

周恩来(1月)、毛沢東(9月)が相次いで逝去  
唐山大地震(7月)  
江青ら四人組逮捕、華国鋒主席就任(10月)

1977年(14歳)

邯鄲市鉄路子弟中学に入学。美術部に入部し、王永生のもとで絵画を学ぶ。  
校内の風紀は一層乱れ、大規模な暴力事件が頻発する。  
市の工人文化宮の美術部に参加し絵を学ぶ。  
市の大衆芸術館の講習班に参加し、張義春、鄭今東の指導を受ける。  
昼は石膏像、人物、静物などを描き、夜は一晩中駅でクロッキーを練習する。  
周蝶慧の知遇を得る。  
文化大革命の終結(8月)  
文化大革命の混乱の收拾と秩序の回復が図られ始める

1979年(16歳)

中米国交樹立(1月)

1980年(17歳)

河北軽工業学校陶芸美術専修コースに入学。リアリズムのテクニックの訓練を受ける。  
この頃、「わが生涯」(イサドラ・ダンカン著)「告白」「嵐が丘」「九十三年」「ゴッホの手紙」などを読み、太行山、燕山へたびたび写生に出かける。  
木版の勉強を始める。  
鄭今東に栗憲庭を紹介される。当時、雑誌「美術」の編集委員だった栗氏に方力鈞は版画作品の雑誌掲載の意向を伝えられるが、その後栗氏は抽象芸術特集号を編集したために停職となり、当初の計画は立ち消えになる。  
この後方力鈞は一層自立した考えをもつようになり精力的に作品を制作する。  
中国の対外開放政策開始  
各大学・専門学校で入試再開

中国アヴァンギャルドの第1世代である「星星画会」による「第1回星星美術展」開催(9月)

美術大学でソ連アカデミー式のリアリズム教育が復活する  
文化大革命時に農村への下放を経験した「知識青年」世代を中心に社会批判とヒューマンティの回復を目標とした「傷痕」リアリズム、「郷土」リアリズムが流行する



photo by Xu Zhiwei



photo by Xu Zhiwei

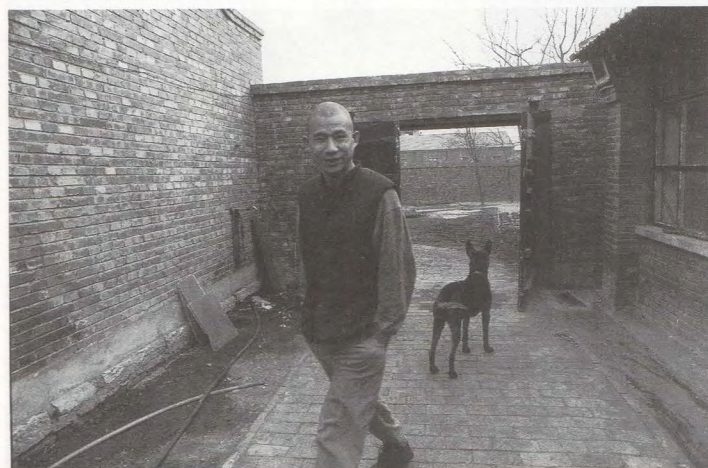


photo by Xu Zhiwei



photo by Xu Zhiwei

1984年(21歳)

工業学校卒業後、邯鄲市立広告会社に配属される。  
省・市の美術展への参加多数。省主催美術コンペ大賞受賞。  
〈郷恋〉シリーズ制作(政府主催「第6回全国美術展」に出品)。

1985年(22歳)

北京中央美術学院版画科に入学。版画の専門的な指導を受ける。

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油画芸術討論会(黄山会議)が開催され、表現の大幅な自由が保障される。  
この時期中国美術界の芸術思想が最も活発化し「'85ニューウェーブ」と呼ばれる現代芸術運動が起こる

1986年(23歳)

中国各地を調査旅行する。  
西洋近代思想の著作が大量に翻訳・紹介される  
思想界に文化批判ブーム  
学生民主化運動(12月)

1987年(24歳)

この頃西洋近代思想の著作を多読する。  
反自由化運動

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「言語純粋化」「ルーツ探しフィーバー」が盛んになる

1988年(25歳)

坊主頭をモチーフとした素描シリーズ〈素描No.1〉～〈素描No.3〉を制作。

1989年(26歳)

「中国現代芸術展」出品。  
学生として天安門事件を体験する。  
天安門事件(6月)

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中国美術館主催「中国現代芸術展」が開催されるが、発砲事件により中断される(2月)

1990年(27歳)

卒業後北京に留まり画家の道を歩む決心をする。油絵制作を開始する。

1991年(28歳)

