

06 | Tanigawa's concept of *kosaku-sha* also conveys the nuances of "provocateur," "handyman," "agent." [Hayashi]

moved out of that system, because they also worked within that system, like Raymundo Albano, for instance. And eventually, they had to become institutions in themselves. So that's the afterlife of the independent curator. The independent curator would become an institutional figure, just like what Apinan has become and, to some extent, Jim Supangkat. And this kind of transformation into an institutional figure would be resented by the art community. But, at the same time, it is this independent-curator-turned-institutional-figure who is able to generate resources for some of the more ambitious contemporary art projects to be produced, like Jim Supangkat was able to actually stage an international biennial in Jakarta and Apinan was able to set up a national pavilion in Venice. So these are complicated issues that are, I think, inherent in the transition from the traditional museum set up to independent curation and back to some kind of reformed institutional structure.

**MC** | I think those curators indeed played a role of a trickster or "manipulator" as Mr. Kuroda pointed out. [06]

Now I have a question about Asia and its problem. According to Professor Kajiya's presentation, Asia as a term gained currency in the contemporary art scene in Japan from the 1980s onwards. Since then, the unity of Asia or the communication among Asians became hot topics for discussion. Listening to Mr. Fan, in the Chinese context, China seems to be the topic of discussion. I wonder if the concept of Asia had played any role in the Chinese art discourse.

**Fan** | Discussing the concept of Asia within the framework of global culture is very meaningful. And this is also true for the visual arts. I did not particularly refer to the arts in Asia, but I was personally conscious of the common basis we share on Asia and its art, when I gave my presentation on Chinese art.

When we discuss Asian art, it would be important to discuss what Asian-ness is in our cultural contexts.

Asian-ness, in my opinion, is something that has been defined by the West over a long period of time. We should not, however, simply take the concept of Asian-ness defined by the West as something that is fixed and

permanent. Asian-ness is something that is reconstructed in response to the changing arts and culture around the world, and re-established as result. Yesterday, I went to see the Indian contemporary art exhibition at Mori Art Museum and was strongly impressed by it. I have seen many contemporary artworks from the West, but I found those Indian artists who were exhibiting yesterday to be firmly rooted in their own culture but also skillfully projecting their own interest in humanity and views on the issues in contemporary society.

Of course, there would be many artists in other Asian countries who are creating works that are as convincing as the ones of those India artists I saw yesterday. These arts in Asia have a great potential, based on cultural strength, as well as visual strength based on the local context. Asian art is complex, and is something that needs to be researched further.

Let me introduce you an analogy. The US dollar and the Euro are the two contesting currencies in the global economy today. But if a single currency for the Asian region is developed and joins in, the balance of power may actually improve. Certainly, an Asian currency is theoretically possible, but in practice, it will be a long process, and history would need to be examined to materialize. The same could be said about culture.

**MC** | Thank you. Let me open the discussion to the floor. Please raise your hand if you have any questions or comments. Mr. Maeda, please.

**Maeda Kyoji** | My name is Maeda and I will be moderating Session 2 tomorrow. I have two questions specifically related to the re-examination of the Asian art discourse in the last 20 years. First, on installation to Mr. Flores, and second, on realism to Professor Kajiya.

First of all, on installation. Professor Kajiya had indicated that installation had once colluded with the idea of Asian-ness. This is a typical case in which the premodern and the postmodern had a round in the loop and then joined together in the end. Professor Flores presented an important point that the nature of installation requires a curatorial subject, or needs to be related to some curatorial agency.

In addition, as I viewed the installation of the ink paintings presented by Mr. Fan, I thought, "Oh, installation is an important matter, after all." I mean, installation is a format that is related to a location, and, therefore,

to a local context. But, that is not to say that it obliges to directly connect the location and the object, or the image, ready to be installed. For example, various artists travel to different biennials around the world, incorporating local elements into their own style or method to create similar installations. This is one example that proves my view. So, I think that while a location is vital in creating installations, connecting to and how it connects to the location is arbitrary. I observed these two aspects of installations in the images presented by Mr. Fan.

On the contrary, tradition is also connected to the location. But tradition, in most cases, cannot be severed from the location like installation. What I saw in the ink-painting installation was certainly elements of tradition, but a tradition that is no longer rooted in its original location. So, in this case, we could say that tradition has been re-invented.

I would like to ask Professor Flores for his comment based on this understanding. With the emergence of installation, artworks turned to local elements. But as a result, it also turned global. So installation is a format that enabled this environment in which the tradition and globalization co-exist. What is your opinion?

The other question is on realism. I understand that when dealing with postmodernism and Asian art, realism plays a very important role. When I looked through the reports from the past symposia that the Japan Foundation had organized, I had an impression that art had been discussed as something that reflects or criticizes the reality in society. So it is realism in a broad sense because it is a kind of representation of social reality.

This could be related to the *Transavanguardia* in Italy who emerged during the postmodern times, and whose priority was to first restore figurative expression, and then to represent social reality through realism. In this context, the emergence of Asian art and its connection to realism and postmodernism is inevitable. So my question to Professor Kajjiya is, "What will happen to realism that articulates and represents social reality, in the age where peer-to-peer communication is possible?" Of course, there are many other artists who do not practice realism but are pursuing potential alternatives. Perhaps, tomorrow's presentation will introduce some of these artists.

MC | Thank you. Professor Flores, first, please.

Flores | It's a tough question, but I'll try to answer.

I think if we consider localism and globalism in relation to installation, I feel that it's not very productive to posit or put in place a separation between the local and the global. I think, for me, tradition is really about self-consciousness of the past. And the self-consciousness of the past is a modernist operation for (par) excellence. So tradition, or the production of tradition, is a modernist gesture. So, if we implicate tradition in the production of installation, it's part of a modernist disposition.

And also, I also believe that the local is universal. So maybe the "local" is a more productive term than the "national," because the national becomes assimilated into the international or the multicultural, but the local always has integrity as an equivalent universality. I think the local is always equivalent and it is always universal.

So, as I mentioned earlier, installation is a production of space. And space is not a given; it is produced. And in the case of the artist-curator, it was the artist-curator who was able to produce the space, because it was not available at the time.

And then, finally, but I must also say that the production of installative space is not always met with approval by the public. For instance, the sculpture installation of Jim Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* was, of course, controversial—there was protest against it because it didn't conform to certain values in the Indonesian society. So there have been performances and installations in Southeast Asia that have been met with hostility, with the very public that they wish to actually converse with. The everyday life and installation, there is tension between, always, everyday life and installation, although there is also a desire for installation to be identical with everyday life. But always there is the resistance, the possibility of a non-identity with that supposed environment.

MC | I would like to add to Professor Flores' comment. Installation, as a term, became commonly used to describe a new type of artwork from the late-1970s. We have to question whether or not the site-specific installation and the installation that has mobility could be discussed on

the same basis. Site-specific installations intervene with the site, while others are kept independent from the location and are mobile. This is an issue inherent in the concept of installation.

Professor Kajiya, could you respond to the question on realism?

**Kajiya** | What Mr. Maeda pointed out as a problem in realism became a topic of discussion in the mid-1990s, and continues to be discussed today. The realism in question is not about “realism as a style” but “realism as an attitude.” It is a characteristic that is visible in Asian art, too. But when I read through the exhibition catalogue texts and newspaper criticism, I had the impression that what is considered as real was gradually changing.

With the globalization in progress, Japanese animation and manga are being received and accepted in Asian countries, and the Internet is becoming a collective experience. These are the realities to which young artists face today. When I termed the communication peer-to-peer, I imagined that there would be a common reality that people with different national and cultural backgrounds would share upon their encounter.

