

NOTHING IS STILL

SHENG QI, Political Symbolism | LE GUO, Abstract Journey



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Curated by Dagmar Carnevale Lavezzoli

Hua Gallery Manager - Chinese Contemporary Art Specialist

20 September - 17 November 2013

The word Hua means to paint, or a painting, in Chinese.

Hua Gallery specialises in the exciting and sometimes controversial space that is Chinese contemporary art. As Chinese contemporary art continues to fascinate and intrigue collectors around the world, demand and appetite for fresh and innovative art from this fast-changing region continues to escalate.

Hua Gallery represents and exhibits cutting edge, stimulating works by established contemporary Chinese artists, as well as emerging contemporary Chinese artists who are not as yet discovered internationally.

Hua Gallery adopts a distinctive business strategy by acquiring works from artists before selling them, as well as by exhibiting and selling works by artists on a commissions basis - an approach which demonstrates a passion, dedication and commitment to the artists and also, importantly, provides confidence to art collectors who trust the gallery to help expand their collections.

Hua Gallery's founder and director, Shanyan Koder, has developed strong relationships with her artists, and hopes to build a Chinese contemporary art collection in her gallery that is different and inspirational. Every artist represented by Hua Gallery is chosen for their artistic individuality, the creative symbolism in their work, and the emotional energy their work creates.

Hua Gallery is situated on the Albion Riverside, a prestigious residential block on the Battersea riverside, designed by world-renowned architects Foster and Partners. With close to 2,000 square feet of gallery space, Hua Gallery is London's only Chinese contemporary art gallery with a permanent exhibition space of this size and scale.

Originally born in 2007 in Pietrastanta, Aria art gallery established its environment in Florence during 2009, placed inside a venue of unique beauty in the heart of the city. Here an antique tropical garden leads to the exhibition space and allows the gallery to settle in the historical memory of the city, creating a link between past and contemporary times.

The origin of the garden goes back to 1534, by the will of Margherita Acciaiuoli wife of the famous patron of arts Pierfrancesco Borgherini, owner of the property at the time. After two centuries, the garden and the building became both property of Rosselli del Turco family.

Today Aria is a dynamic gallery aimed to the production of exhibitions, events and high-level live performances. The shows scheduling is wide-ranging and always in progress. In its collection Aria Art Gallery has represented works by past icons, like Auguste Rodin, Amedeo Modigliani, Andy Warhol and Burhan Dogancay, contemporary identities such as Robert Indiana, Fernando Botero, Carole A. Feuerman, Hassan Hajjaj, Angelo Frontoni, Zhuang Hong Yi, as well as young emerging artists.

The gallery works in strong relationship with two partners:

first of all ESE (European School of Economics) private College of Higher Education that is located exactly in front of Aria as its conception of its philosophical extension. The two structures are in fact mirrored and intimately connected.

The other important partner of Aria Art Gallery is the prestigious Relais & Chateaux "Il Bottaccio di Montignoso" located both close to the Mediterranean Sea and the Apuanian Alps, just a few km away from the Carrara Marble Caves; it represents an appendix for events, caterings and exhibits for the works of more valuable collection.

Antonio Budetta CEO, and Federica Cirri director, are not yet thirty but are the eclectic, dynamic and winning team of the gallery. Antonio, graduated in graphic advertising, started to work as art director in different well-known companies, first in Italy and later in various foreign countries. Back to Italy, he began to work as a gallerist in Pietrasanta, experience which led him to the creation of Aria Art Gallery. The director is Federica, interior designer and events manager in London, Madrid and New York; she is also a "cultural entertainer" and curator in the field of art and design.

NOTHING IS STILL

Sheng Qi's Political Symbolism and Le Guo's Abstract Journey

Curated by Dagmar Carnevale Lavezzoli

Encompassing works by two Chinese artists, this exhibition presents the viewer different ways of approaching art, triggered by diverse modes of expressing one's own intentions. Whilst Sheng Qi explores Chinese social issues, creating works rich in political symbolism, Le Guo delves into intense visions of colour, investigating the concepts of transformation and suspension within visual space.

