

## **Why Sculpture, Why Here**

Tate Modern, 5 October 2007

Co-organised by Tate Modern, Iniva and Henry Moore Institute

Participating artists: Subodh Gupta, Abel Barroso, Dilomprizulike (The Junkman from Africa), Huang Yong Ping, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and Mamiko Otsubo, with a conclusion by Sarat Maharaj

### **Stephen Feeke introducing Huang Yong Ping**

Good afternoon everybody, it's my pleasure to introduce Huang Yong Ping, the first speaker for this afternoon. He'll be joined behind the podium by William Wong who's going to translate for him. Huang Yong Ping was born in 1954 in Xiamen in China, but he has lived in Paris since 1989. He graduated in 1982 from the Fine Arts Academy at Zhejiang and originally trained as a painter. He was also part of the Xiamen Dada Group. He is now very well known for his installations which he has exhibited widely throughout the US and Europe. Notably there was a retrospective called *The House of the Oracles* at the Walker Art Center in 2005, and this year he had an exhibition called *Huang Yong Ping: From C to P* at the Gladstone Gallery in New York. His first European show was in 1989 at the Pompidou Centre; in this country he's shown in Camden and Oxford, and recently he was in the *China Power Station Project* in 2006.

### **Huang Yong Ping (translated by William Wong)**

Please excuse me, I have to do my presentation in Mandarin. I would like to thank Tate Modern, Henry Moore Institute and Iniva. I've been living in Paris since 1989 and I've done over a hundred projects, but I think for this afternoon, I'll just concentrate on four and I'll wrap it up with two more recent works.

I'd like to start with a piece I did in 1993, which is called 'Theatre of the World' and took place at Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart. I use life animals, creatures, to explore their consciousness and to inform my creativity. What you see on screen is inspired by the shape of a turtle shell, and all around the fringe there are 19 drawers, within which there's just one open space, and I've put in whatever I could find, all sorts of live creatures. There are some mechanisms which I could manipulate to allow certain species to go into the middle chamber to interact with each other. Part of the inspiration of this piece of work was from my time spent in Solitude; there was

a sudden level of insularity there which inspired this installation. You can take a close look from the top to see how the various creatures respond to and interact with each other. Where I've sourced these creatures is important: they had been kept in isolation in shops, so this is a new perspective to allow them to enter one unified space. It is refreshing, but also quite tense for the animals.

This is taken from my sketchbook, part of the inspiration comes from the Colosseum in Rome. On the far left, you see a Chinese character, it's made up of four parts; at the top you can see three identical bits, and each one means an insect, so they are symbols of these three insects resting on a bowl container. And the concept behind it is to throw some creatures into one space and to see how they interact.

This picture was taken in 1994 outside the Pompidou Centre in Paris. I had a piece of work there called 'Hors-limites: l'art et la vie'. Because of the contentious nature of having insects and all that, the staff at the Centre and animal rights campaigners were protesting outside the Centre. When the exhibition opened in Germany in Stuttgart, it was smaller and not so high profile, but this is what happened in Paris.

This picture is taken back in 2005 in the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. When this installation went on tour in April this year to the Vancouver Art Gallery, it was just on display for about a week; what happened later is that both, human rights and animal rights organisations joined forces to protest, so it had to be withdrawn.

This is from the 40<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, at the French Pavilion back in 1999. Its title is 'One Man, Nine Dragons'. This experience meant a lot to me, because it was part of the French Pavilion presentation, but then I was a Chinese national representing France in principle, and I felt as an artist I shouldn't be linked to a nation state, but I actually felt pressured in some sense. I collaborated with a French artist called Jean-Pierre Bertrand. I decided to take up the outdoor space and to let Bertrand do his work in the interior. This is an architectural floor plan, the red dots you see on the screen represent those very tall tree trunks from the previous slide. The tree trunks are between 7 to 15 metres tall. At the top of each tree trunk you'll probably remember seeing some metallic beasts, which were kinds of dragons from Chinese mythology. And this is the entry to the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. This is right in the middle of the space where the tree trunks break through the glass roof.

The image we see here is going back to 2002 and 'The Nightmare of King George V'. It shows the juxtaposition of an elephant and a tiger. The original

inspiration came from the National History Museum in Paris. King George V used to love hunting, and apparently there was one day where he was hunting and managed to kill four tigers in one day. This image came from the National History Museum, and if you look closely, within the glass case you can see the tiger; apparently it shows the tiger as it has just been hit and as it is falling. Where I have actually changed the posture: the tiger is pouncing in attack. That's the little thing I manipulated. I wanted to explore how the juxtaposition between natural history and the history of colonialism work together side by side.