ドイツ人、ミハエラ・ラープと結婚。

1992年(29歳)

北京芸術博物館にて劉焯と共同で初めての展覧会を開催する。  
市場経済の推進

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「シニカル・リアリズム」「ポリティカル・ポップ」が流行する

1993年(30歳)

この頃より海外開催の中国美術展や世界でも重要な幾つかの国際展に参加するようになり、欧米のアートシーンから国際的な注目を集める。



photo by Dana Lixenberg

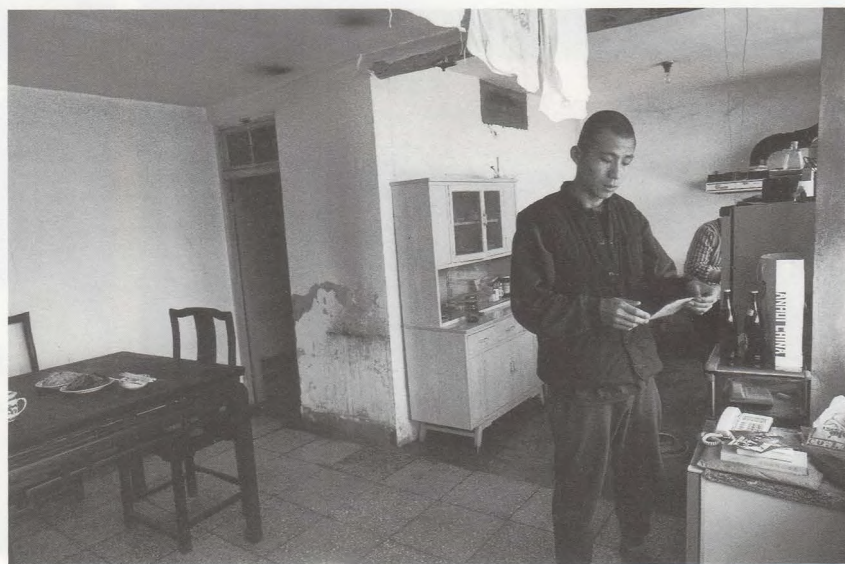


photo by Xu Zhiwei

## 展覧会歴

### 個展

- 1995年  
「方力鈞」、ギャラリー・ベルフロア、パリ、フランス  
「方力鈞」、ギャラリー・セリユーズ・ザクン、アムステルダム、オランダ
- 1996年  
「方力鈞—物語なき時代の人間像」、国際交流基金アジアセンター、東京

### グループ展

- 1984年  
「第6回全国美術展」、広州
- 1989年  
「中国現代芸術展」、中国美術館、北京
- 1991年  
「方力鈞・劉煒二人展」、北京
- 1992年  
「方力鈞・劉煒油絵展」、北京芸術博物館、北京
- 1992-93年  
「中国新芸術展・毛沢東以後」、ニュー・サウス・ウェールズ州立美術館、シドニー/クイーンズランド・アート・ギャラリー、ブリスベーン/パララト・アート・ギャラリー/キャンベラ美術大学、オーストラリア
- 1993年  
「ポスト'89中国新芸術」、香港アート・センター、香港  
「ポップな毛沢東」、現代美術館、シドニー、オーストラリア  
「東洋への道、第45回ヴェネツィア・ビエンナーレ」、イタリア  
「ポスト'89中国新芸術展」、マルボロー・ファイン・アート、ロンドン、イギリス

### 1993-94年

「中国前衛芸術展」、ハウス・デル・クルチュレン・デル・ヴェルト、ベルリン、ドイツ/クンストハレ・ロッテルダム、オランダ/オックスフォード近代美術館、イギリス/クンストハーレン・ブランツ・クレーダファブリック、オーゼンセ、デンマーク

### 1994年

「世界—モラル」、クンストハーレン、バーゼル、スイス  
「サンパウロ中国芸術展、第22回サンパウロ・ビエンナーレ」、ブラジル  
「新中国美術」、ハンアート・T.Z.ギャラリー(漢雅軒)、台北、台湾

### 1994-95年

「第4回アジア美術展」、福岡市美術館/世田谷美術館、東京 他

### 1995年

「幸福幻想—アジアの現代美術作家たち」、国際交流基金アセアン文化センター、東京  
「我々の世紀」、ルートヴィヒ美術館、ケルン、ドイツ  
「第1回光州ビエンナーレ」、韓国  
「4対」、アムステルダム市立美術館、オランダ  
「中国前衛芸術展」、サンタモニカ・アート・センター、バルセロナ、スペイン

### 1996年

「中国との出会い」、ルートヴィヒ・フォーラム、アーヘン、ドイツ  
「北京/ノーノーメロドラマ?」、ミュンヘン、ドイツ  
「収蔵作品展'96新収蔵・ヒロシマをテーマにした委託作品」、広島市現代美術館