Sheng Qi, one of the pioneers of contemporary Chinese art, developed his career in response to the political and economic situation in China. Starting as a performance artist, giving rise to Concept 21 in 1986¹, Sheng Qi has always given the human body a crucial role in his art. In fact, in 1989, as a rebellious gesture to express his indignation for the Tiananmen Incident, Sheng Qi cut off his little finger and buried it in a flowerpot. It was a strong and violent act caused by the brutal context of the period. Not only did his later art inspired by this act serve as a spark for his career, but saw his mutilated hand become a symbol bearing the drama of a whole nation. Today the poignancy of this work has rendered it one of the icons of contemporary Chinese art.

As Sheng Qi's focus is on history, his paintings portray political and religious figures as well as Chinese symbols and slices of everyday life. A recurrent image is that of Chairman Mao (1893-1976), the founder of the People's Republic of China (1949), who, for decades, kept China under political oppression and launched the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). His renowned figure is often depicted surrounded by a vast crowd of tiny people. The shape of the Great Helmsman is huge and prominent and stands in stark contrast to the small dimensions of those who are around him. The innumerable people allude to the enormity of the Chinese nation while the large figure of Mao symbolizes China's single-party system. The small stature of these human figures also recalls traditional Chinese landscape painting in which human beings were placed amongst the vastness of nature, occupying the same role as that of tree, rocks, and lakes. In some works little bodies generate Mao's silhouette, which appears as a sort of ghost floating in an evanescent atmosphere. Playing with the notions of emptiness and fullness Sheng Qi's symbolic work suggests that although physically absent, the Chinese ex-leader seems to still be spiritually present.

Sheng Qi enjoys playing with contrasts in terms of both dimensions and colours and through a precise and expert brushstroke he captures multiple facets of Chinese

history. An interesting detail to note about his art is the choice of method used: acrylic on canvas with a dripping technique. As all of his works are intimately linked to history, the artist has decided to use this technique to create an effect that evokes the passage of time; drops are never still, they change and transform the subjects, suggesting their presence within the wide realm of history².

Differently, Le Guo's paintings present intense visions of colour, organic forms and undefined shapes. Bearing influences by both Western Expressionism and Surrealism, as well as by Chinese philosophies and classical art, his work is generated by a continuous interaction between physical and emotional, conscious and unconscious, internal and external. Interested in investigating the variability of space and the endless possibilities it provides, Le Guo explores the painting's surface and delves into its multiple layers. His work is the result of a natural process in which the artist is part of the creation but the creation is also spontaneously generating itself out of the artist's intentions.

Le Guo's art does not aim to fix a precise concept, nor does it intend to provide the viewer with a final image. On the contrary his works offer a multitude of visions that seem to continuously originate new forms. The artist's way of painting is dynamic and varied. In a both instinctive and meditated gestural body

movement Le Guo imbues his canvas with layers of colours. Sometimes he uses brush, sometimes parts of his own body. Other times it is only through subtle movements of the material's surface that pigments spread all over the space, thus giving rise to the artwork. In any case it is an internal rhythm, reminiscent of either calligraphy or Tai Ji Quan, which leads his creation.

Conveying a sense of performance, the artist's dynamic movements match with the fluidity of colours, ink and water. Nothing is still. Everything shifts. Various elements appear in the shape of a fluctuating vision; they are suspended and floating within space. Le Guo's art exudes a sense of inner liveliness, defined in Chinese as qiyun shengdong 气韵生动³. In fact, his works seem to be continuously pulsing, leading the viewer on an abstract journey within their all-embracing depth.