This belongs to a project called 'The Bat Project', which I was doing between 2001 and 2005 over four years. This is an American air force spy plane called EP3. In April 2001 there was an incident; this spy plane had a mid-air collision with a Chinese fighter aircraft and was intercepted; later on it was forced to land on Hainan Island. While the plane was detained in China, I drew inspiration from it to create a piece of work, so I reconstructed the plane from the middle through to the tail, spanning 20 metres.

This project really stirred up an international diplomatic incident, because of me being a Chinese artist – but by then I had actually obtained French citizenship – and the French Embassy in Beijing started a fuss, because this was also based on an American spy plane, so they intervened and it resulted in a whole series of investigations.

This is on location at the 2002 Guangzhou Triennial, and I decided to reconstruct the cockpit, the nose part and also the left wing of that spy plane. Apparently some officers from the American consulate in Hong Kong came and took a series of pictures, and then they passed it on to the Chinese Foreign Office, which came to investigate the matter further. Just a few days before the exhibition was due to open, the whole thing was withdrawn, and the installation had to be carved up and removed from the site.

In 2003 in Beijing, I got some sponsorship from businessmen and property commercial developers and decided to start reconstructing the remaining wing of the spy plane. Again, shortly before the exhibition was due to open, the sponsorship terminated due to self-censorship; basically people didn't want it to be something so politically sensitive and so controversial.

In 2005, I managed to find an identical cockpit from the spy plane EP3 in California, so I recreated it in the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. This is an inside-

out view from the cockpit, and just outside I'd placed over 300 bats, so this is actually a bats' home. What you see is the fuselage of the aircraft, and it sort of documents the history of my four-year project.

This piece of work is known as 'From C to P'; C stands for the Colosseum in Rome and P for the Pentagon. It took place at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York. It was made up of over 200 pieces of terracotta. Back in the seventeenth to eighteenth century, the Colosseum in Rome at one time was actually falling in ruins, was completely dilapidated, and there were over 300 varieties of plants and weeds growing within the structure. This is the interpretation of the Pentagon, and having it side by side with the Colosseum, they represent both current and former empires. Although it looks perfect from the outside and it's very strong, within the walls of the Pentagon there are weeds and seeds of discontent.

This is an image of my work at the current 10<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial. What inspired me to do this installation is, you notice that in Istanbul there are so many mosques, and each mosque has this really prominent architectural feature, the minaret. So I created a replica mock-up of the minaret and placed it lopsided within the scaffolding. I've called it 'Construction Site'. The shape of the minaret reminds me of a rocket, some sort of weapon, and by placing it in this context, within this construction site, it made me rethink this purpose.

### **Question**

I wanted to ask you about your training. It seems to me that a lot of your work involves replication of a ready-made object, but the replication you make is really bold and confident. I wondered whether this comes from a training in which monumental sculpture is possible and in which traditional methods of replication and labour are readily available? Does this go back to a training in the Chinese art academy?

### **HYP**

I don't think so, because I actually had a fine art training, an art background, I learned to paint, I trained as a painter.

### **Question**

Just out of curiosity, how did you get the spy plane in the first place?

**HYP**

I got hold of the draft plan, because the actual aircraft was shipped away on a Russian aircraft. It was actually a mock-up, and the idea of the mock-up being reconstructed in parts somewhat resembled the aircraft being chopped up in pieces and flown away on a Russian aircraft.

**Question**

It seemed to me that much of the work you've shown us was about dialogues between empires; even the first piece you presented with the insects that are interacting with each other, it's about power and control, and I was wondering if your experience living in Paris but being at first a Chinese national and then moving on towards becoming a French citizen has influenced or inspired these concepts?

**HYP**

It's probably less to do with the fact that I emigrated to France and became a French national, but really, even in the art world, on the surface it might all seem very gentlemanly, while underneath it's actually full of power conflicts, so this is really an observation from life.

**Question**

I wondered if you could describe a little bit more the use of animals in your work, from living ones to taxidermied ones; it seems that sometimes they're mythological, sometimes they're real...

**HYP**

I just love animals and I also generally believe that other life forms have higher intelligence than humans.

Transcribed by Jackie Howson and edited by Marion Endt.