

CAI GUO-QIANG

Gunpowder Art

Symposium Programme

24th of October 2019, Lecture Theatre, Ashmolean Museum

- 12.30 - 13.00 Symposium Registration
- 13.00-13.15 **Welcome & Introduction**
Shelagh Vainker, Curator of Chinese Art and Exhibition Curator
- 13.15-13.30 Screening of *Cai Guo-Qiang: Rewind*
First Panel
- 13.30 – 14.00 **Context and Influence in Cai Guo-Qiang's Work**
David Elliott, Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art, Guangzhou, Vice Director and Senior Curator
- 14.00 - 14.30 **Volatile Matter: Politics and Pyrotechnics in the Work of Cai Guo-Qiang**
Ros Holmes, University of Manchester, Presidential Academic Fellow in the History of Chinese Art
- 14.30 - 15.00 **Cai Guo-Qiang and the Depths of Spectacle**
David Taylor, University of Oxford, Associate Professor of English
- COFFEE BREAK
- Second Panel: **Cai Guo-Qiang from Multiple Perspectives**
- 15.30 – 15.45 ***Two Gunpowder Drawings* and Cai Guo-Qiang in Japan**
Lena Fritsch, Ashmolean Museum, Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art
- 15.45-16.00 **Yi 羿 - Myth: Shooting the Suns**
Paul Bevan, Ashmolean Museum, Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting
- 16.00-16.15 **Cai Guo-Qiang: In Search of El Greco**
Saul Nelson, Ruskin School of Art, DPhil Candidate
- 16.15-16.30 **In the Volcano: Cai Guo-Qiang and Pompeii**
Jérôme Neutres, Independent Curator
- 16.30—17.00 **Art History and Museum as Medium**
Cai Guo-Qiang, Artist
- 17.15 – 19.00 **PRIVATE VIEW** of the Exhibition

CAI GUO-QIANG Gunpowder Art

Abstracts and Biographies

Context and Influence in Cai Guo-Qiang's work

David Elliott, Vice Director of the Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art in Guangzhou

Beginning with the context of Shanghai in the late 1970s- early '80s where Cai Guo-Qiang studied, I will consider briefly the early influences on his work including that of Russian/Soviet art as well those of his contemporaries and the prevailing cultural discourse in the city. I shall then consider - again briefly - the periodicity of Cai Guo-Qiang's artistic production to date: from painting, to explosion events, to explosion drawings, to installations, to gunpowder paintings.

David Elliott is a British art historian, curator, writer and teacher who has directed museums in Oxford (MoMA 1976-1996, where he presented Cai Guo-Qiang's work for the first time in the UK in 1993), Stockholm (Moderna Museet, 1996-2001), Tokyo (Mori Art Museum, founding director 2001-2006), and Istanbul (Museum of Modern Art, 2007). He is currently Vice Director and Senior Curator of the Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art (RMCA) in Guangzhou.

He has been the artistic director of major biennales in Sydney (2010), Kyiv (2012), Moscow (2014) and Belgrade (2016) and has taught Art History/Museum Studies at the University of Oxford (1986-96), National University of the Arts, Tokyo (2002-06), Humboldt University, Berlin (Rudolf Arnheim Professor in the History of Art 2008), and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2008-2016).

Volatile Matter: Politics and Pyrotechnics in the Work of Cai Guo-Qiang

Ros Homes, University of Manchester, Presidential Academic Fellow in the History of Chinese Art

This talk explores the cultural role of gunpowder in Cai Guo-Qiang's work from a variety of art historical perspectives. While Cai has used and reused a wide range of materials throughout his career, from porcelain to plexiglass and arrows to oil paint, gunpowder remains at the core of his multifarious practice. Examining the artist's long-term commitment to this volatile material, the talk traces the cultural and artistic connotations which have been ascribed to Cai's 'gunpowder works.' Despite the artist's consistent reference to destruction as a key methodology of his practice, and in contrast to its centrality in the critical reception of his works, the paper argues that Cai's explosive artworks might more productively be understood in relation to their interpretive ambiguity. For even when gunpowder is detonated on silk, porcelain, and handmade paper, the artist's carefully choreographed combustions not only de-stabilize these symbolically loaded materials but also leave equivocal afterimages in their wake. Establishing how Cai plays with the inherent versatility of gunpowder as a means to both suspend and question certain aspects of his own artistic identity, the talk traces the clashes of power, culture and identity engendered by global spaces of encounter.

Ros Holmes is Presidential Academic Fellow in the History of Chinese Art at the University of Manchester. She specialises in modern and contemporary art and online visual culture. She is currently completing her first book, which is entitled 'The Art of Incivility: 'Rudeness' and Representation in Contemporary China'. In 2019 she co-curated the exhibition *Chinternet Ugly* at the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art (CFCCA).