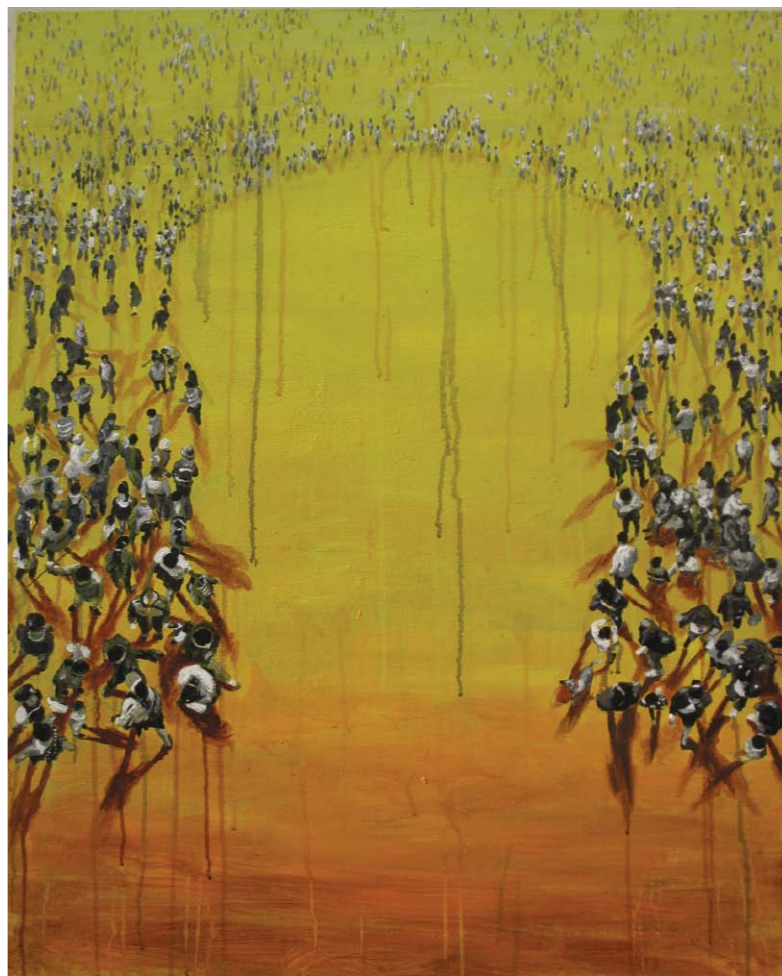
¹ Concept 21 was one of the first-ever Chinese performance art groups of modern times. Sheng Qi and other three artists, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke and Zhao Jianhai, used their own bodies as canvases. Employing paint, pieces of cloth and tai ji quan movements, they performed both at Beijing University and on the Great Wall. Berghuis, Thomas J. Performance Art in China, Timezone 8 Limited, Hong Kong, 2006, p.51, 55

² Conversation between Sheng Qi and the author. October 2012.

³ Qiyun Shengdong is translated in English as "spiritual resonance and lifelike motion". This is the first and most important of the six principles formulated by Chinese art critic Xie He (479-502) in order to judge the quality and value of Chinese paintings. These principles profoundly impacted artists of later generations. Conversation between Le Guo and the author, February 2013.

