

Zhou Documents

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Projects Introduction: Works of "China Period" and "Japan Period" of Niu Bo

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A. China Period (1978-1987)

On exhibit are the two works which were prohibited by the Chinese government in 1985.

1. Witness Portrait (completed about 1982-1983, see the photo)
During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards were celebrating in Tian An Men Square after Mao Zedong had viewed their parade. But behind the guards on the wall, the famous portrait of Mao had been changed and replaced by a photo of then 7 year old Niu Bo. More importantly, he submitted a proposal to the government that the portrait in Tian An Men Square should represent the people by changing the picture of a Chinese individual each day; thereby China would sublimate Tian An Men from a bastion of autocracy to a living art museum. Two issues will be discussed here: a) A comparison of the relationship between the state and the people, and between God and individual. b) The effect of communism and democracy on politics and art.

2. Natural and Unnatural (completed about 1982-83. see the photo)
The part of the Great Wall in the photo is erased and replaced by a scene of natural landscape; the modified photo is presented alongside the original for the purpose of the contrast. Two further issues are discussed here: 1) The relationship between artificial and natural, and 2) The role that the Great Wall played in the development of China's history.

B. Japan Period (1988-1995)

"The Fountain" was first shown in Mito Art Tower in 1993 and later became a permanent exhibit for display as well as for "use" in Tokyo Art Gallery.

A replica of the "Fountain" by Duchamp is installed in the men's room of an art gallery . A mirror is installed above the toilet at a 45 degree angle so that the user can simultaneously enjoy the same view as the original work by Duchamp. This work is re-created here in display . It aims to illustrate three issues :

1. Art and life: the relations of using and being used;
2. The difference between art space and non art space in an art gallery;
3. "Re-baptizing" the dried "Fountain" of the 20th century art.

"Capping Mt. Fuji" was also a product of 1993 . Fuji Mountain is a symbol of permanence and inviolability to the Japanese ; its size and its symmetry encapsulate their belief in their culture.

Unfortunately , long ago , a volcanic explosion removed the very peak of the mountain . Niu Bo has created an image of the mountain being returned to perfection by man's artifice . This deliberately confuses man's quest for the ultimate in his own nature and his attempt to manipulate Nature itself .

"Before entering a museum" is a work organised by the artist to give the individual an awareness of "self" . Each visitor to the museum was given an eye-test before entering ; at the entrance to the museum , he/she signs the chart with the artist as collaborator .