, from the development of his thinking to the practice of his artwork, was filled with experimentation. While his first *Appearance of Crosses* paintings were not exhibited until the Shanghai Art Museum's Exhibition of Today's Art in 1988, the crosshair had already been revealed in his 1986 work *Taboo*, a hint of things to come.¹³ 1985 was an important year in Ding Yi's artistic career; having experienced a certain doubt and despair regarding any possibility of creating a combined style of Chinese and Western art, he had by now completely abandoned his adherence to Utrillo and Cézanne.

EQUIVOCATION ABOUT PAINTERLINESS

The developmental path of contemporary Chinese art after 1979 is inseparable from the transformations that have taken place in Chinese society and politics. The principal goals pursued



Ding Yi, *Taboo*, 1986, oil on canvas, 84 x 84 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART, Shanghai.

at that time were demands for social change and freedom of speech. Meanwhile, in new Chinese art, the mania of the "Cultural Revolution" was quickly transformed into another sort of feverish emotion. During the post-1979 period, many artists uncritically accepted foreign culture; more precisely, they began to blindly adopt Western modern art theory and practice as their point of reference. In an interview after the first Stars exhibition in 1979, Wang Keping summarized this attitude: "Käthe Kollwitz is our banner-carrier; Picasso is our herald."¹⁴ The first critical turn in the history of Chinese avant-garde art after the economic reforms of the 1970s was the China/Avant-Garde exhibition, held in Beijing in February 1989. Almost all major styles of Western modern art invented over the past century could be found in this exhibition; Ding Yi's works, too, were included. The two paintings that he displayed used the crosshair motif, and, seemingly the calmest pieces in the whole exhibition, he was able to maintain a sensibility that was distinct from the other work.

Certainly, the fact that the crosshair is pure, allowing little space for associative interpretation, was a major reason for his choice of this motif. Ding Yi rejected the Symbolist and Expressionist art forms that were popular at the time, for he did not relate to the emotion that permeated these two styles of art. He hoped that his own works would, both in their conceptual and visual aspects, exhibit a greater sense of rationality. Caught between Chinese traditional art and the myriad materials and styles of art "imported" from the West, Ding Yi experimented extensively with everything from pencil on paper to ink painting to performance art. Yet, having done this, he decided that he would "simply [seek to] return painting to the essential quality of form, of form as spirit."¹⁵



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 88-6*, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghaiART, Shanghai.

THE ORIGIN OF APPEARANCE OF CROSSES

Ding Yi recalled that, "at that time [the mid-1980s], I was pondering two questions. One was the question of breaking through the Expressionist style that was popular then; the other was the question of transforming inner energy." He continued, "The possibility of breaking through was to make art in a manner that was not art-like, to sift away all skill, all narrativity, all painterliness. That most familiar printer's mark, the crosshair, then became my symbol. People often ask me what its meaning is. Actually, in my paintings, it has no meaning."¹⁶ In Monica Dematté's opinion, the use of the crosshair constitutes a sort of accident that was made theoretical by Ding Yi. He has transformed the simplicity and practicality of the cross design into a colourful and visually rich material,¹⁷ and he rid his work of the complication and burden of cultural meanings and forms.

Ding Yi has said, "When I began to paint *Appearance of Crosses*, I chuckled to myself, for no one understood my paintings. They thought this was mere fabric design. But this was exactly what I wanted. Hans [van Dijk] understood my work. He saw that exhibition [in 1988], and in 1989, he explicitly came to my studio and extensively discussed with me the structure and spirituality of my works. This had a great impact on my later development."¹⁸ In an interview, Li Xiaofeng once asked, "Over the course of Chinese avant-garde art, it almost seems that there has been a certain taboo—namely, [a taboo against] the craft-like nature of works. . . . Is this accidental? Or is this a result of deep consideration?" Ding Yi replied, "Only art that isn't art-like is art. I am convinced that breakthrough requires that I make use of other elements."¹⁹

APPEARANCE OF CROSSES: THE PERIOD OF TECHNICAL PRECISION

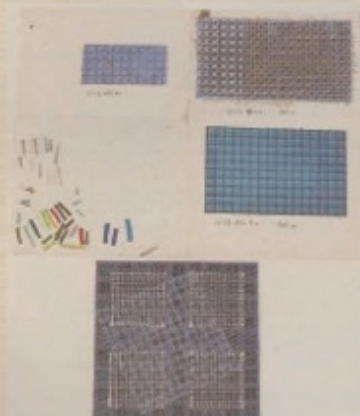
Having had a starting point that was not adopted by his peers is something that brings satisfaction to Ding Yi. Non-painterly painted works were something inconceivable for almost every artist in China during the late 1980s. From conception to execution, he made nearly impossible demands upon himself in developing simplicity and precision in his work. In his first work, *Appearance of Crosses I*, the picture plane was divided into three strips—red, yellow, and blue, respectively. The crosshair design element that he had appropriated from the printing industry filled the canvas with its black forms; in fact, the process of completing each of his works during this period was

not unlike the working process of a graphic designer. In order to ensure the greatest precision in his lines and colours, he made use of a ruler, tape, and drafting pen. Ding Yi forcefully controlled the pictorial effect of the painted canvas and cleared away any possible stray traces left on the canvas. The dimensions of his works were generally large, and given the demands of such a precise manner of creating and completing the paintings, the physical and mental burden of such a process was intense.