Cai Guo-Qiang and the Depths of Spectacle

David Taylor, University of Oxford, Associate Professor of English

In this paper I'll suggest some of the ways in which Cai's art, and his explosion events especially, counters a tradition of critical and philosophical suspicion of spectacle that goes back (in the West) some two and half thousand years. In order to make this claim, I'll first trace Cai's relationship to the theatre and the manner in which his art addresses questions of what performance is and does. Consideration of Cai's work through the many vectors of performance - including space, time, movement, process, materiality, and audience - will then lead me back to the matter of spectacle. Contrary to the likes of Guy Debord, for whom spectacle renders us passive, its enthralling fiction putting us at a distance from the real, Cai shows us that spectacle is (or at least can be) an epistemology: a way of knowing.

David Taylor is associate professor of English at Oxford and a tutorial fellow of St. Hugh's College. He specializes in British literature and culture from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, with particular interests in the theatre and the relations between literary and visual cultures. He is the author of *Theatres of Opposition* (OUP, 2012) and *The Politics of Parody* (Yale UP, 2018), and also the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre* (OUP, 2014). In 2017 he curated the exhibition "Draw New Mischief: 250 Years of Shakespeare and Political Cartoons" for the Royal Shakespeare Company, which opened in Stratford-upon-Avon before travelling to the Barbican. He is currently working on a book about theories and practices of spectacle in the Enlightenment.

***Two Gunpowder Drawings* and Cai Guo-Qiang in Japan**

Lena Fritsch, Ashmolean Museum, Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art

Lena Fritsch is the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Ashmolean Museum, working on exhibitions, displays and acquisitions of international art. Recent exhibitions include *A.R. Penck: I Think in Pictures* (2019) and *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Sudanese Artist in Oxford* (2018). One of her main research areas is Japanese art and photography; recent monographs include *Ravens & Red Lipstick: Japanese Photography since 1945* (English version by Thames & Hudson, Japanese by Seigensha, both 2018). Before joining the Ashmolean she worked at Tate Modern, and Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum of Contemporary Art, Berlin. Fritsch holds a PhD in Art History from Bonn University, Germany, and also studied at Keio University, Tokyo.

Yi 羿 - Myth: Shooting the Suns

Paul Bevan, Ashmolean Museum, Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting

Arrows, fire, and gunpowder were all central to the art of war in pre-modern China and aspects concerning these will be briefly introduced in this talk as they relate to the art work, "Myth: Shooting the Suns" by Cai Guo-Qiang.

Paul Bevan is the Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting at the Ashmolean Museum, and has taught modern Chinese literature and history at Oxford, Cambridge and the School of Oriental and African Studies. His primary research interests concern the impact of Western art and literature on China during the Republican Period (1912-1949). His publications include *A Modern Miscellany - Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei's Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen* (2018) and "Intoxicating Shanghai"- *An Urban Montage: Art and Literature in Pictorial Magazines during Shanghai's Jazz Age* (forthcoming).

Cai Guo-Qiang: In Search of El Greco

Saul Nelson, Ruskin School of Art, DPhil Candidate

The talk will be considering Cai's work of that title in the exhibition in the light of affinities between his work and El Greco's, arguing that both artists pursue painting as a medium that captures the invisible.

Saul Nelson is a third-year DPhil candidate at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford. Saul works on post-war modernist art, with an emphasis on migration, and his work has been published in *The Oxford Art Journal* and *The London Review of Books*.

In the Volcano: Cai Guo-Qiang and Pompeii

Jérôme Neutres, Independent Curator

Jérôme Neutres is an independent curator, who earlier in 2019 curated the exhibition *In the Volcano: Cai Guo-Qiang and Pompeii* at the National Archaeological Museum, Naples. He is the former director of La Réunion des Musées Nationaux Grand Palais and former president of the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris.

Art History and Museum as Medium

Cai Guo-Qiang, Artist

Cai Guo-Qiang (b. 1957, Quanzhou, China) is, quite literally, one of the world's most ground-breaking artists. He is best known as the Director of Visual and Special Effects for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics where he treated awestruck viewers to possibly the greatest fireworks show in history. His practice ranges over painting and drawing, video, installation and performance.

The Ashmolean Museum exhibition *CAI GUO-QIANG Gunpowder Art* of 14 works ranges across Cai's career. They represent his profound engagement with both western history and Chinese artistic traditions and materials including paper, porcelain and silk. These include early experimental works from the 1980s in gunpowder on Japanese paper; works in coloured gunpowder on canvas; porcelain panels and sculpture with moulded decoration and gunpowder on the surface; and silk hangings with gunpowder. Coinciding with the Ashmolean's Last Supper in Pompeii exhibition, it also shows a selection of objects from the test for one of his most recent projects made in February 2019 in the amphitheatre of Pompeii where a wooden boat, life-size reproductions of Roman sculptures, terracotta pots and glass dishes were sprinkled with black and coloured gunpowders and ignited in a spectacular display that lasted more than three minutes.