### 1996-97年

「チャイナ!」、クンストムゼウム・ボン、ドイツ 他ヨーロッパ各地を巡回

### コレクション

ニュー・サウス・ウェールズ州立美術館、シドニー  
ルートヴィヒ美術館、ケルン  
アムステルダム市立美術館、アムステルダム  
ヘニー・オンスタ美術館、オスロ  
福岡市美術館  
広島市現代美術館



## Elegant Space

**Tatehata Akira** Professor, Tama Art University

The paintings of Fang Lijun consistently convey a sense of loss. This is a fundamental loss which cannot be described simply as loneliness or solitude. One might go so far as to say that he expresses total resignation, a condition in which there is no point in discussing positive values. With his skilled brush, he gives "form" to the absence of meaning. His beautiful but disquieting paintings have been referred to as Cynical Realism. They are depictions of great paradoxes related to that which has been lost.

This unique sense of loss in Fang's work is, of course, deeply rooted in the individual experience of an artist living in today's Chinese society. His figure groups with shaved heads, vast skies, expanses of water, and brightly-colored flowers are expressions of a nihilistic sensibility that keeps a critical distance from hysterical ideologies, a sober gaze looking objectively at traumatic personal memories which are slow to heal. But these unusual motifs are not the only reason for the appeal of his paintings. It is also necessary to recognize that they represent a high level of achievement as sound modernist paintings, solidly constructed with an assured technique.

A deep sense of space is created in these dense, stable compositions, and colors are applied uniformly with all traces of the brush eliminated, making the forms stand out from the background with boldness and precision. The artist's penetrating gaze, never sentimental, gives a stern strength and dignity to the pictorial space.

Below I would like to consider the development of Fang Lijun's painting in terms of these two aspects, his use of personal subject matter and his handling of the formal issues connected with pictorial space.

The development of the work shown in this exhibition began with three small gouaches painted in 1984 (cat. nos. 1-3) when Fang was working as an advertising designer in his home town of Handan in Hebei Province. They are depictions of vast expanses of land and sky and might be thought of as the painter's primal landscape. The smooth gradations of light and dark transform the external light into a light which seems to glow from within the forms in the painting. The infusion of a strange sense of life into these bleak landscapes can be seen as the beginning of the approach used in his subsequent work.

The figure with the shaved head, still the most common motif in Fang's paintings, first appeared in 1988, the year after he entered the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing (cat. nos. 4, 5). It emerged in the middle of landscapes which were an extension of the *Country Love 2* (cat. no. 3). The slumped, powerless figures and the objects like billiard balls which fill up the landscape are both illuminated from the back. The lights and darks of the exaggerated chiaroscuro, rather than giving a sense of three-dimensional forms revealed by external light, seem to emanate uncannily from within the painting.

The model with the shaved head represents anonymity. He directs a dark, suspicious glance toward us with no understanding of the meaning of his own appearance. He seems to stand for the artist himself, armed with technique but not knowing what to paint or which way to turn.

Born in 1963, Fang was a primary school student during the stormy years of the Cultural Revolution. In the statement he prepared for this exhibition he gives a detailed account of his bitter experiences as a child of the persecuted class. He did not, however, think of himself as an isolated victim.

"I thought of how people will not miss a chance of persecuting someone else even if they know how much it hurts to be persecuted themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Fang developed a sensitive but cool awareness of the realities of life which made him totally different from a generation older than himself who tried to restore a sense of humanity by criticizing the Culture Revolution.

The Beijing-based art critic, Li Xianting, divides Post-Cultural-Revolution artists into three groups. In Li's classification, the first generation were the "Intellectual Youth" who had been sent down to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Beginning in the late

seventies, they developed a style known as "Scar realism," rejecting the "Maoist model" and exposing the tragedies of the Cultural Revolution. There were also anti-establishment movements like the Stars group which turn to abstraction and proclaimed a "rebellion against realism." The second generation of the latter half of the 1980s represented a "modernist phase." They carried out radical, Dada-like actions influenced by what they had heard about Duchamp and what they saw at the Rauschenberg exhibition of 1985 in Beijing. The third generation, which Li divides into the two trends of Cynical Realism and Political Pop, is a group of younger artists who appeared at the end of the eighties. The former makes obscure, enigmatic paintings infused with ennui and lacking any sort of spiritual relief. The latter uses techniques taken from Pop Art to make provocative paintings in which political symbols and commercial symbols are given equal value.

To Fang, a representative Cynical Realist of the third generation, criticism of a hated ideology will not heal the wounds caused by the nightmare of the Culture Revolution which he experienced as a child. He has written,

"It is not so terrible to propagate hate. What is terrible is that so many people readily accept it.