After more than four years of experimentation during this early period, the language of a rational art that Ding Yi employed found full embodiment on his canvases. His art thus approached what he understood as the spirit of the times. However, the question of whether or not the precision of his technical execution would be able to aid him in giving greatest expression to spiritualism quickly confronted him. On the one hand, excessively careful execution almost inhibited the possibility of the aleatory—yet the aleatory was precisely what Ding Yi unconsciously sought to create on his canvases. On the other hand, the greater freedom that “precision within freedom” offered—a form of discipline that Ding Yi created for himself that seeks precision and accuracy through a free artistic style—also attracted Ding Yi, so he decided to abandon the extreme technical precision that he had been using, bid farewell to the harsh, cold colours and the rigid lines that he had been employing, threw out the tapes and rulers and other tools, and decided instead to rely only his hands to make the marks on his paintings.

APPEARANCE OF CROSSES: THE PERIOD OF HAND CREATION

The emergence of more evident brushwork in Ding Yi's works is the most obvious characteristic that differentiates the second phase of his work from the preceding “precision period.” Ding Yi has said that “the paintings from the precision period look more solemn, as though one were using diplomatic language to speak. The phase of hand creation is more like a colloquialized period.”³² *Appearance of Crosses 91-4* was the first work of this second phase. On the canvas, all straight lines have been eliminated. The absolute verticals and horizontals of the past works still exist, but now, these lines form an underlying structure that is periodically revealed and periodically hidden. In the sketch *Appearance of Crosses 89-B*, of 1989, forty-five-degree diagonal lines were obviously retained behind the crosshairs. This not only greatly increased the richness of the colour and the sense of the space on the painted surface, but it also differentiated the work's visual effect from the quieter, more stable quality of earlier works. The insertion of such diagonal lines caused the layered markings to become richer and the tonality softer. In *Appearance of Crosses 92-4*



Ding Yi, sketches for *Appearance of Crosses 89-B*, 1989. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghaiART, Shanghai.



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 91-3*, 1991, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 190 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghaiART, Shanghai.



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 92-15*, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 160 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART, Shanghai.

and *Appearance of Crosses 92-15*, one can clearly see that within the surfaces, underpainted with red, blue, and grey, Ding Yi has created greater complexity in the relationship between the hues of the colours and their complements. Moreover, he has simultaneously diversified and unified the relationship between the lines and colours within each painting.

The "colloquialized" style during this period of creation brought unprecedented relaxation to Ding Yi's body and mind. This was the result of two factors. One was that the means of applying paint during the "precision period," often for more than eight hours a day, had strained his body and brought challenges to his physical well-being. The second factor was his new philosophical understanding of a "spiritual quality" in painting—namely, the notion of using direct brushstrokes to enunciate clearly, mark-by-mark, the problems that faced him.²¹

After entering the period of freehand mark making, Ding Yi's most obvious pleasure in creating his works arose from the process of calmly painting every crosshair by hand. The former ruler-straight lines began to warp slightly, at times losing their shape, and, by the second half of 1992, it was already becoming difficult to make out the crosshair markings on his canvases. We should, moreover, consider differences in the colours that he was employing. If we were to say, for example, that the *Appearance of Crosses* works that he produced at the beginning of 1988 were produced under the premise of his idea of "automatic colour selection"—choosing his colours freely—then during his hand creation period it might be said that he attained an even more extreme degree of leeway in his usage of colour.²² Ding Yi, who in fact has always been a strict self-disciplinarian, gradually became anxious about his feelings of relaxation during the process of making these hand-created works. He once considered returning to using a ruler when painting, for he feared the possibility that he would "paint sloppily,"²³ but rejected it as this idea would merely constitute a means of giving himself more restrictions.



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 92-20*, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 240 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghaiART, Shanghai.

APPEARANCE OF CROSSES: THE PERIOD OF MATERIAL EXPERIMENTATION

Ding Yi's true period of "colloquialization" was based on experimentation with a variety of materials as a means of seeking new possibilities for creation. This period is what he calls his "phase of material experimentation" and was the result of enriching his concept of "precision in freedom." At the same time that he was sampling new materials, he did not forget problems that manifested themselves in his recent works. What he sought to correct first was the way he selected the colours for his paintings. In a letter to Bo Xiaobo, he wrote, "Now, I feel that I can no longer float along in this habit of using light blue, light green, and fire red." He continued on to remark that "after *Fire-red*, I paused while painting the canvas and created two small sketches on paper which had the feeling of free line drawings."²⁴ At first, he arbitrarily used a crayon to draw directly on the surface of the painting, sensing, with surprise, a sort of spirit of the "vestigial" in the unexpected outcomes from this process, and he decided to continue to experiment with this.

Ding Yi had made use of the crosshair for nearly six years, and his desire to experiment with various materials became stronger. His introduction of charcoal, corrugated paper, and chalk established a new point of departure. The use of different materials brought different pictorial effects. In truth, this kind of appreciation for materials had already made a deep impression on Ding Yi in his sketches on paper from the previous several years. It was precisely the leisureliness and openness of the sketch period between 1991 and 1998, which sometimes resulted in a rough pictorial effect, that allowed Ding Yi to enter a frame of mind that is unique to the practice of writing Chinese characters. He decided to transfer this inspiration directly to the canvas and to transform his large panels into spaces for a process of "direct writing." At the same time, Ding Yi hoped to make use of the greater flexibility that the materials gave to him as a means of engaging in a sort of dialogue with his inner spirit.