**MC** | Thank you. Adding on to what has been discussed so far; when we talk about the return of realism in the postmodernism context, we tend to focus on the return of figurative representation. In relation to installation, we must keep in mind that the realism returns in various ways, some would be incorporating figurative images, and others would be using objects in an everyday context. There are many methods in dealing with it and we must carefully study each case.

Since we are running out of time, are there questions from the floor?

| **Lee Mina** | I do not have any questions but I do have a comment. I have been attending this series of international symposia since the first one organized by the Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center in 1994. I would like to share with you the reality that I have observed as audience in the series of discussions.

And I would like to comment, not criticize, Professor Kajiya's observation, knowing that his presentation is about discourses in text form and not the reality from the specific time. You indicate that Japan is

included in the conception of “Asia,” with an emphasis on the “is.” I want to remind everybody is this fact was true in the case of the exhibition at the Fukuoka Art Museum.

At the time in 1994, when the series of symposia started, I often went to the Fukuoka Art Museum to see the Asian Art Show, Fukuoka. The exhibitions in Fukuoka, with Asia in its title, included Japan, but the same was not true for those shows in Tokyo.

At the time, as Mr. Kuroda commented on the issue of tradition, the discussion focused on the relationship between the modernity and contemporaneity in Asia. Is there a gap, or is their continuity? This question was raised cyclically in almost all of the symposia. And the other focus was on whether or not Japan is inside Asia or outside of it. The fact is, although there was hesitation, the panelists and audience shared the understanding that Japan was outside Asia. I think it was during the symposium in 1997. Murakami Takashi was attending the symposium, and raised his hand to comment, “The position of Japanese in Asia is like that of the honorary white in South Africa.” [07] The audience stirred in response. I recall Apinan Poshyananda participating in the symposia, in 1994, 1997, and 1999, and I think Murakami gave this comment in the one in 1997. Apinan followed Murakami with some other comment. As apparent in the way the audience stirred in response to the words of Murakami, discussing Asia in Tokyo at the time meant discussing an Asia that did not include Japan.

I am surprised that I could actually read through the statement “Japan *is* included in the conception of ‘Asia,’” without any difficulty now. My change in attitude reflects the fact that Japan’s position with Asia has shifted along with its financial standing.

**MC** | Thank you. Professor Kajiya?

**Kajiya** | I was making references to the exhibitions in 1979 and 1980 at the Fukuoka Art Museum where they used the word “Asian art.” How it was after then is exactly how Ms. Lee described it. Actually, in my text you will find my discussion of today’s situation where the word Asia still does not include Japan. When I was reading through the discourses before the 1980s in preparation for this presentation, I could hardly find

07 | Murakami cleverly used the term “honorary white” as a metaphor to describe the Japanese status in Asia. “Honorary white” is a term that originally defines the social status of the Japanese in South Africa, but by applying to the context of Asia, it aptly described how the Japanese maintained a sense of superiority and kept a certain distance from their Asian neighbors. I thought this reference was palpable, but I was asked what this comment meant to say from several people after we finished the session, so I thought I would add this explanation. [Lee]

“Asian art” as keyword in the newspaper and magazine articles. I referred to the exhibitions in 1979 and 1980 to think about how this word was conceived.

**MC** | Thank you. That was a very pertinent comment. It goes without saying that modernity in Japan pivoted between the two axes, “leave Asia” and “develop Asia.” So, when we consider Asia, the first element we consider binding the whole region is the common experience of “modernity,” that is, the Western “modernism” penetrating them (or through a forced transplant), whatever its evaluation is in each nation or locale. But we should not forget another binding element in Asia except India (and its west). That is the memory of Japanese occupation which lingers on. It is impossible to talk about Asia without that memory. Thus the “post” in postcolonialism is about forgetting but re-acknowledging the irrevocable past over and over again and to resist putting the past into oblivion. Sakai Naoki talked about this in the international symposium in 2002, “Asia in Transition: Representation and Identity.” We need to remember this point. Are there any more questions?

| • **Tsuji Shigebumi** | To follow up on Professor Hayashi’s statement, modernity is neither too close nor too remote with the development of modern nation state. We cannot discuss aspects of modernity without the backdrop of the nation state.

The intellectuals who were active members of the nationalistic *Seikyo-sha* group during the Meiji period developed their theory after studying the modernist idea on nationalism from the West. Consequently, the Japanese ultra-nationalists usurped Japan as their symbol, and decided to refer to the nation state Japan as the country of tradition. They do not make references to the specific local tradition, such as the tractions in Shigaraki or Karatsu. So we need to be very careful. In relation to the peer-to-peer communication, nation as a dominating institution is not productive in itself, so an earnest peer-to-peer communication would not be possible. Furthermore, the larger and more dominant system called globalization eventually absorbs the smaller system of the nations. I have small news to share with you. My friend Hans Belting told me

that Karlsruhe is now aggressively promoting the idea of a global art museum with the assistance of the media art department of a famous art school. We are starting to slowly acknowledge who is promoting this idea. Mr. Fan referred to Europe and America as the epicenter of globalism. I think we will see more of this in the future.

**MC** | Thank you. In relation to the plan for global art museum, global art history is now a popular subject in the discourse. We need to be careful when dealing with these ideas.

With the reference to the discussion on the nation, we must once again consider the fact that the word culture originates from the German word *kultur*. I learned from Nishikawa Nagao, that in French discourse from the 19th century, what we call culture is described as *civilization*, not *culture*. *Kultur* is a word that began to be used to assert German culture and tradition, embodying their nationalist ideology, against the universalizing but at the same time French-centric discourse of civilization. The word was imported to Japan, some time in later Meiji period, and became the word *bunka* in Japanese. Until the earlier Meiji period, as in the title of Fukuzawa Yukichi's book *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* [An Outline of a Theory of Civilization], civilization was a dominant concept, but then from a point in history, *bunka*, or "culture" taken from German becomes mainstream. Since then, the nation of Japan and its "culture" has been naturally assumed to be integrated into one entity. So the word "culture" always carries the shadow of the nation on its back.

| • **Kwok Kian Chow** | I would like to say that it has been a wonderful experience being here this afternoon. As mentioned by Ms. Furuichi, it has been 20 years since programs related to Asian art have been introduced in Japan, so there is a sense of celebration in the air, even though as we are moving into recession economically. And just now, there was a bit of discussion about globalization, and our understanding of the term, globalization, has become more complex. As we can see, there are differences in cultural globalization, economic globalization and many other aspects of globalization.

Professor Flores mentioned that with the downturn of neoliberalism, we are going to expect more, in fact, protectionism in economic exchanges



internationally. So, the period that we experienced in the past two decades or so also corresponded with the kind of economic globalization that took place. So, what is moving ahead of us, it is going to be difficult to anticipate. But I think one thing for sure is that as we have shared common discourse, such as postmodernism and postcolonialism and so on, the return to critical analysis of tradition and looking at tradition as a kind of source for new discourses will become very, very important. If not for other forms of globalization, we are going to anticipate the kind of tremendous growth in knowledge generation, in local cultures, for the simple reasons that more of international discourses and publications will be translated to local languages and more work in terms of critical studies will be done in local languages. So, naturally, this will become a very fast area of advancement in the next maybe one or two decades to come. So, I think globalization has somewhat come to a stop for some regards, and yet we can see towards new kind of developments that is very much located in local cultures.

**MC** | Thank you for a very positive and hopeful comment. We cannot be defeated and numbed in today's globalized system. We need to continue to take action, and Mr. Kwok's words encourage us to think about what we can do.

I would like to close today's session, as it is already past our scheduled closing time. I think we have been able to discuss some very important issues, so I hope we can take them further in the Sessions 2 and 3 tomorrow.