Sheng Qi







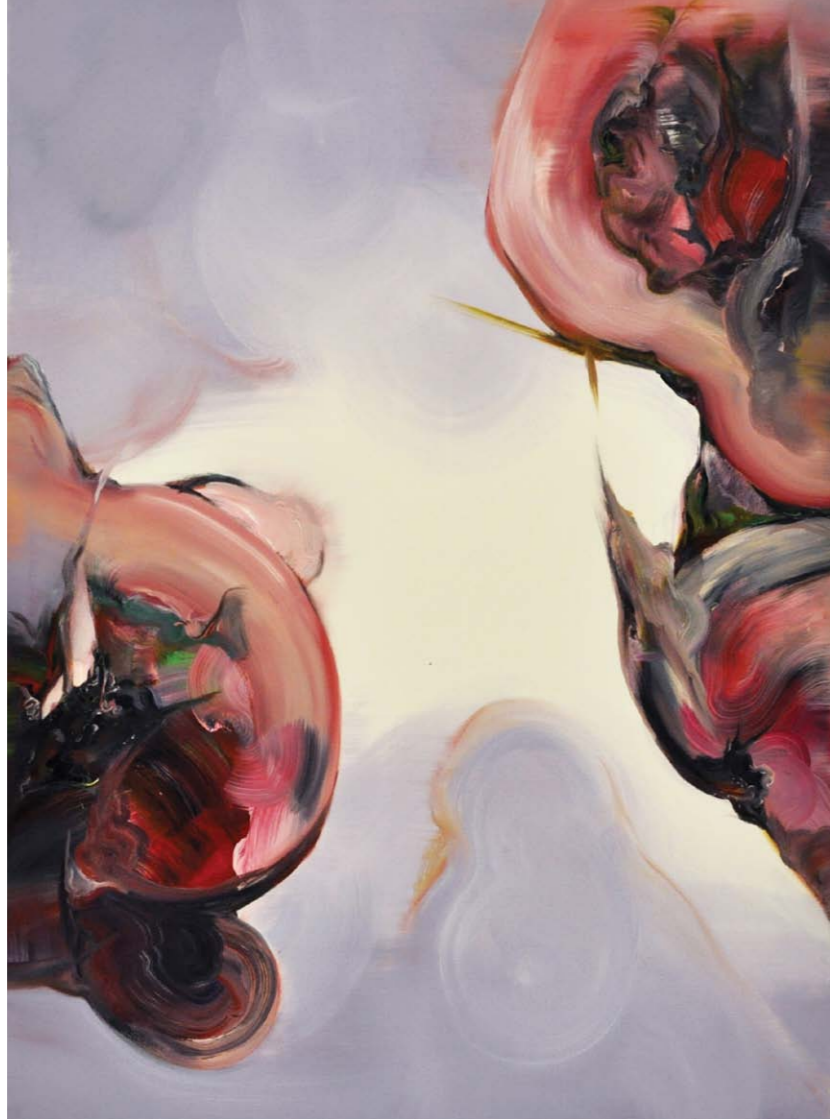


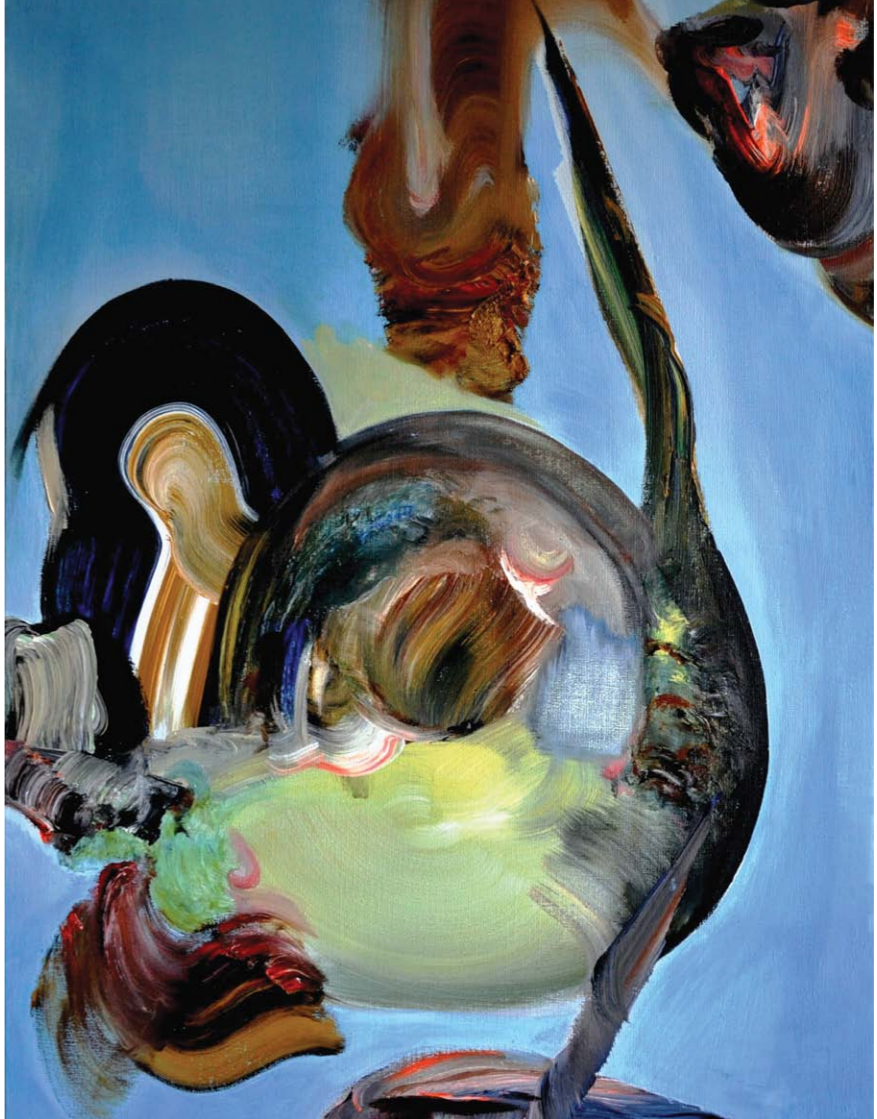


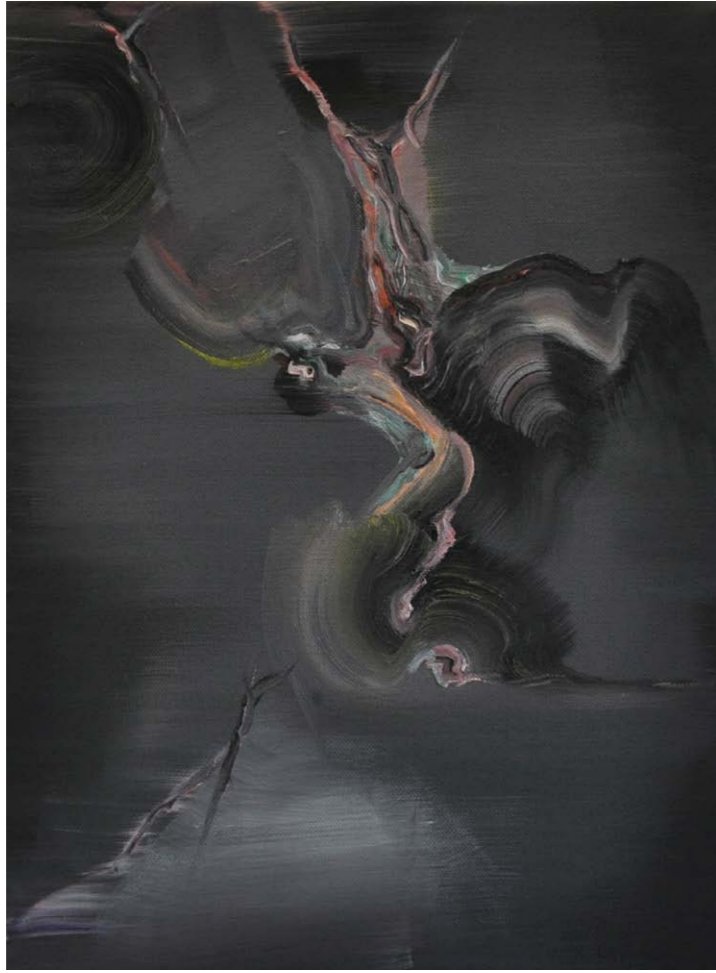


Le Guo











19 20



21

SHENG QI



01 Budda's car park
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 120 cm
2010



02 Black and White
Shadow of Mao
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 100cm
2011



03 Yellow Shadow
of Mao
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 80cm
2012



04 Blue Tibet
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 100 cm
2011



05 Chinese girl
+ 100 reverse
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 79 cm
2012



06 Slogan + Bike
Acrylic on canvas
79 x 60 cm
2009



07 Red Lanterns and Bicycles
Acrylic on canvas
79 x 99 cm
2009



08 Grey Birdeye Ride
Acrylic on canvas
59 x 80 cm
2009



09 Red Birdeye Ride
Acrylic on canvas
59 x 80 cm
2009



10 My Left Hand
Bronze
36 x 10 x 8 cm
2004



11 Head to South East
Watercolour on paper
42 x 60 cm
2013

LE GUO



12 Dismantle Mindscape I
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
102 x 102 cm
2011



13 Dismantle
Mindscape II
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
140 x 100 cm
2011



14 Dismantle
Mindscape III
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
120 x 100 cm
2011



15 Visceral Dynamism I
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
81 x 71 cm
2012



