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From a Poem to the Sunset

First part of an exhibition series with new acquisitions of contemporary Chinese and international art

May 1st – August 30th 2015

Daimler Contemporary Berlin

In 2013, the Daimler Art Collection began adding a significant new aspect to its international profile, with the acquisition of more than 40 artworks by about 20 Chinese artists. From this year on, these new acquisitions will be presented to the public in an exhibition series in Berlin. These works by Chinese artists relate well to the Daimler Art Collection's areas of special interest: the area of abstract and conceptual tendencies, and the "new media" area. At the same time, they form a new complex of their own within the fabric of the collection, which is culturally and aesthetically distinctive. In choosing which artists and which movements to incorporate, the Daimler Art Collection focused on art trends in the major centers: Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong (incl. Hong Kong). A forward-looking purchasing strategy was adopted, aided by in-depth research on location. Major artworks by artists who are already internationally well-known were acquired, and artworks by members of the younger generation of artists (born circa 1980) who are as yet unknown in our country were also discovered. Taken together, these new acquisitions for the Daimler Art Collection offer an insight into a country – a country that is both fascinating and the subject of controversy – that will be of great critical and global significance to the 21st century: not only because of its thousand years of tradition, but, above all, because of its rapid economic and cultural development.

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This exhibition series in Berlin will present the recent Chinese acquisitions in the context of the Daimler Art Collection. This “dialogue” with international artistic concepts will bring out the unique qualities of the new acquisitions, but it will also bring out parallels and relationships in the form of shared artistic concerns. The first part of the exhibition – *From a Poem to the Sunset* – is primarily devoted to conceptual tendencies, which first became observable in contemporary Chinese art in the mid-1980s but which, notwithstanding this, form the basis of the working methods of many younger artists.

The prelude to this exhibition is provided by poems, chosen either as linguistic inspiration or as an artistic means of expression: Natalie Czech (* 1976, D) often references lyric texts. In her artworks, she explores the ways in which words can evoke images, and how minimal interventions in the text can create new meanings. In some respects, her working method is akin to traditional calligraphy, the ‘methodology of writing’. In a series of artworks entitled *Calligraphy of Written Backward*, Qiu Zhijie (* 1969, CHN) investigates the wider possibilities inherent in the backward writing of Chinese calligraphy, giving it something akin to a filmic visual language and combining it with a melancholy subject matter in the form of the thoughts of the banished poet Su Shi (1037-1101). The Irish artist Sarah Browne (* 1981, IRL) is represented by an artwork in several parts that the Daimler Art Collection commissioned her to create, in which she evokes memories of the designer Eileen Gray. For the conclusion of her artwork *From Margin to Margin (Looking for Eileen)*, 2010/2015, the artist herself commissioned a poem. At every presentation of the project – this time in Berlin, for instance by the inclusion of carrier pigeons – this poem will take a new and autonomous form.

In his artworks, the artist Zheng Chongbin (* 1961, CHN), who was born in Shanghai and lives in San Francisco, achieves the suspension of the polarity between the Chinese and Western art worlds. One way in which he does this is to work in ink and acrylic paint – in parallel and

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with equal intensity. He shares with the Dresden artist Max Uhlig (* 1937, D) a fascination with ink painting (both artists have spent many years engaging with this art form); additionally, both artists' artworks feature gestures with a pronounced actional character, oscillating between abstraction and representational, readable content. The works of the young, Berlin based artist Sibylla Dumke demonstrate an intensive activity with structures of nature. Her intuitive strokes and the delicate tracery of the ink reflect the artist's abilities of sensitive observations, interpreted in "a rhythmic movement" (SD).

Alongside artists who are concerned with what are regarded as the classic artistic media, the exhibition presents a number of complex installations in the area of new media. In the main space of the Daimler Contemporary, there will be a choreographically structured coming together of selected works by Yang Fudong (* 1971, CHN) and Philippe Parreno (* 1964, DZ/F); there will be showings of the films *Continuously Habitable Zones aka C.H.Z.* (2011) by Philippe Parreno (commissioned by the Daimler Art Collection) and *Yejiang/The Nightman Cometh* (2011) by Yang Fudong. Both artists analyze the properties of their chosen media and formats: Yang experiments with film and photography, whilst Parreno makes the "exhibition" format itself the theme, designing "choreographies of bodies in space" (P.P.).

The next part of the exhibition presents current conceptual tendencies in Chinese contemporary art, in the form of a group of artworks by Liu Ding (* 1976, CHN), and single works by Pak Sheung Chuen (* 1977, CHN) and Lee Kit (* 1978, CHN). Zhang Peili (* 1957, CHN) was undoubtedly a pioneer of Chinese conceptual and video art; his documentation of one of his early "mail art" projects – *Brown Book No. 1, 1988* – appears in the exhibition. The artist Zheng Guogu (* 1970, CHN) is similarly interested in modern China and its society. He is also known internationally as a member of the Yangjiang Group. His artwork is brought face-to-face with a work by Japanese-American artist couple Shusaku Arakawa (1936-2010)

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and Madeline Gins (1941-2014). Both artists are fascinated by the idea of a multifaceted Gesamtkunstwerk that incorporates society, architecture and the human body, poetry and philosophy. In the cabinet space of the Daimler Contemporary, *Mont Saint Victoire*, 2012, by Li Ran (*1986, CHN), an installation in several parts, is presented. The artist seeks and formulates his own individual point of entry to the modernism buried by the Cultural Revolution by combining questions relating to the theory of art with his own personal experiences.

For the artists in the subsequent part of the exhibition the internet is the source and arena of study: Both Katja Davar (*1968, GB) and Guan Xiao (*1983, CHN), who is represented in this exhibition by a 3-channel video and by the eponymous sculptural ensemble *Sunset*, construct and deconstruct their own real and virtual worlds and collect their references from different areas of knowledge, cultural contexts and epochs. A fundamental preoccupation for both artists is the question of how we, in our age, can evoke the past, the present and the future in thought.

The first part of the exhibition concludes with the *Physique of Consciousness Museum*, a kind of 'artist museum' by Xu Zhen produced by Madeln Company (founded in 2009 by Xu Zhen [*1977, CHN]) that is dedicated to "human thought and action, and its body language". The way that the thinking behind this artwork spans cultures, religions and contexts makes it symbolic of the whole exhibition and its ethos; amid the diversity and individuality of the exhibited artworks, it tries to highlight unifying and meaningful analogies. In all sections of the show, one can make out ongoing arcs that trace the course of recent tendencies in art and in current events.

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An extensive program of supporting events accompanies the exhibition series. At the heart of this is a series of talks: an autonomous forum on specifically Chinese themes that will bring together a selection of art protagonists from China, with the hosts acting in the role of moderator. The talks will concern the artistic background and ethos behind the presented artworks, alongside fundamental issues and current themes of cultural and social development in China. The discussions, lectures and performances will give the artists featured in the exhibitions the opportunity to speak. Furthermore it is planned to host a multi-day symposium in Berlin, which will bring together some of the most knowledgeable protagonists on this subject from the international academia. The insights arising out of these events are going to be published online, and in an accompanying publication, which will be released at the beginning of 2016.

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