I would like to thank the three panelists and the commentator. Please give them your hand.





## Session 2

### Blindness and Insight of Postmodernism: Case Studies

This session will follow up on Session 1, which reviews the categorization of "Asian art" in the past 20 years from historical and theoretical points of view, and focus on individual artists as case studies. It will examine how this categorization or the postmodern discourse that supported such specifications augmented or diminished the way in how the artists' works were received.

#### Opening Remarks for Session 2 | Maeda Kyoji [Moderator]

Presentation 1 | Kim Bog-gi

**At the Crossroads of Cultural Clash: In the Case of Suh Do Ho**

Presentation 2 | Hirayoshi Yukihiro

**Huang Yong Ping and the Agitation of the West and the East**

Presentation 3 | Kanai Tadashi

**Becoming India: The "Locality" of Subodh Gupta**

Comment | Kamiya Yukie

**Discussion (Q&A)**

## Opening Remarks for Session 2

### Maeda Kyoji

Staff Writer, Yomiuri Shimbun

Good morning. Thank you for coming today from the very early hours. My name is Maeda Kyoji and I write for the Yomiuri Shimbun. I will be moderating Session 2 of the international symposium 2008 "Count10 Before You Say Asia." As for myself, I have written a few articles on artists from Asia, but I have not focused specifically on the arts coming from this region. So, as I consider myself not to be a specialist in this field, I would like to listen to everybody's presentations today, and ask candid questions, just as I would as a journalist. I would like to ask you in the audience to do the same and ask questions on any point of your interest.

Yesterday, we started out the symposium with evaluating the discourses on Asian art. As a result, we identified traditional and contemporary, as well as localism and globalism as issues. These issues are old but also new. The issue of the tradition and contemporary is concerned with time, and the issue of the local and the global is concerned with space. These terminologies that are coined together in pairs often construct an axis to coordinate the position of oneself. In other words, they are important components in the identity politics that oblige us to be discreet in our discussion. In relation to this, in Session 1, we saw how the development of the discourse has demanded essentialism to define Asia's identity, and a positioning that counters the West. Furthermore, a range of topics were covered: the dual role of artist-curator and installation as an important art form where the two roles meet, as well as where national and social elements are incorporated; realism as a critique



Maeda Kyoji

on the social reality; Asian-ness in the market, and its value as commodity in the global economy.

In today's Session 2, we will pick up our discussion from where we left off yesterday, but will particularly focus on individual artists through case studies. I hope that the presentations will be able to elaborate on the issues that were brought out yesterday through these specific examples. Artists generally conceptualize and create artworks in a discursive space of their contemporaries. The same could be said for art critics. But they often protrude from the scope of discursive theories through their creative activities, and become critical of the theories based on their actual experiences. So we expect the case studies to investigate how the discourse has affected the production and appraisal of the artist, and seek hints to overcome the confinements of the current discourses.

Today, Mr. Kim Bog-gi will present Suh Do Ho, an artist from his native country Korea, Professor Hirayoshi Yukihiro will present Huang Yong Ping from China, and Professor Kanai Tadashi will present Subodh Gupta from India, each based on their individual research. As moderator, I would like to mention that we are dealing with a very limited selection of artists this time, and that they were not selected as perfect models that would frame our discussion. For example, we asked Professor Hirayoshi to take a case of a Chinese artist, since he was involved in organizing the "Avant-garde China: Twenty Years of

Chinese Contemporary Art” exhibition. We asked Professor Kanai to discuss an Indian artist, based on his experience of curating the “Vanishing Points: Contemporary Japanese Art” exhibition, introducing Japanese contemporary art to the Indian audience. So Huang Yong Ping and Subodh Gupta were each selected by the presenters. But as for the Korean case study, we had initially solicited him to see if Lee Ufan, who works in Korea, Japan, and Paris, would be a good subject for discussion. Mr. Kim had responded by suggesting Suh Do Ho or Kimsooja, instead. In the end, we agreed on a presentation on Suh Do Ho, whose father is also a prominent abstract painter, Suh Se-ok whose art is deeply rooted in the traditional calligraphy.

This line up of three artists is one of the many combinations that could have been possible for our consideration. Nevertheless, the three presentations should indicate how a number of lines—lines for traditional and contemporary, as well as those drawing from the local and global, among others—intricately cross over the sections. I would like to invite you to extract other lines, and see what lies ahead and which artists could be discussed along those lines. The three artists are all high-profile artists and, perhaps, their current status owes partly to the international biennial and global market systems, where English is the currency for communication. We hope to have Ms. Kamiya Yukie to touch on these points as she comments on today’s presentations. This, in turn, means that there are artists and art practices that are in the blind

spot, kept outside of the network of international exhibitions and global market economy, as Mr. Kuroda Raiji pointed out yesterday. So, then, on what ground do they stand, and how are their positions configured as such? I hope you can work on your own imaginations, as you listen to the presentations.

Let me finish now and invite Mr. Kim to start his presentation.

Thank you.

## At the Crossroads of Cultural Clash In the Case of Suh Do Ho

**Kim Bog-gi**

*Editorial Director, art in culture and art in Asia*

### Transcultural Displacement

Suh Do Ho is a Korean artist who has received much attention on the international art scene since the mid-1990s. He has held solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris and the Seattle Art Museum. He has also been invited to participate in the São Paulo and Venice Biennales and included in many exhibitions at major art museums around the world. At the same time, however, he has had few opportunities—mostly group shows—to show his work in his native Korea. It was not until 2003 that he had his first solo show there.

Suh, who was born in 1962, majored in Eastern painting at the Seoul National University. After completing graduate studies in Korea, he went to study in the United States, where he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting at the Rhode Island School of Design and a Master of Fine Arts in sculpture at Yale University. (For a student of Eastern painting in Korea, it is a very unusual academic background.) After catching the eye of a New York gallerist at his graduation exhibition, Suh moved quickly onto the New York gallery circuit, where he was discovered by Western art critics and curators and ultimately matured into a truly international artist. Observing from the standpoint of the Korean art world, it is clear that Suh achieved his success overseas. His art was then imported back into his own country.

Suh is a migrant. But his migration did not consist of simply moving from Korea to the United States—from the East to the West. It involved a life-transforming experience, accompanied by experiences of studying abroad and marriage. Suh has created a range of artworks in which these kinds of identity shifts through the prism of “meditation on personal space.” That personal space is a physical, corporeal, psychological and metaphorical space that can be shifted back and forth between Korea and the United States. The concepts of “transcultural displacement” and



Kim Bog-gi



01 | Since the Korean peninsula has remained divided into North and South after the Korean War (1950–53), South Korean men over 19 years of age are required by law to complete military service. [translator's note]

“deterritorialization” lie at the base of these shifts. Sure enough, the great majority of Western critics have discussed Suh’s work in reference to the discourses of Diaspora, globalism, nomadism and so on. While such discussion has served to propel Suh’s career internationally, it has also limited it by reducing his work to a stereotypical depiction of the experience of an Oriental moving to the West.

Today I would like to make an examination of the work of Suh Do Ho and in particular its connection to the art of Korea and Asia making use of postmodernist discourse.

## Points of Discussion

### 1 | Clothing—Diaspora and Raw Identity

The starting point for Suh’s artworks is clothing. He explains: “I approach my work from the concept that clothing is the smallest private, secret space that an individual can own, inhabit and transport.”

*High School Uni-Form* (1995) [FIG.1] consisted of 300 Korean boys’ school uniforms joined at the shoulders. Standing up straight in lines, the black uniforms resembled a line of well-trained soldiers. The work brought together the artist’s own memories and also historical and socio-cultural references in the form of very specific objects.