This is why we are always ready to hate those who have taught us how to hate, because that makes it easier for us not to look at the hatred in ourselves."<sup>2</sup>

If this is the case, human qualities cannot be restored by adopting a new ideology. The illusion of the liberated individual has been destroyed by historical reality.

Although he bases his paintings on photographs of himself, family, and friends, he paints figures which have no proper names, keeping at a cool distance from an optimistic belief in the value of the individual. Uncommunicative figures with shaved heads, enigmatic smiles, and closed eyes appeared in a series of pencil drawings (cat. nos. 6-10) in the same year, 1988. There is no way to read the inner feelings of these figures. In many cases, every member of the group has the same face. Although their features are depicted with great clarity, it is impossible to assign a name to any of them. Fang says that he uses photographs as a basis for his paintings and drawings in order to obtain realistic details without having to rely on his imagination, not because he is concerned with specific individuals.

1989 was the year of the Tian'anmen incident. This was a definite turning point in Fang's work, although one should be careful not to discuss its influence in too simple-minded a fashion. Since that time, Fang has worked exclusively in oil. The light in his paintings has intensified as he turned from monochrome to greater use of color and the nature of his cynicism has also changed. Although this may be an odd way of putting it, the enigmatic quality of his images has intensified.

A good example is the major painting, *Series 2 No. 2* (1991-92, cat. no. 18), where the man could be either yawning or screaming. In spite of the sharpness of the image, the meaning of the facial expression is left floating between various possible interpretations, and the viewer is left with only a vague impression. In *Series 2 No. 3* (1991-92, cat. no. 19), a group of figures with uncanny smiles seem to be saying something, but nothing can be heard except the frigid laughter of a cool observer of the world.

Another notable feature of the paintings done during this period is the bright, empty sky in the background. In the drawings of 1988, the background is like a heavy wall of earth or stone, and the human figures are placed in an oppressive, enclosed space. One might say that the artist still had the desire to stay aware of an absurd situation. The events of 1989 made such a moral stance meaningless. Paradoxically, they might have given the artist a feeling of liberation, a conviction that nothing could be done so it was better to accept everything without emotion. The brightness of the sunlight and the deep blue of the sky are mercilessly neutral toward any sort of "meaning." A world without the possibility of narrative is rendered empty and bright.

In terms of formal concerns, however, this neutral "beautiful light" gives greater solidity to the pictorial space. The pure values of light and shadow contribute solely to the formation of space and give an extremely stable structure to the painting. The light in the background and the light on the group of figures in the foreground both have a source in the picture plane, but are grasped by different methods. The resulting discontinuity between the erotic shaved heads which extend out from the picture plane and the deep sky which pulls the gaze of the viewer into the depths of the picture creates a marvelous, illusory space.

Between 1992 and 1993, Fang produced a number of paintings that might be

described as his bright color series (cat. nos. 24-26). There is still a separation between the background and the figure groups in the foreground, and flowers are added to the picture as if by a collage technique. These elegant images remain empty, representing nothing beyond their difference from real life. This is not the work of a colorist. There is no trace of the feeling that would ordinarily be expressed by such beautiful colors.

In the following period, Fang eliminated color entirely and began concentrating on paintings that were virtually monochromatic. Most of them show human figures swimming in a pool. Those in which men and women appear in a variety of poses under water (*1993 No. 15*, cat. no. 31) have an especially quirky atmosphere. The gravity-free sense of space is congenial to the intensification of enigmatic qualities in the images noted above. However, the slack, unsupported limbs of the figures and the languid underwater light are only pulled into a convincing composition by Fang's exceptional draftsmanship. Fang has said of himself, "I am not handicapped in drawing skill." Although he does not go out of his way to brag about his technical ability, he declares, "If one lacks confidence in a minor area (technique), it is impossible to express oneself in major areas."

One of the finest works of the swimmer series is *1993 No. 11* (cat. no. 28). It depicts a man swimming on his back with eyes closed and gentle waves rippling around him. It is a quiet, meditative painting dominated by a solemn light the color of lead. The extreme elegance of this painting could only have been achieved by a deep understanding of the medium of oil paint, in particular the capacity of the medium to diffuse light internally and make it seem to radiate from within. Taking in only a small visual range of the water's surface, there is a reverential quality in the space that fills the viewer with awe.

What is the significance of water in these paintings? Water is the most uncertain and enigmatic of symbols. It refers to death as well as life. It can either seduce or frighten with its gentle capacity for absorbing everything. The undulating appearance of waves and light in Fang's monochrome world dissolves this ambiguity of water and sublimates its enigmatic qualities to create beautiful scene "beyond conflict."

