

Zhou Documents

1998

A Panel Proposal for AAS 1998 Annual Meeting (About Chinese Avant-garde Art)

Meng-bo FENG 冯梦波

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FENG 冯梦波, Meng-bo, "A Panel Proposal for AAS 1998 Annual Meeting (About Chinese Avant-garde Art)" (1998). *Zhou Documents*. 75.
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A Panel Proposal for AAS 1998 Annual Meeting

Hsingyuan Tsao
Assistant Professor, Chinese Art History
Reed College
Portland OR 97202

Looking into Disjunctures between Art and Society in China since 1985

Chinese contemporary art is becoming part of our world. This belated recognition is partly because China is not, by definition, a post-industrial society. However, Chinese avant-garde art, which is both the last avant-garde art in world cultural history and one that has appropriated some of the values of post-modern discourse, has entered the most prestigious international exhibitions. Especially since 1985 the new art waves, effected by economic reform, have begun to have an impact on the world art market and to be exploited by it.

Chinese avant-garde art, because its economic foundation is anomalous within the Chinese social superstructure, smiles at Karl Marx, whose socialist theory has been adapted into the Chinese political tradition and is still the dominant political force. This panel will be devoted to issues of describing and analyzing the situation of Chinese contemporary art as it moves into the post-modern international art world, carrying a heavy cultural burden of modern, even pre-modern society on its back. Papers are focused on the intersections between official and non-official (pseudo-underground) contemporary art, between art derived from an earlier socialist realism and the avant-garde art influenced by international post-modern trends, between post-cold war politics and the post-Mao environment, and between strategies of distancing from and participating in the Chinese tradition.

The history of avant-garde art in the last dozen years testifies that Chinese contemporary art is no longer a regional phenomenon, but must be considered within a pattern of international interaction. Reciprocally this art phenomenon challenges Marxist theory and its legitimacy in critiquing this pseudo-postmodern art, and quests for new directions of addressing art and the current social topography.