Korean education still bears the marks of Japanese colonization and military culture, and here one can find a Facist-related visual metaphor for the group identity. The group expressed as a unit by this symbolic use of clothing stands like a giant hollow scarecrow or a ghost severed of head and limbs. Uniforms compel people to integration. The concept of the uniform gains power in social and power systems that make a virtue of conformity as opposed to diversity, solidarity among individuals, of obedience and sacrifice. Suh’s work is a rejection of the group identity that would oppress the individual and autonomy. At the same time it imparts emotions from the artist’s own memories, such as friendship, camaraderie and unity. It includes a sense of “mourning for the past and for departures” that is felt through the migrant experience.

The school uniform work eventually led to the military uniform work. Both are important in the experience of young male Korean youths.

(When the artist was wearing them Korea was going through periods of violent change, including dictatorship and the Gwangju Democratization Movement.) [••1]

Suh elucidated on his own experience in the army in *Some/One* (2001) [FIG.2].

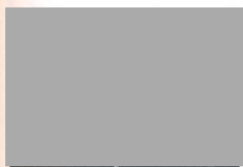


FIG.1  
Suh Do Ho, *High School Uni-Form*,  
1995



FIG.2  
Suh Do Ho, *Some/One*, 2001  
Courtesy: Whitney Museum of  
American Art

This is a large installation made from military dog tags. Weaving the dog tags together, he created a form reminiscent of a bronze war memorial. The work, like a grand suit of amour, gives form to the sacrifice of countless nameless people and also demonstrates the potential power resulting from such sacrifice.

Clothing is the barrier where the subject and the world meet. It is the subject's last layer of external skin and the place where the first communication with the outside becomes possible. It is also the place where the private world meets with the public space, where meaning is made public. Suh starts with clothing but expands its concept to space and architecture. His clothing is the broad concept that makes you realize how vague the boundary is between the tangible and the intangible.

## 2 | The House—Representation of the Nomad

Clothing leads next to the house. Suh has continued to look at the home using fabric as his material. He makes houses ranging from cotton tents to transparent fabric houses. The homes he makes were either places he had lived in the past or was living in at the time. The artist himself has confessed that the reason he chose fabric as a material was because of its mobility—when an exhibition was over he could easily fold the work up into a suitcase and carry it away.

In *Seoul Home/L.A. Home* (1999) [FIG.3], in order to make the fabric version of his family's traditional house in Seoul, he made a pattern of the house itself. It was a kind of "tailor-made" sculpture. He transferred almost all architectural details of the interior of the house onto his fabric model at 1:1 scale, using thread. Suh and his highly skilled assistants sewed together hundreds of pieces of silk to make the house. The work is a "transportable site-specific installation" predicated on portability.

His more recent *Fallen Star 1/5* (2008) [FIG.4] represents a meeting of a traditional Korean house and a Western style house. It is a work that depicts the fate of an artist picked up by a whirlwind in Korea, carried across the Pacific and dropped in the United States, making reference in the process to the artist's own life as a drifter going back and forth between Seoul and New York.

Generally speaking, the home carries with it the peculiarities of a place. However, in Suh's work the house itself traverses borders. Through that



FIG.3  
Suh Do Ho, *Seoul Home/L.A. Home*,  
1999. Courtesy: The Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



FIG.4  
Suh Do Ho, *Fallen Star 1/5*, 2008

process of displacement the place itself is made to relocate. Suh thus personifies the house, opening up by juxtaposing it to other cultures. You could say that the concept of the portable house is itself the ultimate representation of nomadism.

### 3 | The Group—The Individual within the Collective, or the Minority

Suh explains: “You could say that my assertion is to refrain from ‘defining’ things. The more I live as an artist, the more I feel all the barriers are breaking down. That’s why I feel that efforts to erect barriers are futile.”

I understand Suh’s term “barrier” to mean particularities such as origin, region, nation and race. He also says the following: “With the ‘particularities’ of an individual, I always approach my work with the attitude of addressing a more general ‘universality’.”

*Public Figures* (1998) depicts a giant sculpture-less plinth being held up by a group of tiny people. The human figurines, being squashed by the overwhelming weight of power above them, express a tension between the identity of the individual and that of the group.

*Floor* (1997–2000) [FIG.5] is a work where a large thick sheet of glass has been placed over the floor. Visitors can walk over it freely. But if you look closely at the glass sheet, you see that underneath it is a mass of tiny people, holding up the glass sheet. There are six types of the small human figurines, in black, white and yellow color and in male and female versions. Each was made from molds at a factory. The figurines hold their arms up to support both the glass and the real people walking on top of it. The tiny figurines appear to be trying to escape from their predicament. Yet they are encased in the space below the glass, and real visitors walking above are made to feel complicit in their entrapment.

*Doormat: Welcome* (1998–) looks like a kind of rug but is in fact a collection of hundreds of small figurines arranged to form the word “Welcome”—as though they were involved in some kind of mass game. While the work entails the critical message that the uniqueness of the individual is erased by collective ideology, it also possesses a black humor sufficient to prompt sardonic smiles in viewers.

*Karma* (2003) [FIG.6] is an extension of *Doormat* that enlarges it significantly. It was critiqued and described as rendering the collective unity and the artifice of a totalitarian society that extols group



FIG.5  
Suh Do Ho, *Floor*, 1997–2000

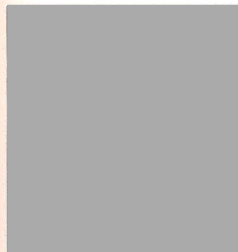


FIG.6  
Suh Do Ho, *Karma*, 2003  
Courtesy: The Museum of Fine Arts,  
Houston

consciousness and loyalty are, in fact, nothing but empty shells.

*Paratrooper-I* (2003) [FIG.7] consists of hundreds of oval-shaped textile with embroidered signatures that the artist collected. The threads are the fine threads of survival, of fate. It is a raw psychological self-portrait of our lives, depicting how we are caught up in the web of fate and how we can never become fully free.

## Dialectic Logic

### 1 | Tradition in the Blood, Localism

Suh grew up in a good environment where the tradition of the literati and the “scholar-bureaucrat” endured. He grew up in Seoul and as part of the *yangban* class [·02]—two facts that are essential for understanding his development. Furthermore, his father, Suh Se-ok, is a master of Eastern painting. As an artist, Suh has progressed along the path of the elite. How has this background affected his work? To put it differently, how has he incorporated tradition in his work? Tradition has many faces. I would like to examine closely the formal aspects inherent in Suh’s work—present regardless of his will—as examples of the Korean sensibility.

Let’s turn back to his houses made in fabric. His house in Seoul is constructed in traditional architecture and demonstrates its particular characteristics beautifully. It’s a place with waterscapes, ornamental stones and stone lanterns offering the full complement of traditional landscaping. Suh explains: “When I was in Korea, every time I left the large gate of the house I experienced the sensation of moving to a different place, the sensation of isolation. The question of where you establish the boundaries of your ‘house within a house’ is an eternal theme for me and my work—it is essential to understanding the world and civilization.”

It would also be interesting to examine the influence on Suh’s work of his father. The shapes of the figurines that appear in Suh’s sculptural work are surprisingly similar to the people depicted in Se-ok’s watercolor series, *People*. The similarity is in the way the faceless figures raise their hands to the sky. Perhaps you should say their forms exist in the Suh genes. Interestingly, when Se-ok recently exhibited a new installation work, Suh worked as his assistant.

