

Application for Funds to Support ARTH 340/440 – Fall 2013

Issues in the Arts of China: Chinese Contemporary Art

Purpose

In order to take advantage of the installation of *Zodiac Heads: Circle of Animals* by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) in the atrium of the Cleveland Museum of Art (July 27, 2013 to January 26, 2104), I am offering a new class on Chinese Contemporary Art under the auspices of my *Issues in the Arts of China* topics course. This is one of few chances for students to see Chinese art at the Cleveland Museum of Art since its world-class Chinese collection went into storage in 2004 and will not emerge in the new galleries until January 2014. Another reason for offering the course this fall is the opportunity for students to visit Ai's first North American retrospective exhibition *Ai Weiwei According to What?* at the Art Gallery of Ontario (August – October 2013). Finally, I have been able to arrange a special showing of pre-eminent Chinese film artist Yang Fudong's (b. 1971) *Seven Intellectuals of the Bamboo Forest* (2003-2007) for a radically reduced screening fee. In order to take full advantage of these unprecedented opportunities for students to see and experience the art of two of China's most important international artists as part of my course, I need the support of a UCITE Nord grant. I would also like to invite three guest speakers to make presentations to the class and join students in discussion via Skype.

Rationale

In art history, our primary sources are the works of art themselves. Whenever possible, we endeavor to arrange for students to see and experience works of art in person so that they can closely study, think about, and discuss the works more fully. Seeing pictures of artworks projected on a screen is not the same. This is particularly the case with contemporary art that typically involves multi-sensory installations and films. Installations are inherent spatial and often involve sound, movement, film, interactivity, and temporality. Many of these integral aspects of contemporary artworks are lost in the translation of them into projected still photographs. Students who are able to see and experience the works of art they are studying in a course are much more engaged with the material and their personal interactions with the artworks have profound effects on them far beyond an individual course. Students can experience the viscerality of art and all of its visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile qualities. Arranging for students to visit the Ai Weiwei retrospective exhibition and see Yang Fudong's films will have a direct impact on student learning in the course and greatly enhance their ability to think about, question, discuss, and write about Chinese contemporary art.

Trip to *Ai Weiwei According to What?* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto)

Ai Weiwei is one of the most well known contemporary global artists and has made worldwide news in recent years for his political and social activism as well as his art. Ai's art and activism have landed him in jail in China several times, government authorities have bulldozed his studios, and in recent years he has not been allowed to leave the country to attend his own exhibitions. Two installations in *According to What?* recall the child victims of the Sichuan earthquake in 2008. In a recording played on loop, the names of the thousands of victims of the earthquake are read one-by-one. Their names are also written, in Chinese characters, of course, on the wall. Meanwhile, above the names, is a giant, winding *Snake Ceiling* made of children's backpacks. The rest of the show also features sound and video installations, along with photography, and sculpture. I would like to take ten students to see and experience the exhibition in Toronto.¹ By driving in three of our own vehicles and sharing

¹ There are only two other venues for the show in North America: the Hirshorn Museum in Washington and the Indianapolis Museum of Art. The Hirshorn show was held in Spring 2013 during my pre-tenure teaching release and the Indianapolis show happens over the summer.

hotel rooms, the trip will be quite affordable, but the cost is beyond the means of individual students and the art history department does not customarily provide financial support for individual courses.

Screening of Yang Fudong's *Seven Intellectuals of the Bamboo Grove*

As the pre-eminent Chinese film artist, Yang Fudong (b. 1971) and his films have been praised by critics and have drawn crowds at his exhibitions in Shanghai, London, Sydney, Paris, Singapore, Frankfurt, Stockholm, Athens, Tokyo, and New York. The fashion house Prada commissioned Yang to make *First Spring*, a short film in which Yang tapped into his renown imagery and technique to parody his own work while advertising their spring line. Unfortunately, this nine-minute film is the only one of Yang's films that one can see without visiting one of his museum exhibitions. Artists' films are only shown in museum settings, they are not available to rent or buy through retail channels such as Amazon or Netflix. The most recent opportunity to see Yang's most renowned film series *Seven Intellectuals of the Bamboo Forest* (2003-2007) in North America was during 2009 exhibition at Asia Society Museum in New York. I have made arrangements to show *Seven Intellectuals* for a radically reduced screening fee of \$250—these films usually cost thousands when they are part of an exhibition—so that my students can see Yang's films here in Cleveland. Since Yang's films require a museum setting, I am collaborating with John Ewing, Curator of Film at the Cleveland Museum of Art, to arrange the showing.

Honorariums for Guest Speakers via Skype

Since scholars and curators who are experts on Chinese contemporary art, several of whose work we will read during the semester, are not locally based, I would like to invite three scholars to make presentations to the class and join students in discussion via Skype. Providing an opportunity and forum for students to discuss Chinese contemporary art in a live, interactive setting will be tremendously beneficial for them. Although Skype itself is free, I will still be asking scholars to take time to prepare a presentation and take time out of their demanding schedules to interact with my students. Therefore, I would like to offer each of the three speakers a modest honorarium. Since it is too far in advance to set up these Skype sessions, and I do not currently have the ability to offer an honorarium, I have not confirmed specific speakers at this time. If this proposal is funded, I will make the arrangements during the summer.

Course Description for ARTH 340/440: Chinese Contemporary Art (Fall 2013)

This course explores the artists, works, ideas, and reception of Chinese contemporary art from 1979 to the present. We examine the creation, expression, and performance of Chinese identity in painting, sculpture, ceramics, performance, photography, video/film, and installations. Key issues we will discuss include cultural and artistic history; trauma and memory; political activism and censorship; the body, gender and sexuality; globalization and transnationalism; the rapidly changing urban and natural environment; global audiences and the international art market; and the role of expatriate artists. We will examine art movements and exhibitions as well as individual works and artists through contemporaneous primary and critical sources (in translation) as well as through later scholarship. Visits to the *Circle of Animals: Zodiac Heads* installation by Ai Weiwei at the Cleveland Museum of Art, attendance at guest lectures, and regular viewing documentary, artist, and feature films are all integral to the course.

Artists we will cover include **Ai Weiwei**, Cai Guo-Qiang, Huang Yongping, Lin Tianmiao, Wang Guangyi, Wang Qingsong, Xu Bing, Yin Xiuzhen, **Yang Fudong**, Zhang Huan, and Zhang Xiaogang.
