

CHINESE WHISPERS

Media Release

October 2015

A new look at contemporary Chinese art through the Sigg and M+ Sigg Collections

Significant portions of Uli Sigg's collection will be on display in a joint exhibition by Kunstmuseum Bern and Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern, Switzerland and afterwards will travel in a reduced version to MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art in Vienna, Austria, before substantial parts of the Swiss collector's holdings move to Hong Kong as a donation. Some 150 recent works from the Sigg and M+ Sigg Collections will be presented in Bern from 19 February until 19 June 2016 and thus reflect today's China.

The exhibition

"Chinese Whispers" provides a deeper insight into China's art scene of the past fifteen years. The exhibition provides an opportunity to explore the vast country through the eyes of Chinese artists, from Ai Weiwei to Zhuang Hui. It follows on to "Mahjong", the internationally acclaimed show held at Kunstmuseum Bern in 2005. Curated by Bernhard Fibicher and Ai Weiwei, it was the hitherto most extensive exhibition of Chinese contemporary art in the west.

The title of the forthcoming show, "Chinese Whispers" refers to the popular party game in which an orally transmitted message changes as it is passed from one person to the next. Notions of tradition and transmission, distortion and miscommunication are part of the exhibition concept. On one hand it will be reflected through the influence of western contemporary art on Chinese, on the other hand through their renewed interest in their own traditions, but also their reflection of life in present-day China. Moreover, the exhibition will question western perceptions of China and the vast cultural, historical and political differences that remain despite our greater familiarity with the world's largest cultural area and one of the biggest economic powers.

The exhibitions will document the ways in which Chinese artists have carved out their positions between east and west, between tradition and progress. It will also reflect their confident attempts to bridge the gaps, and to define their own identities in a global art system. The works on display express the impact of recent sweeping changes on China's urbanism, use of resources, criticism of the political system, and the documentation of its most recent history as well as personal introspection.

Background

Contemporary Chinese art constitutes a unique phenomenon. Unlike current western art, which has evolved across a succession of artistic movements, there was a significant rise in Chinese art when greater freedoms were introduced in the 1980s. The country's artists swiftly embraced many modern and contemporary western art movements that had "passed them by", creating authentically Chinese art in terms of content as many works responded to the political and social challenges of the day. Since the turn of the millennium, a younger generation

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of artists has emerged that is both active at the very forefront of the global art scene and deeply committed to China's own rich artistic heritage.

A far-sighted Swiss collector

In the late 1970s, Uli Sigg – Swiss business journalist, entrepreneur, a former Swiss ambassador to China (1995-1998) and art collector – became interested in contemporary Chinese art, and was its first systematic collector. Rather than following his own personal taste, he deliberately built his collection in the representative manner of a national gallery of art. Boasting over 2,200 works by some 350 artists, and representing various genres across forty years of Chinese art history, Sigg's is considered to be the world's largest collection of contemporary Chinese art to date. Sigg has always wanted to return his unique collection to its country of origin. In 2012, having found the ideal venue in the new M+ museum for visual culture, West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong, he donated a large part of his collection to what will be one of the world's largest museums. Designed by the Swiss architecture office, Herzog & de Meuron, it is due to open in 2019. The M+ Sigg Collection will constitute the foundation of the M+ museum collection. Alongside a selection of works from Uli Sigg's donation to M+, "Chinese Whispers" also presents many pieces from his still increasing private Sigg Collection.

A joint exhibition

"Chinese Whispers" is the most ambitious joint project to date by Kunstmuseum Bern and Zentrum Paul Klee, which since mid-2015 operate under one umbrella foundation. Two of Bern's major cultural institutions will provide over 4,000sqm/44,000sqft of gallery space for the public display of 150 exciting works of contemporary Chinese art, including several spectacular installations.

In spring 2017, "Chinese Whispers" will be shown in a reduced version at MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art in Vienna, Austria. From 2019 onwards, the M+ Sigg Collection will be on permanent display in Hong Kong.

The artists

Ai Weiwei, Cao Fei, Cao Kai, Charwei Tsai, Chen Ke, Chen Chieh-jen, Chen Wei, Chi Lei, Chow Chun Fai, Chu Yun, Cong Lingqi, Ding Xinhua, Duan Jianyu, Fang Lijun, Feng Mengbo, He Xiangyu, Hu Xiangqian, Jiang Zhi, Jing Kewen, Jin Jiangbo, Jun Yang, Kan Xuan, Li Dafang, Li Shan, Li Songhua, Li Songsong, Li Tianbing, Li Xi, Liang Yuanwei, Liu Ding, Liu Wei, Lu Yang, MadIn Company / Xu Zhen, Ma Ke, Mao Tongqiang, Ming Wong, Ni Youyu, O Zhang, Pei Li, Peng Wei, Qiu Qijing, Qu Yan, Shao Fan, Shao Wenhuan, Shen Shaomin, Shen Xuezhe, Shi Guorui, Shi Jinsong, Song Dong, Song Ta, Sun Yuan / Peng Yu, Tian Wei, Tsang Kin-Wah, Wang Qingsong, Wang Wei, Wang Xingwei, Adrian Wong, Xiao Yu, Xie Qi, Xin Yunpeng, Xu Di, Xue Feng, Yan Lei, Yang Meiyan, Ye Xianyan, Zeng Han, Zhang Jianjun, Zhang Xiaodong, Zhao Bandi, Zheng Guogu, Zhuang Hui.

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Media conference: 17 February 2016, 10:15AM, start at Kunstmuseum Bern, second part at Zentrum Paul Klee (shuttle service provided)

Opening event: 18 February 2016, 6:30PM, start at Zentrum Paul Klee, second part at Kunstmuseum Bern (shuttle service provided), party at PROGR hall

Duration: 19 February until 19 June 2016

Venues: Kunstmuseum Bern & Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland

Number of works: 150 works and groups of works by 72 artists

Exhibition area: 4,100sqm / 44,132sqft

Curator: Kathleen Bühler, Curator, Contemporary Art, Kunstmuseum Bern

Committee: Peter Fischer, Director, Zentrum Paul Klee
Matthias Frehner, Director, Kunstmuseum Bern
Pi Li, Curator, Collection at M+ Museum for visual culture, West Kowloon Cultural District, Hongkong
Uli Sigg, Collector, Mauensee, Switzerland

Further event: MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art, Vienna, Austria (spring 2017)

An exhibition catalogue (in German and English), approx. 360 pages, with numerous color plates, will be published by Prestel Verlag.

Loans

Sigg Collection

M+ Sigg Collection | M+ Museum for visual culture, West Kowloon Cultural District, Hongkong

Partner «Chinese Whispers»

Credit Suisse

Burggemeinde Bern

Stiftung GegenwART

Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA)

Stiftung für Chinesische Gegenwartskunst

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