02 | Originally the term *yangban* referred to scholarship and the martial arts, with its origin in the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392), but during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897), it came to refer to members of the ruling class who could become bureaucrats. It is thought that this bureaucratic term came to refer to social status. [translator’s note]



FIG.7  
Suh Do Ho, *Paratrooper-I*, 2003

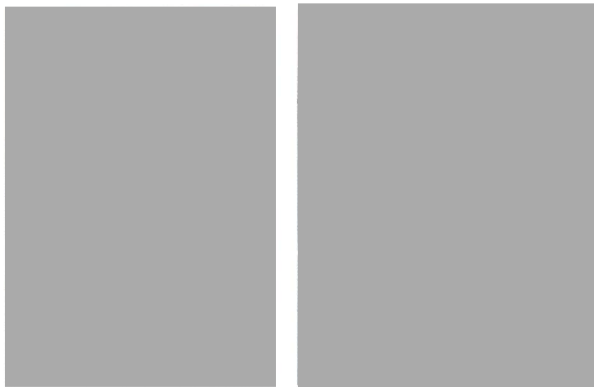
## 2 | Eastern Painting, Asian-ness

Suh's installations and sculptures possess aesthetic qualities of transparency and respiration, often with multiple layers that seem to breathe independently. Many of the materials he uses in his work are transparent—and not just the fabrics. Fabric, thread, photograph and polyurethane are the main materials. Semi-transparent materials allow interaction between the inside and the outside. Suh's study of Eastern painting and his regular contact with *hanji*, handmade Korean papers, contributed to this use of materials. It is *hanji* that is pasted on the frames of the screen doors of old Korean houses. Suh's work also evinces the methodology and spirit of ink painting. He has the ability to see clearly through to the subtle, complex hidden structures that are weaved into the layers of the image. They seep into the pictures, breathing in between the paper and the ink, and that richness is something that does not exist in Western art, but is a characteristic of Eastern.

As in celadon, there is an air of refinement, of scholar-bureaucrat temperament that exists in Suh's works. They also remind one of a delicate feminine sensibility, of the worlds of easy contemplation and meditation.

In Korean art the work best known as a symbol of the “nomad” is Kimsooja's *Bottari* [FIG.8]. Unlike Suh's work, Kimsooja's *Bottari* is presented “raw”—as it is. You could say that her work possesses the emotion of the common people, like the flavor of a hotpot, a strong, feeling of *han*—that general feeling of lament in the face of difficult circumstances that is said to characterize the Korean sensibility.

FIG.8  
Kimsooja, *Bottari Truck*, Installation  
view at Rodin Gallery, Seoul, 2000  
Courtesy: Samsung Museum, Seoul



### 3 | Glocalism

Most of Suh's works consist of easy to understand content and forms.

However, the various phases they entail are complex enough to make you giddy. His bodies of work are created along the fluid and alluding lines that trace a spiral-like path. For that reason they are open to both the inside and outside.

Suh's works approach the issues of subject and object, identity and difference, individual and collective, freedom and restriction, memory and reality, tradition and immediacy and local and global not as mutually exclusive dichotomies, but as interdependent elements. I agree entirely with the critics who interpret the dichotomies inherent in Suh's work as "careful contemplation on the historical and social consciousness of beauty" or as an "'entente' between the aesthetic and the political." In other words, it is an example of dialectic logic.

In the age of globalism, Suh actively incorporates the language of contemporary art without discarding his ethnic identity. Also, while protecting his own cultural characteristics, he avoids the pitfalls of narrow-minded regionalism. That is to say he is an artist who could be credited for his pursuance of "glocality," whereby globalism and localism are made to complement and complete each other.

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Original text in Korean

Translated from Japanese into English by Edan Corkill

## Huang Yong Ping and the Agitation of the West and the East

**Hirayoshi Yukihiro**

Associate Professor, Museum and Archive, Kyoto Institute of Technology



Hirayoshi Yukihiro

Let me start my talk with a quote:

—

Huang Yong Ping's art should be understood first of all as a set of strategies of cultural resistance to the power of dominant discourses including the institutional system itself [...] His work introduced Western avant-garde art and thinking to China and emphasized the Dadaist tradition and deconstructivist theories. He combined these with traditional Chinese philosophy, which has been oppressed for many years under Maoist rule, in order to create a strategy to subvert the established and oppressive order of "official art" in China. Today, living and working in the West, he focuses on a critique of Eurocentrism that still prevails in the dominant global discourse [...] After moving to the West in 1989, he introduced metaphysical and practical systems such as Chinese divination and geomancy so as to counterbalance the rationalist, scientific, and technocentric systems of Western ideology and knowledge. [·oi]

—

This passage, which appears in the opening of Hou Hanru's essay in the catalogue for Huang's 1998 solo exhibition at Amsterdam's De Appel, is typical in its description and dominant in its style for introducing the artist. I do not intend to raise any objections to its content. In the climate of globalization that has emerged in the postcolonial period, one could say that the schematic of anti-Western voices being raised in dissent against the political and cultural domination of the West has already become obsolete. Yet, in as much as it does not allow for a clear rebuttal, Huang's work suggests an outright resistance against authority, as corroborated by the artist's own statements. What needs to be addressed here is not the strategy of resistance to authority but the tactics that are used in its implementation, and the type of interpretation that such tactics evoke. To deal with these subjects, it is important to

oi | Hou Hanru, "A necessary reminder," *Huang Yong Ping* (Amsterdam: De Appel Foundation, 1998), 65–66.

first make an overview of Huang's works and ascertain his strategic position.

Born in Xiamen in 1954, Huang graduated from the Painting Faculty at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. Influenced by the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the postmodern thought of Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, and the art theories of Dada and Marcel Duchamp, Huang formed Xiamen Dada in 1986. As a group, the artists held several exhibitions in Xiamen. Following one of these, held at the New Art Museum in Xiamen in 1986, an "incineration event" in which all of the works that had been on display were burned in the museum's forecourt, is remembered for its symbolic importance in triggering the avant-garde art movement that emerged across China in the mid-1980s. In 1987, Huang created "*The History of Chinese Painting*" and "*The History of Modern Western Art*" Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes [FIG.1].

As the title suggests, the work was created by agitating two books on the history of painting, one Chinese and one Western, in a washing machine. Considered in the context of the period, it should be seen as an action against the Western art that had begun to flow into China, but of particular importance here is the fact that rather than affirming the superiority of one or the other of these purified statements, by mixing the two together, Huang created a "dirty, impure" product.

Consequently, the work can be interpreted as a reference to the impossibility of genuine communication with others or the inevitability of deterioration that occurs in the internalization and misunderstanding of others. Around this time, in order to move beyond the Western modern art dictum that stresses the "creativity/originality of the artist," Huang adopted the element of chance, following the examples of John Cage and Duchamp. To assist him, Huang relied on things like the *I Ching* and *Zen*. Based on these concepts, he created a huge roulette wheel and began making work according to the instructions that he wrote on it.

Rather than being a code for Chinese identity, the *I Ching* and *Zen Koan* were fundamentally referential systems that guided Huang toward postmodern thought. In fact, in a 1986 article titled "Xiamen Dada—Postmodern?", he discusses the similarities between the lineage of anti-art, which began with Duchamp, and *Zen*:



FIG.1  
Huang Yong Ping, "*The History of Chinese Painting*" and "*The History of Modern Western Art*" Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes, 1987



FIG.2  
Huang Yong Ping, *House of Oracles*, 1989–92



—  
Using an upside-down porcelain urinal (Duchamp) or packing the artist's feces into glittering cans (Manzoni) to answer the question 'What is art?' is exactly the same as Chan masters using "a dried feces stick" or "three pounds of flax" as the answer to the question "What is Buddha?" [...] Postmodern is the modern renaissance of Chan Buddhism. [•02]  
—

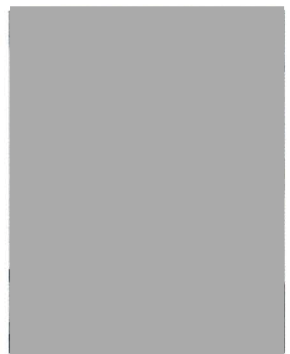
If nothing else, at this point one should note that Huang understood how the methodology of opposing Western rationalism was not uniquely Chinese and that it had already "existed" in the West. Interestingly, all mention of this parallel between Chinese and the West would completely disappear from all of Huang's post-1990 statements. But for now, let's set that fact aside and continue on a bit more with our overview of the artist's work.