It is obvious that the surface of the water and the swimming man both radiate the same light. The figure here is not separated from the background as are the figures on land in previous series. The arms under the water are partially unified with the gentle texture of the waves and float weakly. Water can be identified with a dream of maternal care, and it may represent a quiet, safe place to which a person might return after renouncing a conflict-filled reality. That is, it is a place for immersion in memories of a sea of amniotic fluid, a haven somehow resembling death.

The next year, Fang painted a series of swimmers in blue (cat. nos. 33-37). They float on their backs or faces, rising and falling with the gentle waves, dreamily abandoning themselves to the water. Or are they pretending to have drowned? In any case, the water surface glows with a tranquil light fused with the white of the sensual, naked bodies.

In spite of the melting light, there is no slackness in the pictorial space. The distance between the figure and ground is not shown as clearly as in previous works where sharp-edged, cut-out figures are placed against the background, but a different spatial structure is employed.

Clearly, the forms are not necessarily located in front of the background (the surface of the water) and in fact may be buried "behind" it. With the use of water, the artist has elected to show the overlapping forms as semi-transparent substances. This may be natural in depicting a swimming pool realistically, but it is not a simple matter to extract the pure spatial "riches" of painting from such forms. The kind of spatial depth evoked here could only have been created with this artist's unique understanding of layered structure and skilled draftsmanship.

Another problem which the artist faces in using photographs is that in a photograph the swimmer and water surface are, naturally, seen from the same angle. But, in the paintings he shows the swimmers obliquely from above and treats the water as a single color area with uniform texture, so that the picture plane is perceived as standing up vertically. This semi-conscious twisting of the visual angle, a residual contradiction in the structure of the image, works to invigorate the pictorial space and give us an experience which can only be had from painting.

The same thing can be said for the series, begun last year and continued into this, in which all-over surfaces of ocean waves or sky are combined with human figures and faces to create a kind of double exposure (cat. nos. 38-42). The semi-transparent, ghost-

like figures are shown against the background of the sea but their existence seems unrelated to that of the sea. It is unclear whether they are located in the depths of the sea or floating above it. Also, the figures and the water are clearly painted from different angles so that one's view of the same picture is oddly doubled.

I must mention the two large works, *1996 No. 9* (cat. no. 43) and *1996 No. 10* (cat. no. 44), which were painted in parallel with this series. The largest paintings yet produced by Fang, they both show groups of children overlapped with the sea and sky. The children, surrounded by flowers, appear to be singing in a chorus. Their faces can be seen as either brightly smiling or screaming in pain. As the artist comments, "When children laugh, they are aware of the possibility of becoming miserable in the future." These paintings present a view of a false paradise, but the artist does not expose the nightmare which might be lurking in the background. He simply observes the horror and the beauty with open eyes. Ever since Fang's early drawings, he has frequently used children as a subject, perhaps because of the irredeemable trauma of his own childhood. He always paints children in bright colors, but the deep blue behind is a common sign of melancholy feeling. They have an innocence which endears them to their parents who earnestly hope for their happiness, but the future is uncertain and anything might happen to them. Seeds of evil may have already been planted behind their delightful faces.

A woodblock print in a scroll format, close to five meters in length, is also included in this exhibition (cat. no. 45). In this black and white image, a bald man with a large face has a contorted expression as if he were being sucked under the water. One might suppose he is drowning in the dark waters of the age. Strangely enough, however, the dark water around him rocks gently in beautiful shades of black and gray. Any conclusions that we draw too rapidly are undermined, and all that remains is the impression of an enigmatic and solemn space.

The imagery of Fang's paintings suggests some sort of narrative but it is never possible to gain access to it. It invites multiple interpretations, none of which can be the ultimate one. One might say that, fundamentally, he is creating a false story devoid of meaning in order to show that it is no longer possible to tell a story. But how beautiful this emptiness is! A person inclined to sentimentality could never achieve this kind of elegance. With a severely critical spirit and a cynical viewpoint opposed to any kind of sentimental escape from historical realities, Fang is able to create a pictorial space of great dignity.

(Translated by Stanley N. Anderson)

#### Notes

1. See Fang Lijun, "Remembrances," p.90.
2. *Visions of Happiness — Ten Asian Contemporary Artists*, exhibition catalogue (The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center, Tokyo, 1995), p.75.



## Fang Lijun and Cynical Realism

Li Xianting Art Critic

Fang Lijun is the most important representative of Post '89 New Wave Art in China, and of the unique mode of discourse collectively created by the artists who constitute this wave — Cynical Realism, a psychological term for the philosophical mix of emotional ennui and rogue humor that pervaded Chinese society in the first half of the 1990s.