Ding Yi's series of material experiments began in 1993; in them, he used canvas without the mixture of glue and water with which he usually primed it. Then he randomly dripped paint onto the surface of the stretched canvas, but the dry, coarse texture of the untreated surface inhibited the smooth, easy motion of the brush as it moved across the surface, a feeling that recalled writing on blackboards with chalk. He quickly discovered that charcoal and chalk, when used together to make drawings on unprimed linen, looked extremely

natural and complementary, even conveying a bit of a "primeval" feel. Abandoning glue and water, as well as the attempt to harmonize pigments, the glossy appearance of his previous paintings completely disappeared; what replaced it were the diffuse, powdery margins that remained around every brushstroke. On the surface of the coarse linen there emerged an illusion of blurriness, resulting in a painting that appeared more intuitive and animated. In order to emphasize this pictorial effect, he even left the four edges of the canvas blank while allowing the chalk to extend its presence outside of the main area. This resulted in an effect around the edges of the canvas to resemble, to a certain extent, "silk manuscripts" or antique textiles.

For Ding Yi, this was not only a process of coming to understand new materials, but also of becoming reacquainted with traditional Chinese art forms. During his "hand creation" phase, Ding Yi used dozens of different supports for painting. These included linen, finished canvas, cardboard, watercolour paper, and corrugated paper; he even painted on the surfaces of furniture. He also used pencil, felt marker, chalk, watercolour pen, ball-point pen, charcoal, oil paint, acrylic paint, and other pigments. With all of these materials he conducted his experiments. After coming to recognize the light feeling that characterized the colourful works from the later part of his "hand creation" phase, he attempted a return to a grey scale. Ding Yi's appreciation of this experiment aroused a desire to indirectly reconstruct traditional Chinese painting. The forms of displaying traditional painting are many: besides single hanging scrolls, album leaves, and other forms with which many people are familiar, sets of scrolls, fans, and screens are also formats that allow viewers to appreciate the traditional painted arts. With regard to their function, fans and screens may be seen as articles for daily use, and the calligraphy and painting that they bear on their surfaces often reveal a narrative.

In *Appearance of Crosses 97-B21/B-24*, which adopts the classical Chinese format of a set of four hanging scrolls, Ding Yi created a panoramic work of art that carries the vestiges of traditional Chinese art. This 1997 work was based on the complex appreciation of tradition that he had developed since his time studying traditional Chinese painting in college in 1986. Importantly, this appreciation involved everything from the grand historical tradition of Chinese painting to the use of arduous techniques such as the creation of "atmospheric rhythm," one criterion for judging the success of traditional Chinese painting, and the employment of the "five shades" in the application of ink. But in these four scrolls, which compose a complete entity that is 260 centimeters tall by 320 centimeters wide, this appreciation was completely "pulverized," made vestigial. On all four sides, the smoky grey corrugated paper still reveals its original colour, creating a frame-like effect. Through Ding Yi's use of charcoal and chalk, traditional motifs and genres—such as "the four gentlemen;" that is, the plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum which often appear in traditional sets of scrolls, and genres such as landscape painting and depictions of birds and



Ding Yi, exhibition view of *Appearance of Crosses 1989-2007*, Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Italy. Courtesy of Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Italy.



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 1997-3*, 1997, acrylic on fabric, 140 x 160 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghaiART, Shanghai.

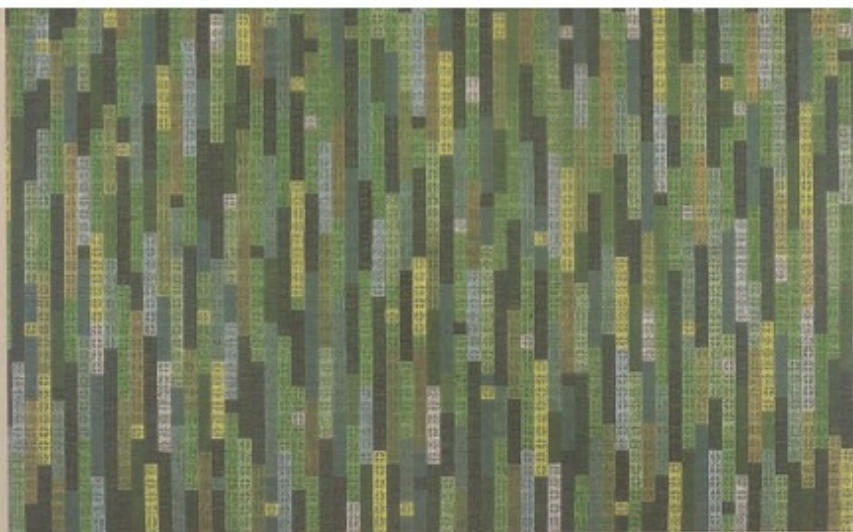
flowers—were carbonized. Even the genre of human figure painting, with its portrayals of Zhong Kui, beautiful women, and others, was not spared. Ding Yi has written that:

... the integrality of traditional culture is currently being challenged by the essence of contemporary society. ... The deepest significance of this culture is being deconstructed, rendering it unreal in real life. It has already been transformed into a sort of spiritual memory or a material trace. ... To care about the vestiges of concepts supported by non-mainstream, traditional culture is to adopt an archaeological position as a means of cutting into the traces left behind by history ... to reconsider their inexpressible material meaning.²⁵

CHECKED CLOTH—THE INTRODUCTION OF READY-MADES

What Ding Yi has called the “harsh” joy of “directly writing” on canvas and paper underwent a new development in 1997. He replaced the raw linen he had been working on with finished fabric. For him, the introduction of Scottish tartan, for example, was not merely a change in material; even more, it constituted a new point of conceptual origin. In particular, the use of this finished fabric brought about an investigation of relationships between cultures. Scottish tartan has been upheld as the true symbol of Scotland, the various patterns of tartan supposedly having once been used as emblems to differentiate clans. In China, however, tartan is simply a textile produced in factories. At first, Ding Yi simply intended to use the colour and patterning of the fabric as a ground—the fabric’s structure and his own cross-shapes possess a certain formal affinity. Yet, after this work was completed, the original appearance of the fabric, all of which he covered in pigment, was almost impossible to discern. But because of variations in the density of the crosses on the canvas and in the thickness of the layering of paint, one could still vaguely make out the plaid’s original pattern. “The colour and patterning of the fabric itself became a sort of restriction on Ding Yi’s creation, yet this sort of restriction has also provided him with a new direction.”²⁶