At the "Magiciens de la terre" exhibition, held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989, Huang showed a huge tomb that was once again created out of scraps from newspapers and other published materials that had been agitated in a washing machine. Then, in Europe, he presented *House of Oracles* (1989–92) [FIG.2], which foreshadowed his use of methodologies like the *I Ching* and augury. The following year, 1993, he showed two important works using animals and insects called *Theatre of the World* [FIG.3] and *Passage* [FIG.4].

In the former, viewers were asked to peer inside a stage device that looked like a turtle shell. Inside this theater was a performance by living lizards, spiders, scorpions, and insects who proceeded to kill each other. The work was a microcosm of global conflicts that was peopled with

FIG.3 (left)  
Huang Yong Ping, *Theatre of the World*, 1993

FIG.4 (right)  
Huang Yong Ping, *Passage*, 1993



non-human living creatures. Meanwhile, *Passage*, as the name suggests, consisted of a passage that was installed at the entrance to the exhibition. With signs reading “EC Nationals” and “Others,” entrants were forced to go through one of the two passages according to these labels. Within each was a cage containing a lion that was meant to serve as a guard (though in the end, Huang was unable to receive permission to use real lions). While alluding to political issues such as nationalism, borders, and asylum-seeking, the works also helped establish the use of living creatures as an important characteristic of Huang’s work.

After this, as Huang steadily began to solidify his position in the West, he made the short list for the 1998 Hugo Boss Award, and the following year, showed his work with Jean-Pierre Bertrand in the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. In 2005, a retrospective of Huang’s work called “House of Oracles” began at the Walker Art Center and later traveled around the United States, before eventually making its way to the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing in a truly triumphant homecoming.

The tactics adopted in Huang’s work to achieve his “intent” and “objective” of agitating the ideologies of both Western and Eastern art and relativizing Eurocentrism are, as I mentioned earlier, the artist’s invocation of the *I Ching* and augury, or a collection of related accidents and anecdotes, and the symbolic use of animals and insects. These things are what in fact have come to be viewed as the main characteristics of Huang’s work. For example, in exhibition reviews in the May and June 2002 editions of *Flash Art International*, Merrily Kerr writes:

—  
Huang has strategically incorporated Western ideas into his influenced Buddhist philosophy. [•03]

Or similarly, in the May 2002 issue of *Art in America*, Lilly Wei writes:

—  
Founder of the Xiamen Dada group in China in the 1980s and greatly influenced by Duchamp, Cage, and Beuys, Huang has been previously known for his subversive installations and unorthodox materials, which included live snakes and scorpions. [•04]

03 | Merrily Kerr, “Huang Yong Ping: Barbara Gladstone,” *Flash Art International*, no. 34, May–June 2002, 134.

04 | Lilly Wei, “Huang Yong Ping at Barbara Gladstone,” *Art in America*, vol. 90, May 2002, 144.

05 | Paul Ardenne, "Huang Yong Ping: Galerie Froment-Putman," *Art Press*, no. 70, June 1992, 101. Original French text: "L'exposition présentée à la galerie Fromant & Putman relevait encore de cette catégorie de l'art 'autre'... A l'intérieur, un bric-à-brac symbolique au sens inaccessible à nos consciences rationalisées"

Viewed as a novel "Chinese" methodology theretofore unknown in Western art, the use of the *I Ching*, augury, and living animals and insects, as suggested by the passage by Hou Hanru. I quoted at the beginning of this talk, should be seen as a means of relativizing and deconstructing Eurocentric rationalism.

But things are not quite as simple as they seem. Aside from their strategic effectiveness, as a tactical approach, these various elements can easily be manipulated to formulate a "Chinese/Asian" image. These are not merely simple objects of comparison that stand as something external or other in relation to Europe or the West, in other words, a world structured on a different reality that exists in the same age. They are delayed symbols of the East's constant second-place ranking to the West. Nor are they merely indicative of the typical conditions that are spoken of in regard to "Chinese contemporary art"; i.e., that since the mid-1980s, Chinese artists, who had been isolated from information from the West and whose artistic expressions had long been suppressed, exploded with life after suddenly absorbing a variety of Western art trends. Instead, they mark a vision of China as a pre-enlightened society that remains immersed in a world-view that is incomprehensible to the modern Western mind. Consequently, Huang has been awarded the position of an artist in a savage society who is both shaman and wild-animal tamer. Let's next examine an exhibition review by Paul Ardenne from the June 1992 issue of *Art Press*. This comment was made in reference to the writer's first look at *House of Oracles*, when Huang's work was shown in Paris:

—  
The exhibition held at Fromant & Putman gallery again recalled the art category by 'others' [...] Inside of the work, symbolic bric-a-brac to which our rational conscience is inaccessible. [·05]  
—

Inside the tent in *House of Oracles* was a huge *I Ching* disc and other devices used in geomancy. It was impossible for the rational mind to understand what significance or symbolism these things might contain. In the same essay I quoted from earlier, Hou Hanru, who has shown a deep understanding and critical approach toward Huang's work while at the same time supporting him as a curator, sees the function of the *I Ching* and augury as "the emphasis of 'irrational' movement, change,

chance and even chaos." This is not another world, another theory, or another system, but simply an element of irrationality used to counter the rational. And this irrationality, like the Qaballah, alchemy, or magic of the Middle Ages, is nothing less than a sign of the premodern or pre-enlightened. Throughout the essays on the characteristics of Huang's work based on the *I Ching* and augury are adjectives such as "irrational," "exotic," "ancient," "eternal," "invariable," "premodern," and "traditional," clearly indicating the difference in its position on a vertical axis. To emphasize the extreme nature of the premodern code in this work, one should note that the parallels Huang once drew between Duchamp and Manzoni and ancient Chinese thought are no longer present.

Next, I'd like to cite a quote on the use of living animals and insects by Evelyne Jouanno:

—

In the West, Huang Yong Ping took his direct attacks on daily and political reality a step further by adding even more surprising materials to his artistic vocabulary, including cooked rice, Chinese medicine, and even live animals and insects as metaphors for different ethnic groups. Rice, animals, and insects constitute an essential part of the everyday Chinese reality where they have been used to formulate an entire system of languages, symbols, beliefs, and social and moral codes emphasizing the non-difference between Man and Nature, or between the World and the Elements. On the contrary, Western thought has viewed Nature as 'other' compared to Culture (or to "civilized humanity") ever since the ancient Greeks. Therefore, introducing "Nature" (rice, animals) with its traditional and cultural connotations as the incarnation of art in the Western institutional context becomes a radically subversive, even inconceivable act of provocation. [•06]

—

Here, the writer argues that by introducing another form of (Eastern) reality, the artist makes an effective assault on the Western norm, but at the same time she reiterates the clichéd image of the East as a society without differentiations between nature and people. I'll try to refrain from condemning Jouanno too severely for her mistaken understanding of the East. Reading images as having "symbiosis with nature" as



FIG.5

Joseph Beuys, *Coyote—I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974

06 | Evelyne Jouanno, "Huang Yong Ping: Cultural Differences and Negotiation," *Flash Art International*, no. 32, Summer 1999, 114.

representation that differentiates the East from the West may be discerned with some credibility by those Westerners who have had some contact with the East. Moreover, not all Asian people have daily encounters with animals and insects, and neither do all Western people objectify nature in opposition to it—as not only non-Westerners but anyone can easily understand. Nevertheless this stereotypical description somehow reminded me of Joseph Beuys' 1974 work *Coyote—I Like America and America Likes Me* [FIG.5]. In this performance, Beuys shut himself up in a gallery that was filled with felt, newspaper, and dried grass, and engaged in a silent dialogue as he played and exchanged glares with a coyote, a sacred animal to America's indigenous people. Regardless of Beuys' actual intentions, which included a critical stance toward Western society, if one were to place Huang in this schema, he would clearly be positioned on the side of the coyote. In other words, rather than being a civilized figure, Huang, a personification of the wild or uncivilized, would play the role of wild-animal tamer, domesticating the coyote and devising an attack on civilization. He would occupy a position that is even more magical than that of Beuys, who considered himself a contemporary shaman.