Post '89 is the conceptual milieu that gave rise to Fang Lijun's art and his Cynical Realism. Post '89 is the result of the Tian'anmen Incident — the defeat of a rationale behind a mass movement to introduce Western democracy, a defeat which resulted in a widespread sense of loss and need for introspection, and which dredged up strata of cultural bewilderment and helplessness. Post '89 is also the universal suspicion of any idealistic attempt to construct a new Chinese culture using Western modern art and modern ideologies. Nietzsche, Sartre, and all of the thinkers produced by Western modernism will never again provide psychological or artistic support for the younger generation of Chinese artists. This can clearly be seen in the changes three generations of post-Cultural Revolution artists have undergone and in the background against which the Cynical Realists grew up.

The Cynical Realists were all born in the 1960s and graduated from art colleges in the 1980s. They are the Third Generation of post-Cultural Revolution artists. The First Generation were those artists who had been sent down to the countryside as "Intellectual Youth" when the Cultural Revolution terminated. Maturing at the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, this generation defined truth and virtue as the key concepts at the core of their artistic output. The hallmark of the work of this generation was the resurgence of social critique and investigation into human nature. The Western theories of modern art now flooding into China nurtured the Second Generation of post-Cultural Revolution artists, who emerged in the mid-1980s. '85 New Wave, typified by a strong sense of cultural critique and a meta-perspective on existential states. The Cynical Realists were only beginning primary school in the 1970s, and they found themselves flung into a society in which concepts were continually changing. For them, the Cultural Revolution is only a childhood memory. They grew up with the opening of Chinese society to the outside world. They were let loose on society in 1989, at a time when the exhibition of Chinese Modern Art ("China/Avant-Garde" exhibition) in Beijing presented the achievements of a decade of realist thought and when various Western philosophies served as ideological models. Yet, no sooner had they clamored to assume center stage than they found themselves up against repression from those in positions of authority. The Tian'anmen Incident occurred soon after. The discovery that the ideal of rescuing Chinese culture — both society and art, was utterly void left this generation of artists with only the chance debris of a hasty encounter. Rejecting the idealism and bravura of the artists preceding them, the new generation brought the Olympian perspective of their predecessors down to eye-level as they focused their sights on the mundane reality surrounding them and from a roguish perspective painted themselves and slices of life that were familiar, depressing, adventitious, and absurd. The majority consequently refused to emulate the various modes of discourse derived from the West in the mid-1980s and sought instead to find new possibilities within realism, introduced from the West in the early twentieth century and dominant in Chinese artistic circles ever since.

Fang Lijun has the classic pedigree of this new generation, and in his work we can see the significant formative influences of his social background. Born in 1963, his childhood and early teens took place during the Cultural Revolution. He remembers gang fights as one of his major childhood pastimes. This undoubtedly reflects the impact on children of a social background ideologically dominated by class struggle and filled with the clash of mass factions in the Cultural Revolution. Yet Fang Lijun remained timid and vulnerable, and the frequent humiliations he suffered because of his family background form the greatest influence on his childhood. The Communist state ideology maintained that those unfortunate enough to have been born into families that were wealthy prior to 1949

— and Fang Lijun's grandfather was once a rich man — were the designated class enemies of the broad revolutionary masses. This was the fundamental ethical criterion taught to Fang Lijun and all other children, and indeed to all adults, at that time. Although class struggle and factional warfare led children into gang fights, one basic option remained free to them — play.

Once ideological terminology was transformed through play, the ideology could no longer harm children. When, as a young child, Fang Lijun witnessed the grandfather he so dearly loved become the selected target of class struggle at a mass criticism meeting, the ethical criteria utterly transformed by ideology created a deep-felt emotional trauma in him, although at that time he had no way of expressing it. Such trauma, whether induced by the gang fights of children under the influence of class struggle, or by the private humiliation induced by his grandfather's public torture, could only result in the sense that human nature was evil. Yet the evil of those people was portrayed by the ideology of that time as goodness and truth. This was something which a child, and even the majority of adults, at that time could not see through. Trauma was the mental torment delivered on the younger generation by this contradiction and doubt.

"I now think of my whole life before China opened up to the outside world as hatred and struggle from beginning to end,"

Fang Lijun remembers.

"Because I was born into the wrong class, I had to learn at a very early age how to put up, shut up, and fake it. In 1976 when Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong died in succession and we went to pay our respects, my father gave me a look, and I knew I was supposed to cry, but I couldn't. But then I cried uncontrollably and people came up to pacify me. My teachers praised me. I then realized that if I behaved in a particular way, I'd be commended. And so this was one of the results of my childhood education. My schooling had taught me the exact opposite of what was intended, but probably at that time I had already become two-faced. You have no choice in the matter. Your childhood environment is just too oppressive for that."