16 Visceral Dynamism II
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
100 x 76 cm
2012



17 Uninterrupted Voice I
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
40 x 30 cm
2010



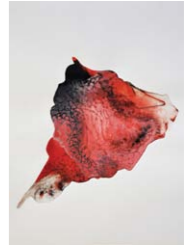
18 Uninterrupted Voice V
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
60 x 60 cm
2010



19 Motion Picture II
Ink, Pigment and Resin
on paper
76 x 56 cm
2011



20 Motion Picture III
Ink, Pigment and Resin
on paper
76 x 56 cm
2011



21 Motion Picture IV
Ink, Pigment and Resin
on paper
76 x 56 cm
2011



Sheng Qi
Photographed by
William Dowell © 2011

1965: Born in Anhui Province, China
1988: Graduated from the Central Academy of Art and Design, Beijing
1989: Lived and worked in Italy (1989-1992)
1998: Graduated with an MFA from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, London

Solo exhibitions

2012
Post Mao - Hua Gallery, London (UK)
2011
Square - Fabien Fryns Fine Art, Los Angeles (USA)
2010
My Painting Has No Colour - Poligono Gallery, Marbella, (Spain)
2009
New Paintings - F2 Gallery, Beijing (China)
China: Fluid Witness - Opal Gallery, Tel Aviv (Israel)
Sheng Qi - Galerie Bork, Copenhagen (Denmark)

2008
Most Wanted - Cramer contemporary, Geneva (Switzerland)
History in Black and Red - Andrew James Art, Shanghai (China)
History in Black and Red - DF2 Gallery, Los Angeles, (USA)
Paintings - Gallery Köhler Müller, Amsterdam (The Netherlands)
