

# Daimler Art Collection

Interview with Renate Wiehager for the magazine *Art289* (289 艺术风尚)

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The Daimler Art Collection, which has existed since 1977, has closely followed the art history of Europe and the Western art world. What role does the collecting of Chinese artworks play in the existing collection of the Daimler Art Collection? What overlaps exist between the newly-acquired artworks from China and the international artworks that come together and complement one another in your Berlin exhibition *From a Poem to the Sunset*?

RW:

Chinese contemporary art has a very short history, beginning in the mid-1980s. For this reason, we have placed works in our collection dating from the 1980s era, alongside our newly-acquired Chinese artworks, with the exception of an earlier painting by the Japanese artist Arakawa.

It may interest your Chinese readers to know that the *Poem* exhibition in the Daimler Contemporary in Berlin (which runs until October 18, 2015) is part of a series of three exhibitions. By the end of 2016, we will have held a total of three exhibitions, featuring around 40 newly-acquired Chinese artworks by approximately 20 artists, alongside international works from our collection. We felt that it was very important to present the Chinese artworks not in isolation, but rather in dialogue with the recent developments of international art. These have, after all, shaped the modes of thinking and the themes of younger artists in China, as elsewhere: these artists are constantly in personal dialogue with international art through exhibitions and via the internet.

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Visitors to our exhibitions can discover numerous overlaps between the exhibited works. Thus, Qui Zhijie and Zheng Chongbin's calligraphy and abstract landscape paintings are presented alongside the large ink drawings by German artist Max Uhlig, who has been engaging with Asian art since the 1970s. A video by the French artist Philippe Parreno creates an artificial landscape with two suns. Yang Fudong's video *The Nightman Cometh* is played simultaneously with Philippe Parreno's: it shows solitary people and animals moving through an artificial winter landscape. Other overlaps include the artistic treatment of individual and cultural contexts (Katja Davar / Li Ran / Pak Sheung Chuen / Liu Ding) and the analysis of spiritual traditions and conceptual strategies (Natalie Czech / Lee Kit / Xu Zhen).

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What role does the encounter with culture and art play for the employees of the Daimler Group? And how do the employees make use of the art scene and the collected artworks of the Daimler Art Collection?

RW:

When we open a new exhibition at the Daimler sites in Stuttgart, elsewhere in Germany, or in our public exhibition space in Berlin, we invite employees and external guests to attend regular guided tours. Employees and guests are allowed to bring along friends and colleagues, too. On these evenings, we visit the exhibition in small groups, and there is plenty of scope for discussions and questions. I think that it is important to make it more than just a one-off event - to have people 'on board' for an extended period of time, and perhaps even for a number of years, to involve them in questions of art and to deepen their understanding. The concept of 'qualification' is paramount for me, by which I mean suitable in-depth discussions about the role of art and culture as a part of our society. What we are trying to do through our exhibitions, tours, and the publications linked to the Daimler Art Collection, is not to generate superficial hype or small talk, but to make people return to the art, to gain a deeper and more knowledgeable understanding. Only in this way can we include people - employees and company-external guests - both intellectually and emotionally.

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Since 2003, you have undertaken many trips to China in order to get to know the art scene there. What impressions have you collected from your journeys to China thus far?

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RW:

Since 2003, the art scene in China has undergone unprecedented change. It has greatly expanded and become more dynamic. At first, there were only a limited number of museums which exhibited contemporary art. I spent a lot of time with the artists in their studios, and I learned a lot. Then there is the gallery system, which has also become more professional, giving contemporary art in China a significant boost, and rapidly helping to create an international reputation. Time and again, I was impressed by the earnestness and the intensity of the artists as they spoke about their art, their ideas, and their utopian concepts regarding the role art can play in society.

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In your capacity as curator of the collection, I would like to know: what were your thoughts and decisions regarding the criteria according to which artworks from China were acquired?

RW:

Why contemporary Chinese art? How does that fit with the history and the conception of the Daimler Art Collection? These were questions which were often posed during the preliminary stages of this exhibition. Since 2001, we have steadily expanded the heretofore primarily European-orientated Daimler Art Collection by adding groups of international artworks from the USA, South America, South Africa, India, Asia, and Australia – countries in which Daimler/Mercedes-Benz has a presence in various different ways, countries that the Daimler Art Collection world tour has visited since 2003. The impetus for this new focus of the collection was, therefore, the natural result of the consistent and long-term internationalization of the collection, just as Daimler itself is an internationally active company.

Chinese contemporary art did not begin to develop independently until the mid-1980s. This is reflected by the purchase of a work by Zhang Peili (\*1957, CHN), who is a pioneer of concept and video art in China. *Brown Book No. 1*, 1988, a new acquisition for our collection, is a documentation of one of his earlier mail art projects. We have acquired artworks dating approximately from 1990 to 2010 by other well-established artists including Qiu Zhijie, Cao Fei, Yin Xiuzhen, Liu Zheng, and Ding Yi. The focus of our acquisitions, however, is clearly on recent contemporary art from Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Guangdong (incl. Hong Kong) by artists who were born around 1980/85.

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How well-attended is the exhibition *From a Poem to the Sunset* in Berlin? How is the newly-acquired Chinese contemporary art changing the profile of the Daimler Art Collection, which has a stock of around 3,000 artworks dating from 1910 to the present day? Do German visitors' reactions and feedback correspond to your expectations?

RW:

We are experiencing considerable interest and positive response from visitors, especially in relation to the juxtapositions and dialogues of international and Chinese art. Visitors are making enthusiastic use of the range of information that we have made available – audio guides, brochures, and texts on individual works in the exhibition – and they have been taking plenty of time to appreciate the video artworks, text objects and drawings alike, giving the artworks their full attention.

A symposium entitled *On the Development of Contemporary Art in China since 2000* which takes place on September 15/16 here in Berlin, will complete our program of events. Britta Erickson (Palo Alto), Anselm Franke (Berlin), Birgit Hopfener (Berlin), Carol Lu (Beijing), Lu Dadong (Hangzhou), Pu Hong (Beijing), Andreas Schmid (Berlin), Karen Smith (Xian) and Su Wei (Beijing) have been invited. The intention of the symposium is to give an expert audience as well as interested visitors a certain insight, in concentrated form, into the multifaceted developments of Chinese contemporary art over the last 15 years. The speakers at the symposium come from different generations, and represent distinct theoretical approaches. The aim is to deepen art-historical and art-theoretical knowledge of contemporary art in China, and to broaden the existing basis for mutual exchange.

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