These experiences Fang Lijun can never forget, and they form the point of inception of his art — the attitude of a cynic and rogue confronting a highly repressive system of values.

In 1980 when Fang Lijun commenced his studies in a secondary school specializing in fine arts, China had embarked on its policy of opening up to the outside world. In society and the art world emerged an intellectual trend of questioning and criticizing the Cultural Revolution and the arts it had produced. This enabled Fang Lijun to see works of art quite different from those he had encountered earlier. He was fond of the artists of the "Intellectual Youth" generation who were using their own forms of expression, and so realized that art could be created without following formulas that had simply been handed down from the authorities. But as a student at a art school, he became increasingly keen to study the techniques of realism.

When Fang Lijun entered the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1985, the craze for cultural critique was getting into full stride and modern Western philosophical theories were flooding into China. In the fine arts the '85 New Wave Art that made the total reliance on Western modern art its criterion was in full flourish, and like many New Wave artists Fang Lijun took to reading quite difficult philosophical texts, although he was little influenced by them. Only the emphasis on humanism in Western philosophy and the affirmation of the value of the existence of the individual made an impact in China, yet the philosophy of day-to-day living was described in the language of that time as, "Play at life, play with the future, play." At that time Fang Lijun was over twenty and, beyond his personal quest to better master the techniques of realism, he increasingly sought to enjoy a life of freedom. Perhaps a libertarian philosophy lay behind the ideal at "playing at life," and this provides a fundamental connection with the Tian'anmen democratic movement. Fang naturally took part in this movement and saw for himself its tragic consequences. This new inversion of good and evil, right and wrong, and of truth itself made a fresh psychological impact on Fang Lijun. When Fang Lijun completed his first batch of oil paintings he commented.

"We would rather be described as painters of loss, ennui, and crisis, or as rogues, or as the bewildered, but we will never again be deceived. Never again attempt to educate us using the old methods, because any precept you might teach us will only attract a hundred questions, and we will finally reject it and toss it on the trash heap." Of course, in reality, Fang Lijun had never flung any state ideology onto any trash heap.

The approach of Fang Lijun and of the previous two generations of artists was utterly different. His predecessors did not believe in expending any effort to use forms of opposition to construct new concepts of value. They believed that ultimately one can only save oneself. Yet if through rogue humor they expressed their sense of ennui, this would surely be the best way both to save, and at the same time parody, themselves.

I have used the term rogue humor (*popi youmo* 澆皮幽默) to describe the characteristic feature of cynical realism, but "rogue" is a term which encompasses a Chinese cultural concept of cynicism. It simultaneously embraces the notions of joking, roisterousness, untrammelled behavior, lack of restraint, indifference, and the ability to see through everything. In 1924 the writer Zhou Zuoren touched on many similar ideas in his essay *Pojiaogu* 破脚骨: "Pojiaogu is what in Mandarin is called *wulai* 無賴 or *guanggun* 光棍; in ancient Chinese, *popi* 澆皮 or *poluohu* 澆落戶; in the Shanghai dialect, *liumang* 流氓; in the Nanking dialect, *liuhu* 流戶 or *qingpi* 青皮, in Japanese, *gorotsuki* and in English *rogue*." Zhou Zuoren uses the term in the context of the Spanish picaresque novel (*novelas de pizaro*) and refers to the *popi* character Niu the Second in the novel *The Water Margin* 水滸伝. Lin Yutang even more enthusiastically praised the concept of the rogue — the *fanglangghan* 放浪漢 or the *liulanghan* 流浪漢 — writing that "Today when liberal freedoms and individual freedoms are threatened, perhaps only the rogue or the spirit of the rogue can liberate us, so that we do not all end up as disciplined, obedient, and regimented soldiers in the same uniform and with the same rank and number in the one big army." The rogue is the last and staunchest enemy of authoritarianism. The noted sinologist John Minford has written in a similar vein, chronicling how a new *liumang* culture sprang up on the barren wasteland of post-Maoist China, describing *liumang* as a term difficult to translate but falling somewhere between the concepts of "loafer, hoodlum, hobo, bum and punk."