Still, according to Ding Yi, the grid-patterned fabric functions not merely as a piece of canvas. What is more important are the cultural associations that the fabric symbolizes that I alluded to earlier, as well as the struggles that occur within the new contexts intimately related to them. Ding Yi believes that the realities created through cultural fantasies and misunderstandings occupy positions of principal importance within history. For example, the course of the establishment and



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses 2007-3*, acrylic on fabric, 200 x 280 cm. Courtesy of the artist and ShengHART, Shanghai.

development of contemporary Chinese art is also a process of misinterpreting Western modern art, an art form that has served as a primary point of reference for many contemporary Chinese artists.²⁷ The superposing and melding of cultures was an essential point that Ding Yi explored during this period.

In his canvases, Ding Yi has grasped consideration of tradition and of contemporaneity in a focused and dynamic manner. Although the crosshair has been the only expressive element that he has permitted himself to use, through the precise and nuanced exploration of the potentialities of everything from materials to forms, he has given full expression on his canvases to the questions that concern him. It is only in this way that he gives visual form to his artistic thinking and to the strength of the spiritual sources behind his works. Indeed, the pursuit of spirituality was precisely Ding Yi's original intention in beginning the *Appearance of Crosses* series. Moreover, Ding Yi's evaluation of the "vestiges" of traditional Chinese art during his period of material experimentation contributes to our appreciation of the wisdom that is contained at the very edges of the canvas, at the physical margins of his works.

The primary element of these works—namely, a vision of Chinese social life made visually abstract by the artist—is placed atop this foundation. Is this an example of the intercultural "hybridity" that Homi K. Bhabha often mentions in his cultural critiques?²⁸ Or should we use Samuel P. Huntington's concept of "band-wagoning"; that is, following upon the heels of super powers, to interpret the profound markings that have accumulated on the surface of Ding Yi's canvases?²⁹ This underlying socio-political concern is the reality that has been made visual by Ding Yi.

THE SMOG OF THE CITY—THE NEW SUBJECT IN THE BACKGROUND OF *APPEARANCE OF CROSSES*

One might say that during the first ten years of his career, Ding Yi made use of *Appearance of Crosses* in an attempt to find interpretation for certain questions that have long been accumulating in his heart and mind. During the following ten years, then, *Appearance of Crosses* has been used to participate in a discussion of contemporary questions—questions of cultural politics, survival, and urbanization, among other things. It is especially the urban upheaval that is transforming Shanghai that caused Ding Yi in the early 1980s to reconsider his fascination with the works of Utrillo and to examine his infatuation with the cityscape. But the contrast between the contemporary moment and the past is difficult to articulate. In another respect, it is precisely the great space opened up by this contrast that gives Ding Yi the opportunity to explore and savour

the history of Shanghai as well as his personal memories and feelings about his life in this city. In a certain regard, Ding Yi's crosshair and the city of Shanghai are alike: as concepts, they have never changed, yet they are now completely different from what they were in the past.

To evaluate and to represent the cultural configurations forming around oneself is not an easy task. Yet Ding Yi has noted that "to adopt a neutral viewpoint and record the traces left behind by this historical period during which the city in which I live has been developing at extreme speed—this is exactly what I am supposed to do as an artist."⁵⁰ During the 1980s, Ding Yi engaged in a theoretical investigation of the process of perceiving the artistic forms and ideologies of Western and Chinese traditional art. In a certain sense, however, he had a feeling of observing all of this with indifference. So beginning in the mid 1990s, Ding Yi observed and experienced every facet of his life being influenced and stimulated by the urban upheaval taking place in Shanghai. This Chinese form of societal development, which takes as its referent the course of urbanization and industrialization in Western modern history, has taken an infinitely more convulsive path than that of Western art history. With full vigour, Ding Yi accumulates and transfers his perceptions and his understanding onto canvas. Yet he continues to use his crosshairs to interpret the strength of the Chinese spirit in this age of tremendous flux.



Ding Yi, exhibition view of *Appearance of Crosses 1958-2007*, Museo d'Arte Moderne di Bologna, Italy. Courtesy of Museo d'Arte Moderne di Bologna, Italy.

Ding Yi's post-1997 works might be interpreted as indicative of going beyond his inner spirit, of his beginning to observe the phenomena of the world around him with determination and earnestness. Ding Yi recently recalled, "I have lived in Shanghai for more than forty years, and every day I have looked at her appearance. Beginning in the mid 1990s, you could clearly feel that this city was changing and expanding at an alarming speed. . . . Thanks to this 'urbanization movement', nothing is left of the [city's] Utrillo-like, gloomy, elegant grace." Instead, he continued, ". . . what this metropolis now gives us are neon lights,

