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Queens Museum of Art News Release

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NEWS RELEASE

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**Queens Museum of Art presents Cai Guo-Qiang's *Cultural Melting Bath:*
Projects for the 20th Century, August 1 - October 26, 1997**

The Queens Museum of Art announces Cai Guo-Qiang's *Cultural Melting Bath: Projects for the 20th Century*, opening August 1 through October 26, 1997. Cai Guo-Qiang, a Chinese artist living in Japan and New York, is one of the international art scene's most ambitious installation artists, known for large-scale projects around the world, including the 1995 and the current 1997 Venice Biennale where he will exhibit *The Dragon Has Arrived. Cultural Melting Bath*, apart from *Cry Dragon/Cry Wolf: The Ark of Genghis Khan* which appeared as part of the Hugo Boss Award exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum Soho in 1996, is the first solo Cai Guo-Qiang installation to be seen in the United States.

Cultural Melting Bath is part of the Museum's ongoing *Contemporary Currents* series sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

Admission by suggested contribution:
\$3.00, \$1.50 students and seniors.
Members and children under 5 free.

Hours
Wednesday - Friday 10 - 5
Saturday - Sunday 12 - 5

The Queens Museum of Art is housed in the New York City Building which is owned by the City of New York. With the assistance of Queens Borough President Claire Shulman and the New York City Council, the Museum is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Additional funding is provided by the New York State Legislature and the New York State Council on the Arts.

For *Cultural Melting Bath*, Cai Guo-Qiang makes full use of the Museum's largest gallery of approximately 2,000 square feet, with 30-foot high ceilings, to create a microcosmic universe. The installation includes four

major elements: 1) Translucent Chinese fabric lines the walls and spans the ceiling of the entire gallery. The netting will create, in effect, a second, enclosed chamber within the gallery, delimiting the boundaries of a microcosm; 2) Massive *Taihusu* rocks of varying shapes, each weighing between two and three tons, have been excavated from Lake Tai in Jiangsu Province in China for this project and shipped to Queens. Each stone, carefully chosen for its characteristics, is placed in the gallery according to the exacting principles of *fengshui*, the Chinese understanding of how *qi* (energy) flows throughout the universe. Placed to stimulate the flow of energy, the rocks will bestow positive *qi* on the Museum and its visitors; 3) Live birds will live in banyan tree roots, also from China, hanging above the rocks and suspended below the net ceiling. Through their flight, the birds will define the gallery's new dimensions; and, 4) A medicinal herb bath, contained within a Western-style hot tub, will be located at the far end of the gallery, sheltered within the rocks. Giving the term "melting pot" a literal reality, Cai will invite various individuals to bathe together in the tub of healing waters. The remarkable diversity of Queens' population at the end of the 20th century is a consequence of the social, cultural and political conditions of that century. Cai fuses East and West in his therapeutic *Cultural Melting Bath* as a metaphor for social healing in the coming century.

Cai Guo-Qiang (born 1957, Fujian Province, China) is best known for the

series, *Project for Extraterrestrials*, in which the artist uses explosives but attempts to return from the negative use these materials are put to in the modern era, to the positive use they were originally created for--communication--when invented in Cai's native Fujian province. In *Project for Extraterrestrials*, an explosive event is used to communicate with extraterrestrials. In his explosions, Cai symbolically recapitulates the "Big Bang" at the birth of the universe and thereby creates a moment when humanity and the cosmos greet each other in the brief chaos of a blast. More than ten variations on the *Project for Extraterrestrials* have been performed from Tokyo to the south of France. In *Project for Extraterrestrials #7: Rebuilding the Berlin Wall (unrealized)* and in *Project for Extraterrestrials #10: Project to Add 10,000 Meters to the Great Wall of China*, in 1993 in Jiayuguan, China, Cai utilized a political platform to achieve a metaphysical transformation of the meaning of a wall into an event which opens up to the universe. In *The Century with Mushroom Clouds* (1996), a project in the Nevada Testing Sites, Cai set small explosions in an attempt to create a "momentary eternity" in which time and space return to their starting point. The video resulting from this project was shown at PS 1/Clocktower, in 1996, along with an installation including Chinese healing mushrooms.

Cai Guo-Qiang's indoor pieces includes works in 1993 when the artist served herbal medicines to museum visitors at various venues. In the

TransCulture exhibit of the 1995 Venice Biennale, Cai's work *Bringing to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot* involved the creation of vending machines for ancient Chinese herbal medicines, evoking the Eastern viewpoint about life, energy and healing, which Marco Polo happened to forget to bring back to the West in the 14th century. In the *Calendar of Life*, in Nagoya, Japan, 1994, Cai made calendar wheels out of ancient herbal medicines. In *The Open System* exhibition in 1994 in Mito, Japan, Cai invited a *fengshui* expert to complete *A Cosmic Diagram: Fengshui Project for Mito* where the entire city was charted out according to the principles of *fengshui*.

On Sunday, September 21, starting at 1:00 PM: **Meet the Artist:** Panel discussion with Cai Guo-Qiang followed by reception with bathing, *fengshui* and herbal medicine demonstrations.

A 64-page color catalog with essays by art historian Reiko Tomii and curator Jane Farver is available.

Cai Guo-Qiang's *Cultural Melting Bath* is part of the Museum's ongoing *Contemporary Currents* series featuring ambitious installations by contemporary artists, curated by QMA Director of Exhibitions, Jane Farver. Recent *Contemporary Currents* exhibitions have been by Dennis Adams: *Ederle* (1996) and Yukinori Yanagi: *Project Article 9* (1995). Upcoming *Contemporary Currents* exhibitions will feature Michal Rovner (1998) and Petah Coyne (1999).

The *Contemporary Currents* series is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

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Cultural Melting Bath by Cai Guo-Qiang is supported by major grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Lannan Foundation.

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