2007
History in Black and Red - Redgate Gallery, Beijing (China)
2006
Missing..., 798 Avant Gallery
Salute to Artists, 798 / RedGate Gallery, Beijing, China
Confidential - F2 Gallery, Beijing (China)
2004
Madness and Appropriation - RedGate Gallery, Beijing (China)
2003
Transcription, RedGate Gallery, Beijing, (China)
2000
Melbourne Fringe Festival - Mass Gallery, Melbourne (Australia)
1998
Nine Pigeons + Nurse + Sheng Qi, Beijing (China)
Are You Willing to Shake My Hand?, Performance, Tokyo (Japan)

1997
Fortune Cookies - Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London, (UK)

Selected group exhibitions

2008
Half-Life of a Dream: Contemporary Chinese Art from the collection of Kent and Vicki Logan - Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, (USA)
2007
Zhu Yi! Fotografia actual en China, ARTIUM Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporaneo - Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain)
2006
RedGate Gallery's 15th Anniversary
Mobile Socialism, Contemporary Art, 798, Beijing (China)
2005
Observing the Senses - RedGate Gallery, Beijing (China)
Body Scape - ARC One Gallery, Melbourne; RedGate Gallery, Beijing (China)
2004
Between Past and Future - International Center of Photography, New York, NY
Over A Billion Served, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver (USA)
China's Photography Painting - Art Season Gallery, Beijing (China)