The reason I mention this Beuys performance is that this “dialogue” between savage and civilized people and societies is that one finds the same element in Huang's participation at the 1999 Venice Biennale, as he too had a strategic intention to confront the wild with his body. In that Biennale, for which Harald Szeemann served as director, the curatorial stance called for an emphasis on the expansive range of multiculturalism in art; and the fact that so many contemporary Chinese works were shown became a topic of conversation. It was at this event that Huang was selected to represent France alongside Jean-Pierre Bertrand. According to a press release issued by the Comité français d'organisation, the theme of the French Pavilion was “dialogue.” Outside the building, Huang showed his work *Sixty-year Cycle Chariot*, and nine aluminum animals that looked down on visitors from the top of a wooden pole that extended upward beyond the roof of the pavilion [FIG.6]. Sensing that “dialogue” unfolds according to an essential imbalance in power and that realistically “dialogue” is impossible, Huang attempted to upend the relationship between the two artists' “dialogue,” in picking up Bertrand's interest to *Robinson Crusoe* and

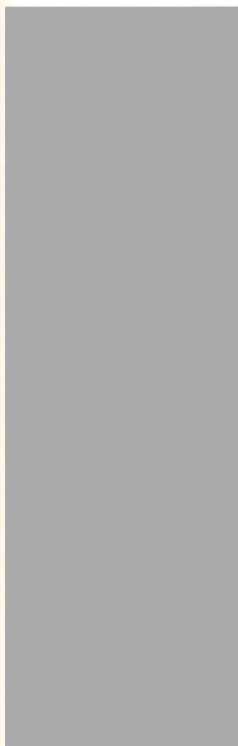


FIG.6  
Installation view of Huang Yong Ping's work at the French Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1999

connecting it to his own work. Huang said:

—  
Robinson created “man Friday” in his own image and taught him to speak English, turning him into a servant, into someone who recounts the story. Therefore, a “dialogue” is a kind of “recounting.” The fact that I was invited to exhibit in the French Pavilion means that I ran the risk of falling into the same trap as “man Friday”—that is, of being given a name, of being turned into someone who recounts. This had been very clear to me from the beginning. [·07]  
—

The black man and parrot which Robinson Crusoe tried to tame, symbols of the savage and uncivilized, were transformed by Huang into the nine beasts that looked down contemptuously on the viewer.

—  
Here, in the context of the French Pavilion, the smooth-tongued parrot was replaced by a group of silent, voiceless animals cast in aluminum—these animals would be much more difficult to tame than humans. The appearance of these animals rediffused the message that frightened the colonialists of the early eighteenth century, the message that frightened Robinson Crusoe—they symbolize the reappearance of native cannibals. [·08]  
—

Judging from condemnation such as Catherine Millet’s critical view that “the horrible creatures by Huang Yong Ping that surmount the roof pollute the atmosphere generated by the installation of his co-occupant, Jean-Pierre Bertrand,” Huang’s strategy to upend the situation seems to have been fairly effective. [·09] But apart from his strategic intention, the contrastive scheme of placing a Chinese artist who, as a wild-animal tamer, personifies the savage alongside a French artist who personifies civilization went off without a hitch. This is obvious from the photographs that accompany introductory articles on the two artists published by Phillippe Piguet in the magazine *L’œil*. Arm in arm, Bertrand’s furrowed brow and fixed gaze at the camera create a strong contrast with Huang, who is seated and looks as he is about to be encircled by huge, plaster chimera-like creatures [FIG.7]. Needless to say, this Huang’s image falls in line with the general image of the snake charmer [FIG.8].

07 | Huang, “A Pavilion for Two People,” *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005), 89.

08 | Huang, “A Pavilion for Two People,” 90.

09 | Catherine Millet, “Venice: La Biennale—48e Exposition,” *Art Press*, no. 249, September 1999, 66. Original text in French: “Elle [la disposition du Huang] pollue l’oeuvre atmosphérique de Bertrand sous l’effet des horribles bestiaux de Huang qui surmontent le toit.”

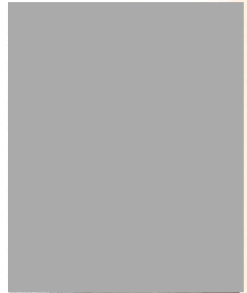


FIG.7  
Huang Yong Ping in the magazine *L’œil*, June 1999

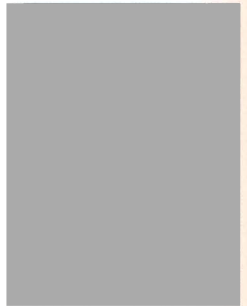


FIG.8  
Snake charmer with the snake around his neck  
(source: <http://www.ipeka.com/rinnet/thaimaa/damnoen.htm>)

When one thinks about it, animals and insects are not merely symbols of the wild, but signs that contain rich, cultural connotations. Nor are they something that is limited to the East, but instead are structural elements that make up a system of symbols that is shared by all cultures. The reason Huang first set out to use these things is figuratively suggested by the various methods of understanding the world that Foucault details in *Les Mots et les choses* (The Order of Things). Various living things are loaded with this system of symbols, and the recognition that the *I Ching* and augury are not illogical examples of premodernism but a type of code enabling us to make sense of the world was finally revealed in Philippe Vergne's analysis in the catalogue for Huang's 2005 retrospective at the Walker Art Center. In that essay, Vergne discusses Huang's reliance on a system of symbols to understand the world, and while making reference to Panofsky's inquiry into the laws of perspective, stresses that in as much as these laws, which gave form to the modern era, are also a system of symbols, there is a collision here between two systems, two paradigms, and two techniques of recognition.

Vergne's discussion can be seen as an important development in the understanding of Huang's work. Despite this, if one detects an intention to accept Huang's position as a "shaman/wild-animal tamer," it is because Huang has chosen to remain an "other" in the globalized world of art, that is, to remain a "Chinois," which means "inscrutable" in French expression.

Huang Yong Ping's career as an artist, which began with the reception of the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein and a "misunderstanding" of Western art, doesn't allow for the essential internalization of the other. The cliché of the uncivilized, for the very reason that it is a cliché, exposes the limitations of a system of symbols that relies on the recipient, agitates the East and West, and serves as a breakthrough in recognizing the existence of an Other who cannot be internalized.