streams of cars, crowds of buildings, display screens for stock reports, and billboards everywhere."⁵¹ Certainly, in today's metropolitan China, the relationships among people, as well as between people and societal structures, are changing. So how can artists in this historical period express the particular qualities embedded in this sort of atmosphere? It was more or less at the turn of the millennium that Ding Yi's work began to be more colourful. While he still painted on checked cloth, glaring fluorescent and metallic colours began to appear; the psychedelic visual effect of excess, the wantonness, the chaos, the disorder, the stimulation, and the sense of urban life entered his paintings. The colours and compositions of his recent works all are very different from his earlier paintings. What has replaced them are asymmetrical designs in which there exist "paintings within paintings," or serrated forms of brilliant, commingled colours, coupled with irregular, curvilinear images. The carefully defined, rectangular outline of a single canvas impeded Ding Yi's expression of the power of the city. Thus, as a means of displaying the strength and brilliance radiating from the core of the city, he combined six canvases of different sizes. Because of the changes in the colours and compositions, the paintings have become richer and more dynamic, and as there are now so many more layers of crosshairs, irregular forms have appeared as well. Shanghai is no longer a calm, drizzly city, and in his recent works, he hopes to echo the noise and excitement of the city. But behind the crosshairs, one can still sense the chaos and emptiness of rootlessness begun with the reform campaign in China. Such is Ding Yi's interpretation of this

urban phenomenon. Like a magician, he continues to build his world of crosses. Independently, he strides along a path towards truth.

Translated by Phillip Bloom

This revised text was first published in the exhibition catalogue, *Appearance of Crosses 1989–2007*, Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Bologna, Italy, 2008.

Notes

- Leon B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 61.
- Ding Yi (丁乙) was originally named Ding Rong (丁荣). He has called himself Ding Yi since 1995. This could be a reflection of his obsession with simple forms in art, which began during the mid-1980s.
- Hou Henry, "An Excessive Minimalist," in *Ding Yi: The Appearance of Crosses* (catalogue for Ding Yi's solo exhibition at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham) (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 2005), 21.
- In October 1981, the Shanghai Museum exhibited works from the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Here, Ding Yi saw original works by American abstract artists like Jackson Pollock and Hans Hofmann for the first time.
- In the fall of 1979, Qiu Dashu initiated and organized the Grass Grass group in Shanghai. In February of the following year, he organized an exhibition called *Painting for the 80s* at the Luwen District Cultural Hall in Shanghai. The exhibition included the works of Qiu Dashu, Chen Juyuan, Yuan Songmin, and eight other artists, all of whom painted in styles strongly influenced by Cubism and Expressionism.
- Joan Lebold Cohen, *The New Chinese Painting 1949–1989* (New York: Abrams, 1987), 67.
- Quoted in Li Xiaofeng, "Undercurrent of Calm Water: Interview with Ding Yi," *Xiandai yishu* [Modern Art], no. 4 (2001): 22.
- Wu Hung, *Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Smart Museum of Art/University of Chicago, 1998), 17.
- Hou Henry, "An Excessive Minimalist," in *Ding Yi: The Appearance of Crosses* (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 2005), 17 (catalogue for Ding Yi's solo exhibition at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham).
- Hans van Dijk, known in Chinese as Dai Hanzhi, was born in Deventer, Holland, in 1946. In order to conduct research on Chinese contemporary art, he began taking Chinese language classes at Nanjing University in 1996. He collected, organized, and founded the largest archive of materials about Chinese contemporary artists at the time. In 1993, he opened the New Amsterdam Art Consultancy in Beijing. That same year, he and Andreas Schmid organized the China Avant-garde exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen in Berlin. This was the first exhibition of Chinese contemporary art of such a large scale to be held in the West. In 1998, his Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, and Belgian collector Frank Uytendaele founded the China Art Archives and Warehouse. Hans van Dijk died on April 25, 2002, at the Peking Union Medical College Hospital.
- Zhao Chuan, "Yu Youhan he ta de xueshengmen" [Yu Youhan and His Students], in *Shanghai chouxiang gushi* [The Story of Shanghai Abstraction] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 2006), 42.
- The Chinese art world of the 1980s was more or less divided into two camps: one was that of the mainstream style, which received official governmental support and which included both traditional Chinese painting and the Socialist Realism that originated in the Soviet Union; the other was a type that took Western modern and contemporary art styles (everything from Post-Impression to Abstract Expressionism, for example) as its inspiration, that received almost no official support, and that, moreover, gave greater expression to the deepest feelings of the individual and to desires for freedom.
- This exhibition, which was organized by the Shanghai Art Museum in May 1988, included nine abstract painters. They were Yin Qi and Meng Liding of Beijing; Yu Youhan, Ding Yi, Pei Jing, and Xu Hong of Shanghai; and Liu Anqing, Teng Song, and Yan Lei of Hangzhou.
- Li Xianting, *Zhongguo de bu shi yishu* [What Is Important Is Not Art] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Meishu Chubanshe, 2000), 196.
- Ding Yi's notes in *Jiexu chouxiang* [Decoding Abstraction] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2007), 25.
- Interview between author and Ding Yi, for the catalogue *Mondrian in China*, curated by Hans van Dijk (Beijing: Beijing International Art Palace, 1997).
- Monica Denetté, "Appearance of Crosses: The Process of Making Chance Theoretical" in *Ding Yi* (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum in 1997, and Ding Yi: Crosses, 97–99 at the International Art Palace, Beijing, in 1998).
- Interview between the author and Ding Yi, October 2007, Ding Yi's studio at 50 Moganshan Road, Shanghai.
- Li Xiaofeng, "Undercurrent of Calm Water: Interview with Ding Yi," *Xiandai yishu* [Modern Art], no. 4 (2001): 22.
- Interview between the author and Ding Yi, October 2007, Ding Yi's studio at 50 Moganshan Road.
- Ding Yi's notes, "Yishu zai lun" [Random Thoughts on Art], included in "Fei zhuliu huihua te ji" [Special Compilation on Non-Mainstream Painting], *Jiangsu Huikan* [Jiangsu Painting Journal], no. 2 (1993).
- Ibid.
- This word appeared in a letter that Ding Yi sent to Bo Xibo, published in "Zai chouxiang zhong yintai de ren" [A Person Who Retires into Abstraction], *Shanghai chouxiang gushi* [The Story of Shanghai Abstraction] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 2006), 72.
- Ibid.
- Ding Yi's notes in *Jiexu chouxiang* [Decoding Abstraction] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2007).
- Qian Naifeng, "Ding Yi 'Shi shi' de duanzhang", manuscript page 16, forthcoming in *Dangdai yishujie congshu* [Contemporary Artists Series], edited by Lü Peng (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2007).
- Wu Hung, *Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art/University of Chicago, 1998), 15.
- Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 219.
- Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 236.
- Ding Yi's notes in *Jiexu chouxiang* [Decoding Abstraction] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2007).
- Interview between the author and Ding Yi, October 2007, Ding Yi's studio at 50 Moganshan Road, Shanghai.