2002
Beijing Afloat - Beijing Tokyo Art Projects
2001
Clues to the Future - RedGate Gallery's 10th Anniversary, Beijing (China)
2000
Post, Material - RedGate Gallery, Beijing (China)
1999
Departure from China - Beijing Design Museum, Beijing (China)
4th NIPAF Asian Performance Art Series & NIPAF Contemporary Art Seminar - Nagoya, Tokyo, Nagano (Japan)
8th Mexican International Performance Exhibition, Mexico City (Mexico)
1998
Inside Out: New Chinese Art - P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (USA)
1993
China Avant-Garde - Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (UK)
1989
China Avant-Garde - National Art Gallery of China (NAGC), Beijing (China)
1988
Great Earthquake, Great Wall - Beijing University, Beijing (China)
1986-87
Concept 21 - Tai Ji, Great Wall - Beijing University, Beijing (China)

Books, reviews and publications

2009
Sheng Qi, Galerie Bork, Copenhagen, Denmark (exhibition catalogue)
2008
History in black and red, DF2 Gallery, Los Angeles (exhibition catalogue)
2007
History in black and red, Redgate gallery, Beijing (exhibition catalogue)
2004
Newsweek, (international edition) Aug. 9, pp. 45
Madness, Appropriation, Huang Du, Wang Ming'an, Hou Hanru, Beijing (soft-cover book)
2000
Giving Art the Finger: Beijing's Avant-garde Extremists, Gary Jones, Sunday Morning Post (magazine), 6-9.
2000
Newsweek, (special edition) July-September, pp. 86-88
2000
The Australian Magazine, April, pp. 27-29
1999
Beijing Scene, World AIDS Day in Beijing, December 10-16, 12.

Work in public collections

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
-Various photographs, acquired in 2010
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
-My Left Hand: Me, 2000 Colour photograph, 80 x 54 cm, acquired in 2008
International Center for Photography, New York, USA
-Memories (Mao), 2000, Colour photograph, 120 x 80 cm, acquired in 2004
-Memories (Mother), 2000, Colour photography, 84 x 79 cm, acquired in 2004
-Memories (Me), 2000, Colour photograph, 84 x 84 cm, acquired in 2004
Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, USA
- Untitled, 1996-1997, Gelatin silver print, 104 x 179 cm, acquired in 2000
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark
-Revolution, 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 400 cm, acquired in 2009
-My Left Hand- Family, 2007, Colour photograph (six prints), 90 x 60 cm, acquired in 2009



Le Guo was born in China in 1964. He received an MA in Fine Art from the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, UK and a BA in Fine Art from North West Normal University, China. He was invited to exhibit his work in the UK by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Barbican Centre in 1990. Le Guo lives and works in London.

Recent Solo and Group Exhibitions

2013

Momentary Suspensions, Hua Gallery, London

2012

Creative Cities Collection, Barbican Arts Centre, London

2012

Restless Envisioning, no format Gallery, Harrington Way, London

2012

Magma Art Event, Apricot Gallery, The Rag Factory, London

2012

Painting and Object – New Works by Le Guo & Jane Cairns, Greenwich Heritage Centre, London.

2011

Salon Art Prize, Matt Roberts Arts, Vyner Street, London

2011

Desire, The Portman Gallery, Glenthorne Road, London

2011

Pre.Sense, Susan Projects, Headington, Oxford

2011

A Line of Flight, Collective, 37 Camden High Street, London

2010

MA Fine Art Degree Show, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London 2010

Necessary Illusions, MA Fine Art Interim Show, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London

2009

Polytek, Water Lane, Exeter, EX2 8BZ, Exeter

Selected Past Exhibitions

Le Guo exhibited his work in several different galleries and public spaces including solo exhibitions at the Barbican Centre, the Bank of China, Studio 3 Gallery, the Zelda Cheattle Gallery and China Art Cultural Centre in the past. Other works have involved a series of collections and publications on an international scale.