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Translated by Christopher Stephens

## Becoming India

### The “Locality” of Subodh Gupta

**Kanai Tadashi**

Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts, Shinshu University

The last few years has seen an amazing growth of interest in recent Indian art. Indian artists have a strong presence in international exhibitions, and special exhibitions of contemporary Indian art are being held almost every year in venues around the world. In this year’s Gwangju Biennale, for example, one could see the work of Shilpa Gupta (1976–), Atul Dodiya (1959–), Jitish Kallat (1974–), Dayanita Singh (1961–). The large-scale work by Shilpa Gupta showing at the Yokohama Triennale still remains fresh in our memory. The Mori Art Museum is currently presenting “Chalo! India,” the most recent of many important exhibitions throughout the world focusing on the Indian subcontinent, including “Kapital and Karma” (Kunsthalle Wien, 2002), “Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India” (Asia Society/Queens Museum of Art, New York; traveled to Australia, Mexico, and India, 2004–07), and “Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Indian Art” (Kunstmuseum Bern, 2007–08), among others. The excitement over Indian contemporary art is being further stimulated by the energetic activities of commercial galleries. The most influential Indian galleries are concentrated in Mumbai, from the Gallery Chemould to Chatterjee & Lal Gallery, where the owners and artists are still quite young. Each gallery has its own individual character and they offer artworks in a great variety of media and artists of all ages, including recognized masters like Maqboda Fida Hussain (1915–), the internationally famous Anish Kapoor (1954–), who has also shown in Japan, and younger artists from the Sir J. J. School of Art in Mumbai. Indian galleries have undertaken a remarkable expansion overseas. The Bodhi Art Gallery opened a branch in Berlin this year in addition to others in New Delhi, Singapore, and New York, ambitiously reaching out to the United States and Europe. Nature Morte, the gallery receiving the most attention in New Delhi, recently opened a space in Berlin to showcase Indian art.

The art investment market is reflecting, or stimulating, the current



Kanai Tadashi



boom in Indian art even more than the galleries. An especially important role is being played by internet auctions, like Saffronart, that attract a newly wealthy class of Indians, especially those who are working in other countries, the NRIs (Non-resident Indian). Sotheby's and Christie's, of course, have both been holding special auctions of Indian art. For example, M. F. Hussain's *Ritual* (1968) sold for 840,000 US dollars at a Christie's auction in New York this September, and Tyeb Mehta's (1925–) *Untitled (Yellow Heads)* (1970) went for 750,000 US dollars. In 2005, a Mehta painting became the first modern or contemporary Indian artwork to pass the 1 million US dollar mark. Along with these established masters of modern and contemporary Indian art, Subodh Gupta (1964–) is showing exceptional strength in the market, although he is still in mid-career. At the same Christie's auction in September, a Gupta installation, *Miter* (2007), brought 840,000 US dollars and a painting, *Steal 2* (2007) [FIG.1], hit 970,000 US dollars.

Still in his early forties, Gupta has reached the same market level as the best-known modern Indian artists. He is the enfant terrible of an Indian art frenzy that has exceeded all previous standards. Recently, he contracted with Hauser and Wirth Gallery, which has venues in London and Zurich, raising his level of recognition and competitiveness in the West. "The Damien Hirst of Delhi" is the phrase in the English paper *The Guardian* (by Randeep Ramesh, February 20, 2007) that has aptly described his success as an artist. However, just as the English identity of "Hirst," or in this case, "Subodh Gupta of London," would not be particularly called into question, I do not think that India can be a self-evident or prioritized point of reference for "The Damien Hirst of Delhi." I would like to consider this issue of what India means for Gupta's art.

Subodh Gupta was born in Khagaul, Bihar province in northeast India in 1964. Between 1983 and 1988, he studied painting at the College of Arts and Crafts, Patna. A noteworthy fact about his background is that he joined a Hindi-language theater group for which he designed and fabricated sets and performed as an actor. Gupta works in a wide range of mediums, from painting and photography to assemblages of readymade objects, a kind of *bricolage*, and performances where he employs his own body [FIG.2]. It may be that his theatrical experience contributed to the diversity of his work. The approach of filling the gallery with stainless steel kitchen articles and metal-plated everyday objects is like presenting



FIG.1  
Subodh Gupta, *Steal 2*, 2007



FIG.2  
Subodh Gupta (from the left): *Vilas*, 2000/2003; *Cow*, 2003; *Bihari*, 1999

the grand finale of the best plays in Gupta's repertory, and the audience might experience the same sort of catharsis that would be caused by a drama [FIG.3].

The view that these shiny kitchen utensils show a connection between Gupta's work and Indian life is quite compelling. It is certainly true that metal dishes and utensils are used on the majority of Indian tables, and because food is frequently used in rituals, each plate or cup can be understood as an index or code referring to Indian spiritual life. When speaking of his childhood experiences, Gupta seems to affirm this interpretation. These shiny objects are mercurial devices that allow movement back and forth between the everyday and the non-everyday, matter and spirit, like an Indian version of the mirrors in *Alice in Wonderland* or Cocteau's *Orpheus*.

My own view of Gupta's work, however, differs somewhat from this likely scenario or from an art historical analysis that concentrates on symbolism. When I saw the huge skull constructed of metal pots in front of the Palazzo Grassi in Venice [FIG.4] and the tableware set attached to the wall in a Biennale pavilion [FIG.5], it did not occur to me that this was the work of an Indian artist. I associated it with the use of readymade objects in Simulationist art and thought of such names as Jeff Koons and Sherrie Levine. As I saw it, these pieces could have been placed in the context of Western contemporary art quite directly with only a slight time lag.

A tendency to combine both everyday and spiritual aspects of India is clearly seen in comparatively early Gupta works such as *29 Mornings*

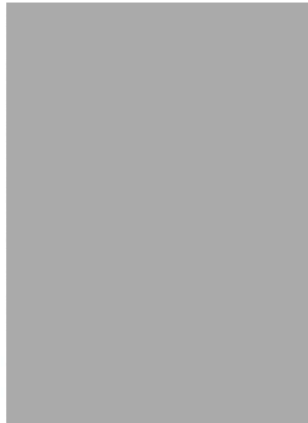


FIG.3 (left)  
Subodh Gupta, *God Hungry*, 2006

FIG.4 (right)  
Subodh Gupta, *Very Hungry God*,  
2006

(1996) [FIG.6]. This installation had a symbolic function, incorporating a traditional mourning ritual that takes place over 29 days on 29 *pirhas* (low wooden chairs), and it employed materials used in the actual ritual, sacred offerings of oil and milk, hard charcoal, clay, and red cloth. The works made of cow dung which preceded the stainless steel pieces had the character of an ethnographic document with multiple meanings—the sacredness of cows in Hindu culture, the ordinary everyday presence of cows on the Indian subcontinent, the practical value of cow dung as a material for walls and fuel, and the symbolic use of cow dung ashes in ritual. In the 1990s, these works seemed quite exotic, almost like ethnographic reports, from the viewpoint of critics, gallerists, and the public in the West.

It seems to me that the extensive use of stainless steel in Gupta's current work is a way of escaping from the restrictions of the dense symbolism in his early work. The kitchen articles are reduced to their shiny surfaces. And this condition of being nothing but surface has been applied beyond kitchen equipment, extending to guns, suitcases, bicycles, and large metal products. These fetishistic glittering surfaces have also become the most conspicuous feature of the paintings Gupta has been making in recent years. Pictorial spaces that reflect the unstable condition of falling kitchen articles have visual qualities similar to photography. Raw pigment is applied here and there as if to emphasize the surface orientation and fictional quality of the medium of photography. Other noteworthy features are enlargement of the motif and emphasis on detail. Stylistically, these paintings are reminiscent of early Pop Art, for

FIG.5 (left)  
Subodh Gupta, *Curry 2*, 2005

FIG.6 (right)  
Subodh Gupta, *29 Mornings*, 1996  
(details)