LISSON GALLERY

City Weekend
17 August 2000

Art Trends

The Times Bring Color to Ding Yi's works

In the past, Ding Yi has been hailed by Western critics as the "Mondrian of China." But unlike the Dutch painter Mondrian, whose paintings have demanded increasingly precise mathematical formulas as a means of articulation, Ding Yi has gone the opposite direction, discarding the T-square and adhesive tape of his earlier years and giving his trademark squares a distinctly less industrial, and more humanistic feel.

Born in 1962, Ding is considered one of the leaders of contemporary Chinese art by critics and art lovers around the world. He currently lives and works in Shanghai.

CW: What changes have you seen, and how have they affected your work?

You could say that developments in society have had a big impact on my art. The colors used now on the television, in ads, and on computers are all related to design - for practical purposes. They all use bright colors in their designs. I started out using muted colors, mostly charcoal on paper. Now, I've started using brighter colors too. I'm using these colors to compete with the status quo, but using art as the medium.

CW: Some people have said that over the past ten years people in China have become more subjective, and that this might be one of the reasons behind the recent rise in Conceptual Art. Do you think that is true?

Hmmm...that has a lot to do with opening up. Policies related to culture and the arts are becoming more and more relaxed, and people are just becoming more open to that sort of thing in general. So now, for example, there is more Conceptual Art, and also, in general, more of an exchange of ideas. When I was a student in 1986, I also experimented with Conceptual Art. There was also movement towards Conceptual Art in the '80s, but it wasn't that widespread. Conceptual art is, in some ways, a purer form of representing and commenting on the state of affairs in China. Now you can see many young artists creating Conceptual Art. They believe that using their own bodies brings them closer to the art they are doing.



CW: Why do you think Chinese Political Pop Art has been so popular in the West?

I feel that many foreigners who don't really have an understanding of China have a liking for Political Pop, but that is starting to change. In China, not many people like that style now, and fewer people outside of China like it. That probably shows that people from other countries are starting to look at China on a deeper level, especially when it concerns art.

CW: Recently, a lot of Chinese artists have been using art, especially Pop Art, to comment on the influence of consumerism on Chinese society. Does that have any influence on you?

None.

CW: Shanghai hasn't really followed the artistic movements that have gone on in Beijing. Why is that? Does Shanghai have any of its own movements or trends?

Well, I think that even though the hopes are very high here, there still are some problems. Unlike Beijing, if you don't have any money in Shanghai, you won't be able to survive here for very long. So, in Beijing it might be easier for movements and things like that to develop. In Shanghai, most of the artists are native Shanghaiese, which also has an influence on art. The artists in Shanghai are more individualistic, so it is very difficult for a group or movement to develop here.

Ding Yi's work is currently on display as part of the permanent collection at the Shanghai Museum, located at 325 West Nanjing Road. A portion of Ding Yi's work is also currently touring the West as part of a multi-person exhibition of Chinese art.



LISSEON GALLERY

Winnipeg Free Press
13 January 1999

Winnipeg Free Press

D6 Winnipeg Free Press, Wednesday, January 13, 1999

Entertainment

Richer decries Moore's lack of due in Canada

By Mark Abley
Montreal Gazette

MONTREAL — BRIAN Moore, one of the finest contemporary novelists in the English language, whose writing has been praised for its elegance and economy, was under-valued in Canada, says his friend Mordecai Richler.

"He was never really given his due in Canada," Richler told CBC Radio. "He never had as large an audience or the recognition that some of the rest of us have had in Canada, possibly because we tend to be rather nationalistic and he lived away for so long. People were not very kind to him and now it's too late, isn't it?"



Moore

Moore, who died Monday at his Malibu, Calif., home was 77 and suffering from pulmonary fibrosis.

He was the author of more than 20 novels and The Luck of Ginger Coffey and The Great Victorian Collection won Canada's highest literary honour, the Governor General's Award.

Moore seemed to understand the reaction of his adopted homeland although he never came to peace with it.

"For many years when I lived in Canada the Irish thought I was a Canadian writer," he once said.

His nephew, Paddy Moore of Ottawa, said: "He was frustrated, I think, when he left, by the Canadian thing — where you have to go away and be recognized outside the country before you're recognized in the country."

Several of his books, including Black Robe, The Revolution Script and The Luck of Ginger Coffey, were set in Quebec and Montreal, the city where he lived for a decade and began to write, and always loomed large in his imagination.

In his last year, Moore knew that his time was short and worked to the end. His final project was to be a novel based on the life of the 19th-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud.