How does Fang Lijun use the vocabulary of his paintings to signify his grasp of the sense of rogue humor or cynicism? In his earliest works, *Pencil Drawing No. 1~3* (cat. nos. 6-8), we see one of his earliest lexical signifiers that he has continued to employ throughout his career — the clean-shaved head. Fang Lijun has a shaved head, and in modern-day life the shaved head is both a striking statement and a sign of individuality, yet it is often also associated with the lout, the rogue, or some negative character. Yet the earliest skinheads tended to cluster in non-individual packs, indicating that the shaved head also conveyed a sense of ideological education and regulation, and simultaneously indicating a form of withdrawal and roguish rebelliousness. After 1989, Fang Lijun's clean-shaved head underwent major changes as a lexical signifier of classic rogue humor. The shaved head could be grinning or dumbly staring, or the head could be viewed from behind in innocent phrenological relief. Yawns were used to convey a sense of acute boredom, removing all significance from the features of the face. A rogue's shaved head with a meaningless expression enabled a form of non-meaning to dissolve a system of meaning associated with rebellion and satire. Yet Fang Lijun used himself and his friends as the models for the image of the man with the shaved head, thus translating this rebelliousness mockery into self-mockery and deriving an image of personal escape from a system of meaning. Another major lexical stock of images in Fang Lijun's paintings are the empty and expansive images of blue skies, white clouds, and vast oceans, which form the first confines and emplacements for his figures. As images, the skies and oceans express a sense of self-liberation from internalized repression. The Chinese expression "taking one step back into the expanse of ocean and the vastness of the sky" relates to the image of roguish satire and ennui. Not obeying, yet not opposing, an ideology, is the stance of those "not concerned by things," and those who feel themselves to "not be part of the scene." The mindscape of such a personality thereby acquires a sense of the expanse of ocean and the vastness of the sky." At the same time, the image of the ocean-sky serves as a contrastive metaphor, strengthening the images of the rogue and of meaninglessness and throwing them into high relief. The technique of using a minimum of detailed brush strokes to emphasise non-expression ensures that the painting maintains a non-emotional neutrality, expressing tranquillity and indifference, breaking though the atmosphere of "being on the spot." Throughout his career, Fang Lijun has tended to use pure, bright, and clear colors that preserve the pleasure gained from inner liberation and purification. However, since 1993 he has moved in the direction of semi-tones, using a more severe plainness to heighten the lexicon of satire and self-parody.

In 1993 his artistic vocabulary also made the shift from rogue images to paintings of images of underwater swimming. The surfaces of his canvases have submerged to more tranquil depths and the neutrality of the images has intensified. His internal image, underwater swimming, expresses a latent premonition or omen within a daily context. Yet this deep tranquillity harbors a certain menace. Most recently he has begun to combine the two styles, so that from the submarine tranquillity of his paintings a roguish, dumb grin now gazes out at us, a heightened element of counter-satire.

Cynicism and rogue humor are forms of spiritual self-liberation, and are not merely signs of the Post '89 period. They can even be regarded as one traditional *modus operandi* of Chinese intellectuals, of which many examples can be found from Chinese history, especially from times of political oppression. The literati of the Wei-Jin period posed with all of the self-mockery of crazed scholars, and their untrammelled personal lives served as a counterweight to the heavy political pressure brought to bear on them and as a path for achieving their goals of self-liberation. The famous Wei-Jin masterpiece *New Anecdotes and Worldly Tales* 世說新語 contains countless examples. In the section of that work titled "Untrammelled Craziness" (*Rendan pian*), we read: "Liu Ling would invariably drink too much and lose control. Once at a gathering in his house he ripped off all his clothes, and became the object of mockery. Liu Ling shouted: 'Heaven and earth is my home, and the walls of this room are my clothes, so what are you lot doing down my pants?' " The Wei-Jin scholar Ruan Ji proclaimed, "What do the Confucian rites have to offer to our generation?" If we peruse the dramatic lyrics (*sanqu*) of the Yuan dynasty, we find many poems filled with the spirit of roguish self-mockery. The dramatist Guan Hanqing wrote: "I am the leader of the lunatics. For most of my life I've done willows and buds, slept with the willows and moved with the plants." Zhou Zhongbin wrote: "You ask why I call a deer a horse and a phoenix a chicken? Well, I'm as confused as everyone else about just what is the truth." Liu Shizhong wrote: "The floating life is a meaningless rave, achievement's absurd, as is fame." The Ming-dynasty writer Shen Kua in his *Mengxi bitan* (Notes from Dream Stream) described the compositions of these Yuan lyricists as "satirical, roguish works," and the Ming writer Sun Daya in his *Preface to the Anthology of the Pipes of Heaven* described the Yuan lyricist Bai Pu as "a cynical lout."

These few examples serve to illustrate that the freewheeling rogue spirit expressive of ennui and nihilism is a stance adopted throughout ancient history by Chinese intellectuals seeking to escape from political darkness. It is no accident that a similar stance should resurface in the modern period in the scholarly writings of Lin Yutang and in the artistic philosophy of rogue humor of the 1990s.

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## Fang Lijun and His Art

Per Hovdenakk Director, Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter

