

**LARGEST-EVER U.S. EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART
ON VIEW AT UC BERKELEY ART MUSEUM AND PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE**

*141 works by 96 artists, drawn from one of the world's most important
and comprehensive collections of contemporary Chinese art*

Berkeley, CA, May 8, 2008 — The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) announces a major exhibition of contemporary Chinese art, on view at the museum from **September 10, 2008, through January 4, 2009. *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection*** is drawn from the collection of Uli Sigg, a Swiss collector whose long and close ties to China have enabled him to build a collection that is unrivaled in quality, scope, and size. The exhibition will feature a selection of 141 works by 96 artists, including exceptional paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, video works, and installations spanning four decades.

The BAM/PFA showing of ***Mahjong*** represents the first time that a significant number of works from the Sigg Collection have been seen in the Americas. (A version of the exhibition has been seen in Berne, Switzerland; Hamburg, Germany; and Salzburg, Austria.) The exhibition is coordinated at BAM/PFA by Julia M. White, senior curator of Asian art, and is co-curated by Ms. White and Lucinda Barnes, chief curator and director of programs and collections.



Huang Yan, *Chinese Landscape: Tattoo No. 6* 1999.
Color photograph. 1 ft. 7 in. x 2 ft. © Sigg Collection

Ms. Barnes states, “We are delighted to be presenting this very significant exhibition at BAM/PFA. ***Mahjong*** ideally complements both this institution’s history as a leading center for exploring contemporary artistic and cultural practices, and UC Berkeley’s position as a national leader in research relating to China.”

Ms. White states, “The breadth of the Sigg Collection offers a window not only onto the stunning changes in Chinese art in the past decades, but also onto the equally stunning changes that have taken place in Chinese society and culture. We

are thrilled that Uli Sigg has made his collection available for this landmark exhibition.”

Mahjong takes its name from the centuries-old Chinese game enjoyed by millions worldwide. Relying on rules and chance, mahjong revolves around collecting matching sets of tiles; the skill lies in recognizing the best opportunities for making high-scoring combinations. The exhibition, like the game, is made up of groupings of works that, when combined in different ways, create new and stimulating opportunities to view and appreciate contemporary Chinese art.

The Exhibition

Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection, which occupies nine of the museum’s ten galleries, surveys the development of contemporary art in China from the 1970s to the present day, illuminating the political, social, and cultural forces that have shaped it. Beginning with Socialist Realism, the exhibition moves on to illustrate the avant-garde movements of the 1980s and early 1990s, and also includes works by a generation of artists who have emerged following China’s social and political reforms of the past decade. The work addresses such issues as Mao, the Cultural Revolution, consumerism, disparities between the cities and the countryside, and the tensions between the individual and society, among others.

All of the major developments in contemporary Chinese art are represented in the exhibition by pivotal works, some of which are now well known in the West. Featured artists include Liu Wei, Huang Yan, Ai Weiwei, Weng Fen, Yue Min Jun, Zhang Xiaogang, Xu Bing, and Zhang Huan, as well as a number of artists still largely unknown outside of China. As a whole, the exhibition provides audiences with an unparalleled opportunity to view China as a closed society in the 1970s and early 1980s, and to observe the changes in cultural expression that have occurred as Chinese society has become increasingly open.

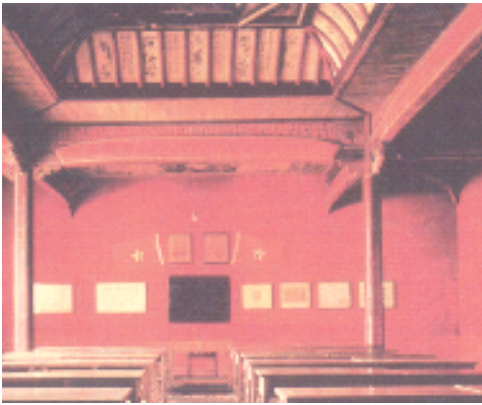
The Socialist Realist paintings that open the exhibition were created in the 1970s, during the Cultural Revolution. Provided as historical background, these are



Li Shan, *Rouge – Flower* 1995. Silkscreen and oil on canvas. 4 ft. 3 in. x 6 ft. © Sigg Collection.

works that might have hung on the walls of schools or other public buildings, conveying their messages through drama or sentiment.

Following this is a range of works from the late 1970s to early 2000s. Many of these focus on Mao—depicted in more familiar than awe-inspiring terms—or the Cultural Revolution, as well as, somewhat later, Tiananmen Square. In Li Shan’s 1995 portrait of Mao, for example, the leader’s facial features have been refined and



Shao Yinong and Mu Chen, *The Assembly Hall—Xingguo Wenchang Temple* 2002. Color photograph. 4 ft. 1 in. x 6 ft. © Sigg Collection.

softened to the point of androgyny, and he holds a lotus flower in his mouth. The Cultural Revolution is invoked in a number of works, including two of Shao Yinong and Mu Chen’s intensely saturated color photographs of the assembly halls that were used for indoctrination of the masses throughout China during that period.

Tiananmen Square is the subject of Yin Zhaoyang’s pair of 2003 paintings, one showing the Square during the day, the other at night. The former, called simply *Tiananmen Square*, shows the Square teeming with anonymous figures, depicted from a centralized, symmetrical viewpoint, in an unmodulated light. In the nighttime version, titled *Ode of Joy*, the Square is depicted from an almost raking angle, and is alight with celebratory fireworks. Together, these two works are a vivid expression of Tiananmen Square’s complex history and the contradictory feelings it evokes.

A separate gallery of the exhibition is devoted to works from a group known as *Stars* (*Xingxing*), founded in 1979. These artists, who were largely self-trained, wanted to create work that was free of political propaganda, and that had room for the “bourgeois” emotions associated with Western art. They were thus forced to work underground. (On September 27, 1979, the group held an unofficial exhibition that drew large crowds, but was quickly shut down by the government, which deemed it an unauthorized public meeting.)

By 2000, with capitalist reforms and globalization well underway, and the market for Chinese art firmly established, artists were freer than ever to express a range of personal ideas and emotions. They increasingly did so in works that take on an openly questioning, even challenging tone. Shi Jinsong’s installation *Office Equipment Prototype No. 1* (2004), for example, appears to comprise a stainless-steel

desk, chair, flat-screen monitor, a lamp, and a variety of other office accoutrements, all of them with the gleaming, streamlined look of a modern office. Yet upon inspection, it becomes clear that each object is actually an instrument of torture: the monitor is a guillotine, screws protrude through the back of the chair, the lamp emits electric shocks, and so on.

Several works in the exhibition take Chinese identity, as expressed in its families and faces, as their topic. For one of these, Zhang Huan's *Family Tree* (2000), three calligraphers spent a day writing texts related to Zhang Huan's family history on his face. The nine photographs that document the process show Zhang Huan's face increasingly obscured by the calligraphy, until it is covered in black.

Not surprisingly, commercialism is central to a number of later works in **Mahjong**, evidencing the tensions between the socialist ideals that are still officially operative and the consumerism unleashed by capitalist reforms. A monumental untitled work of 1999 by the three Luo brothers, for example, combines lacquer technique, Chinese folk art, and advertising images in a brash and ironic composition.

Other works make use of traditional Chinese art forms, if only to subvert them. At first glance, Liu Wei's hauntingly beautiful *It Looks Like a Landscape* appears to be a classical Chinese landscape of hills and mist, while in actuality, it is a composite of photographic close-ups of knees, backs, arms, and other body parts.



Liu Wei, *It Looks Like a Landscape* 2004. Black & white digital photograph. 10 ft. x 20 ft. © Sigg Collection.

The increasingly stark contrast between the urban and the rural in China is addressed from varying perspectives. Seen together, Weng Fen's lush color photographs (2002) of a young girl straddling a wall as she gazes at a large city evoke both the similarity among China's rapidly growing cities and the largely undefined role of the individual in the new China. Moreover, as Kuiyi Shen states in his essay for the exhibition publication (*see below*), the series addresses "the dehumanizing nature of China's massive new real estate ventures."

The Sigg Collection

The Sigg Collection of contemporary Chinese art currently numbers more than 2,000 works by 250 artists. The collection was built with the intention of providing a comprehensive overview of this fertile era in China's recent cultural history, since no other such documentation exists. In addition to its scope, the Sigg Collection is further distinguished by the fact that nearly all of the works were acquired directly from the artists.

"My experience in China since the late seventies—first in the business world by establishing the first joint venture company between China and the West, and later in the diplomatic arena—has made me keenly aware of both the rapid changes in contemporary China and the fact that nothing was being done on an institutional level to preserve or document these developments in the artistic realm," says Mr. Sigg. "Therefore I determined early on in my collecting that my goal would be to collect as much for China as for myself. Someday, when the conditions are right, I am prepared to return this cultural legacy to the people of China."

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication titled *Mahjong: Art, Film, and Change in China*. This includes an introduction by Julia M. White, and essays by leading scholars Julia F. Andrews, professor of art history, The Ohio State University; Kuiyi Shen, professor of art history, University of California, San Diego; and James Quandt, senior programmer, Cinematheque Ontario, as well as comments by Uli Sigg. These are followed by color reproductions of all works in the exhibition and biographical information on each artist. Published by the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, the 120-page book is available in softcover for \$25.00 at the BAM/PFA bookstore and is distributed by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers.



Weng Fen, *On the Wall – Guangzhou (II)* 2002. Color photograph 4 ft 1 in x 5 ft 7 in © Sigg Collection

Film Series

During the presentation of *Mahjong*, the Pacific Film Archive will showcase the dynamic work made by mainland Chinese filmmakers working in the area of feature-length narratives, documentaries, animated shorts, and

experimental films. The film component of the exhibition will offer audiences a wonderful opportunity to see how contemporary Chinese filmmakers have responded to the sweeping political and economic changes in their country, demonstrating how such changes have enabled a renaissance of artistic expression by film and video artists.

Related Programs

In conjunction with the exhibition, BAM/PFA is organizing a range of public programs and activities on the University of California, Berkeley, campus. As part of this, the museum will commission a new work that will be included in the exhibition, and will host residencies by artists and filmmakers who will participate in many of the programs. A description of public programs is attached, and further details will be made available during the summer.

Mahjong Gala

Saturday, September 6

Cocktails and Exhibition Viewing, 6–7:30 p.m.

Gala Dinner, 7:30–10 p.m.

Host Chairs: Dr. Thomas & Mrs. Tecoah Bruce

To kick off its highly anticipated season of Chinese art and film, BAM/PFA offers an exclusive dinner and auction in the museum sculpture garden, featuring a menu created by Alice Waters and prepared by Olive Green Catering; entertainment by Gregangelo and Velocity Circus; and wine by Hess Selection, Merryvale, VinaRobles, and Napa Station.

All proceeds will benefit the presentation of **Mahjong**. For more information or to purchase tickets, call (510) 642-7496 or visit our event website at bampfa.berkeley.edu/mahjonggala

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

The UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) aims to inspire the imagination and ignite critical dialogue through contemporary and historical art and film, engaging audiences from the campus, the Bay Area community, and beyond. BAM/PFA is one of the largest university art museums in the United States in terms of attendance, and offers some fifteen art exhibitions and 450 film programs each year. These often present the work of emerging artists and filmmakers, as well as new perspectives on established practitioners.

The museum's collection of more than 15,000 works includes exceptional examples of mid-twentieth-century painting, including important work by Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko, and one of the finest collections of historical Chinese painting in the United States, much of it from the collection of James Cahill—UC Berkeley professor emeritus and one of the world's leading scholars of this work—and his family. Additional strengths include other historical and contemporary Asian art, early American painting, Conceptual and contemporary international art, and California and Bay Area art. The museum's ongoing MATRIX Program for Contemporary Art is dedicated to exhibitions and programs that present cutting-edge art and ideas. The Pacific Film Archive is one of the nation's most highly respected and comprehensive centers for film exhibition, collection, and study. Its internationally recognized exhibition program surveys a broad range of film in critical, cultural, and historical contexts, and frequently includes in-person conversations with filmmakers, authors, and scholars. The PFA film and video collection of approximately 14,000 films and videos includes the largest group of Japanese films outside of Japan, as well as impressive holdings of Soviet silents, West Coast avant-garde cinema, seminal video art, rare animation, Central Asian productions, Eastern European cinema, and international classics.

Support

Programs at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive are supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Packard Humanities Institute, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, The Henry Luce Foundation, the Koret Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Columbia Foundation, The Christensen Fund, and other private foundations, corporations, government agencies, and individuals, including the BAM/PFA membership. Major endowment support has been provided by the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation and by George Gund III.



Museum Information

Location: 2626 Bancroft Way, just below College Avenue near the UC Berkeley campus.

Gallery and Museum Store Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 11 to 5. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

Museum Admission: General admission is \$8; admission for seniors, disabled persons, non-UC Berkeley students, and young adults (13 – 17) is \$5; admission for BAM/PFA members, UC Berkeley students, staff and faculty, and children 12 and under is free; admission for group tours is \$3 per person (to arrange a group tour, call [510] 642-1002). Admission is free on the first Thursday of each month.

Special Admission during **Mahjong**:

- \$12** General Admission
- Free** UC Berkeley students, faculty, and BAM/PFA members
- \$7** Non-UC Berkeley students, senior citizens (65 and over), disabled persons, young adults (13 – 17)
- \$5** Per person for group tours (to arrange a group tour, call [510] 642-1002)
- Free** For all, First Thursday of each month. Admission to the MATRIX Gallery will be free during the run of **Mahjong**.

Information: 24-hour recorded message (510) 642-0808; FAX (510) 642-4889; TDD (510) 642-8734

Website: bampfa.berkeley.edu

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Press release available online: bampfa.berkeley.edu/press

For information on **Mahjong** and related programs, contact Lucy O'Brien, Jeanne Collins & Associates, LLC, New York City, 646-486-7050 or info@jcollinsassociates.com.

For information on BAM/PFA, contact Jonathan L. Knapp, BAM/PFA, 510-642-8691 or jlknapp@berkeley.edu.