Moore's output

Canadian Press

Books by Brian Moore, the Belfast-born, Canadian author who died in Malibu, Calif., at 77.

The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne (1955), filmed in 1987

The Feast of Lupercal (1957)

The Luck of Ginger Coffey (1960), winner of Governor General's Award

An Answer From Lintao (1962)

The Emperor of Ice Cream (1965)

I Am Mary Dunne (1968)

Fergus (1970)

Catholics (1972)

The Great Victorian Collection (1975), winner of Governor General's Award

The Doctor's Wife (1978), nominated for Booker prize

The Mangan Inheritance (1979)

The Temptation of Eileen Hughes (1981)

Cold Heaven (1983), filmed in 1992

Black Robe (1985), filmed in 1991

The Color of Blood (1987), nominated for Booker

Lies of Silence (1990), nominated for Booker

No Other Life (1993)

The Statement (1995)

The Magician's Wife (1997)

broad. A writer, a rebel, an emigre, an enigma: such was Rimbaud. Born in Belfast in 1921, Brian Moore was one of nine children.

He worked as a paramedic in Belfast during the bombings of the Second World War and as a United Nations official in Poland, observing the terrible devastation of war as well as the Communist takeover of the country.

He immigrated to Canada in 1948 and settled in Montreal in 1949.

Within a few months he had found employment at the Montreal Gazette, first as a proofreader, then as a reporter and feature writer.

Keen to master the techniques of storytelling, he began to write thrillers under the pen names of Bernard Mara and Michael Bryan.

Moore's work as a journalist not only gave him material for fiction, it also trained him in the habit of daily writing.

In 1952, Moore left the Gazette to write fiction full time.

His first literary novel, The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne, appeared three years later.

Moore married Jacqueline Sirois, a fellow reporter, in Montreal.

Yet, even while he relished the city, he was not blind to its underlying tensions which he was to evoke in his 1971 novel about the FLQ crisis, The Revolution Script.

At that time, Moore had not yet written a novel about the violence in his birthplace, Northern Ireland.

But when asked why he chose to write about Montreal's host of terrorism, he said: "My answer is that Ulster's what Montreal might be in 50 years."

In his 1960 novel The Luck of Ginger Coffey, Moore described the life of a dreamy Irish immigrant who finds work at a second-rate Montreal newspaper. The book gives a vibrant picture of the city's underside. It is not, however, autobiographical.

By the time it appeared, Moore had moved to New York. He also lived briefly in London.

When his marriage broke up in 1964, he married a second time, to a Nova Scotian, Jean Denney.

In the mid-'60s, Moore moved again, this time to California which would become a permanent base.

Outwardly, the final 30 years of his life seemed uneventful. In them, however, Moore wrote numerous books that draw on the rich experiences and torments of his earlier years.

Perhaps his most perfect work is The Subject Over Sir (1997), set on a remote island off the west coast of Ireland, it enabled Moore to tackle one of his great subjects: the crisis when a person loses religious faith.

Several of Moore's novels were turned into movies, notably The Luck of Ginger Coffey and Black Robe. Moore also wrote film scripts.

Indeed, the reason he moved to California in the 1960s was to work with Alfred Hitchcock on the screenplay of Vertigo.

But Moore described the experience as "awful, like washing floors."

Brian Moore is survived by his wife, Jean Denney Moore, and by his son, Michael.



Zhou (from left) Shi and Ding are well aware of Western market.

Chinese artists a hot ticket with humour, irony

By Morley Walker
Arts and Entertainment Columnist

THE FUXX Chinese artists on view in a new contemporary art show in Winnipeg are well aware of the importance of pleasing Western eyes — and Western wallets.

"Their work is being devoured by European collectors," says Tim Schouten, the Winnipeg artist who has organized and curated the 12-piece show, Looking Out/looking In, for the Exchange District's Plug In gallery. "The West is still their primary market."

One of the pieces by the best-known of the four, Zhou Tiehai, is a text-based work that spoofs a typical business newspaper story.

"When first listed on the Shanghai Stock Exchange, Zhou Tiehai appeared undervalued, rising only slightly in the first few hours of trade," says the piece, which is printed directly onto a Plug In wall.

"Its fundamentals remain sound, and bullish traders said they have seen indications in recent sessions that foreign houses are accumulating the Zhou again."

Another of the four artists (all from Shanghai), Ding Yi, says that foreign sales are the only way he can survive as an artist.

"Much of China has become a westernized society," Ding said recently through an interpreter, Vancouver art writer and historian Xia Wei.

"Artists from Shanghai have a very globalized outlook."

Ding, 36, has a post-secondary degree in fine arts and he teaches in a vocational school.

Ding's contributions to Looking Out/looking In, which runs through Jan. 31, are perhaps the most traditional.

One piece is a striking three-section wall hanging made of Tartan cloth, meticulously handpainted with tiny symbols and repetitive designs. Since when is Tartan a Chinese material?

"I still think it has traditional Chinese content," Ding says.

Perhaps more indicative of the show's self-conscious and mocking tone are the photo and video-based pieces by video and installation artist Shi Yong.

These pieces directly confront the image problems that Chinese artists face in the West.

On his Internet website, Shi gave visitors a series of choices as to what hairstyle, clothing and posture they associate with a contemporary Chinese visual artist.

He talked all the votes and presents a vision of the "winning" selections in a performance piece in which he stands between neon quotation marks wearing the appropriate clothes, hair-cut and sunglasses.

Schouten says this kind of humour and irony is present in much of the work being produced by the Chinese, who are one of the hottest tickets on the international art circuit.

Schouten, 46, got the idea to organize this Winnipeg show almost two years, when he and his wife, University of Winnipeg development director Pat Hardy, decided to travel to Shanghai, a southeastern port city of 15,000,000. He pitched the idea to Plug In officials, who gave him the go-ahead.

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LISSON GALLERY

The Asian Wall Street Journal
2 February 1996

THE ASIAN WALL STREET JOURNAL.

THE ASIAN WALL STREET JOURNAL FRIDAY - SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2 - FEBRUARY 3, 1996 7

WEEKEND JOURNAL

SHANGHAI'S LONELY AVANT-GARDE

By CATHERINE YAO

SHANGHAI

"Nobody's looking at your painting," someone teased Zhou Tiehai. We were having dinner at a snobbish Italian restaurant, surrounded by well-dressed locals and expats, and Mr. Zhou's huge, provocative artwork had the honor of being hung on the center wall. A takeoff on a Louis Vuitton print ad featuring a fashionable couple on a motorbike, it includes a photograph of expensively attired young prostitutes from Shanghai circa 1930, computer manipulated to make it look like it's on the cover of Vogue magazine. A caption in Chinese reads "We cannot afford it; we feel uneasy." It is Mr. Zhou's stinging commentary on Shanghai's consumer culture, and it did seem ironic to be hanging in such a place.

But the irony appeared to go unnoticed by the Shanghai residents gathered at the restaurant, as does the local art scene in general. A few weeks after our dinner, I found out that Mr. Zhou's painting had been taken down. "Bad Feng shui," said the owners.

Shanghai, despite its mercurial economic development, remains a lonely place for art. "Shanghaiese are so absorbed with making money they don't have time for other things," says one artist, echoing an oft-repeated lament about the city. "Everything here is money, money, money." Aside from a handful of conservative art museums and tourist shops selling tacky or forged pieces, there are almost no art galleries in this city of 12 million people. The best way to see art is to visit the artists' homes themselves.

That's all about to change, argue local and foreign art enthusiasts. "In the future, Shanghai will be the hotbed for Chinese art," claims Lorenz Heibling, a Swiss art dealer who calls Shanghai home. "This place is the economic center of China; it has always been more open and doesn't have the political hangups of Beijing. After 1997 this will be even more pronounced, especially now that China has opened itself to the world," he says. In an effort to develop a local art market, Mr. Heibling has organized shows in local pubs. Yes, there have been buyers—but they have been expatriates, not local Chinese.

The current lack of local attention belies a thriving art scene. No single label fits Shanghai's avant-garde, literally translated gienoes, but local artists do seem to share an openness to foreign influences. The result is a unique blend of Chinese and Western culture, and works that break stereotypes that say Chinese art always carries political messages or portrays picturesque landscapes. Shanghai's leading artists are well-grounded in both Chinese and Western art—they teach themselves about Western art, because local art schools consider it to be subversive.

Shen Fan is one such mold-breaking artist. He paints grass-like strokes in his studio in the outskirts of Shanghai. His colorful, abstract paintings have a peaceful, almost meditative quality to them. But the Chinese don't know what to make of his art, finding it so alien—so Western. On the other hand, one glance and Westerners say, "It's so Chinese."

Another artist, 33-year-old Ding Yi, has been painting only crosses since 1988 as a reaction to what he calls the Chinese habit of finding beauty only in recognizable objects. "The Chinese find beauty in nature only when they can associate its likeness to something else, or when they know it represents something important in history. All those karst formations in Guilin have names—Elephant Hill is beautiful only because it's supposed to resemble an elephant, for instance. I want the person to see the object itself, not the object it represents."

Mr. Ding has had exhibits on four continents, and his artwork sells for \$3,000 to \$5,000. While his work is popular among foreign buyers, no local Chinese has ever purchased a Ding Yi painting. "Those who can afford, they don't understand. Those who can understand—the intellectual elite—they cannot afford," he said. Attempting to reach out to the masses, he's begun painting on everyday objects such as wall partitions, fans and wooden clothes hangers. The Bank of China has issued a paper bag featuring his crosses to be given as a gift to valued customers. This is considered a breakthrough for Shanghai's art scene, as it is the first time that a powerful entity has given recognition to qianwei art.

The biggest change in the art scene in the last 10 years is the development of a market for the art, which has allowed some artists to make a living off of their work. But the profit element is a double-edged sword. "When I was still in school, Jingzhen (consciousness, spirit) was important," said Mr. Zhou. "But for the art students now, making money is the only thing that matters."

"Artists are losing their souls," said Mr. Shen. Interest from foreign art dealers also means increased meddling in the artists' work. "Just because the artist is Chinese, the curator assumes there always has to be a political element in his work. But politics and art are two different things. The artist is sometimes forced to give in to this clamor by changing the meaning of his work."

Contemporary art in Shanghai has a short history because self-expression itself does not have a strong tradition in China. Just 20 years ago, during the Cultural Revolution, self-expression was banned. While the restraints on society have loosened tremendously, even today artistic expression is an act of defiance in itself. Such an act is not always easily understood by the populace.

"It's really great that foreigners are buying our work, but I also hope that someday I can make a difference here," Mr. Zhou says wistfully. "It is important that our art be seen and recognized here because in seeing it, the masses become more critical, acquire new ideas and therefore become more intelligent in the long run."

"Most Chinese don't know what to do with a painting," said one artist. But the freedom to express one's point of view proves to be so exhilarating that for now, the act of painting itself is quite a privilege. Says Mr. Zhou, "When I paint, I'm so happy that I don't mind if I sell or not."

Mei Yao is a SHANGHAI-BASED WRITER.

"Most Chinese don't know what to do with a painting," one Shanghai artist complains.