

# **Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia**

Space, Place, and Community in Action

Edited by

**Meiqin Wang**

*California State University, Northridge*

Series in Art



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# Preface

Writing during the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe, I cannot help but wonder about what art can practically do facing such a massive health crisis and the accompanying political, economic, and social setbacks. The pandemic has almost brought the entire human world to a total stop for several months, with some countries enduring longer lockdown periods than others. As the usual modes of operations in human societies are interrupted by the pandemic, new modes of thinking, action, and social interaction have emerged as people try to understand, approach, and communicate and find alternatives solutions to meet their daily needs, conduct daily business, and move on with their life by building supportive networks and recreating communities. While face-to-face physical communication in real life has largely been halted, virtual communication via social media platforms such as WeChat, Zoom, and other channels has flourished to an unprecedented level. Meeting and interacting online has become the new norm of human communication across the world. It is safe to argue that the internet has saved the human society from being entirely paralyzed with both private and public spaces that it provides for human communication to continue without the fear of spreading or being infected by the coronavirus.

This time also witnesses the unprecedented growth of online presence for art. Major art museums worldwide have opened free online access or simulated tours one after another, enabling people to appreciate prestigious collections of artworks without leaving the precinct of their residence. Curators and artists have organized online art exhibitions as an alternative to the usual exhibitions taking place in a specific physical location. Worldwide, the art communities, like other sectors of our society, have gone online and relied on digital technology to present their art. Some take the opportunity to create art that makes life under quarantine the subject matter of their work. The pandemic has propelled new modes of communication as well as new ways of making and disseminating art. On the one hand, the pandemic has heightened and widened previously existing conflicts and social divisions within nation-states, for which the United States presents a good example. On the other hand, it has also deepened and worsened difference and mistrust among the international communities formed by individual nation-states, for which the deteriorating relationship between the United States and China is a good case in point. At the same time, human beings also face an unprecedented opportunity to unite because the virus does not differentiate people based on their nationality, education, color of skin, wealth, religious belief, social status, and the like

categories that the human society has invented to differentiate social members and bestow corresponding treatments. All these categorizations have proven useless in preventing the spread of COVID-19, which should be a timely reminder that after all, we human beings, regardless of where we come from, share more similarities than differences as one organic living species.

This is particularly true when one consider the main themes of numerous online exhibitions being organized since the outbreak of COVID-19. More often than not, art communities across the globe have expressed similar sense of mourning for the loss of innocent lives, compassion for people living under the threat of the virus, support for medical personnel and volunteers who worked to rescue infected patients, and critique of the politicization of the pandemic by politicians and the manipulation of information for social control that promote misunderstanding, mistrust, and misinformation among citizens. In addition, many artworks have expressed certain universal feelings such as uncertainty, vulnerability, and fragility of life as well as hope for life, resilience, understanding, and unity. While institutionalized politics, those led by nation-states in a top-down fashion, seem to have predicted the worst of societal differences at the time of crisis, the art communities, especially those formed by individuals and organizations in a bottom-up fashion, aspire for the best of humanities to confront the unprecedented health crisis of human history. Simply put, while state-led politics dismay, divide, misinform, and disempower people, art actually seeks to encourage, unite, inform, and empower people in order to turn them into new publics or create new publics that take the matter into their own hands. It is the faith in these potentials of art to convey similar humanistic needs, to establish new connection among people, and to stimulate new ideas and actions for better life for all that sustain my continuous work with this anthology, which presents new research on socially engaged public art from East Asia.

# Foreword

Grant Kester

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One of the most significant aspects of the emerging scholarly discourse around socially engaged art over the past decade has been its capacity to unsettle the established, and frankly Eurocentric, historiographic traditions that have long characterized research in this field. *Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia: Space, Place and Community in Action*, which offers the first comprehensive survey of new forms of socially engaged art in the region, makes an important contribution to this growing body of work. Engaged art has always been a distinctly global affair, even if historians and critics have often relied on a heliocentric narrative in which a handful of North American and European artists brought it into existence out of the “dematerialized” art practices of the 1960s and ‘70s. As significant as these precedents have been, it is important to bear in mind that socially engaged art didn’t simply emerge *sui generis* over the past few decades. Rather, it marks only the most recent manifestation of a desire to engage creatively with the norms of aesthetic and artistic autonomy that extends back to the nineteenth century. It is evident in Daumier’s lithographs following the July Revolution and in the Arts and Crafts movement during the 1860s and ‘70s, in the prefigurative cultural politics of the Paris Commune and the anarchist illustrations of the Neo-Impressionists, in the revival of khadi cloth in the Indian Independence movement and in the prints of El Taller de Gráfica Popular in Mexico, in Iri and Toshi Maruki’s *Hiroshima Panels* and in Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed, and in Emory Douglas’s images for the Black Panther Party and the productions of El Teatro Campesino.

As these examples suggest, we can identify a rich set of precedents for engaged art in the longer history of anti-colonial cultural struggles across the global south. The conventional European avant-garde often sought to generate dissent through a symbolic attack on the normative values of the bourgeois artworld. This was intended as a displaced critique of the forms of political domination on which the institutional artworld itself depended. In this tradition, critique must remain indirect in order to elude the forms of cooption that would, ostensibly, result from any attempt to align artistic practice more directly with forms of social or political action. We encounter, as well, a tendency in the European avant-garde to dismiss any form of popular culture as inherently corrupt, and therefore incapable of sustaining forms of critical or creative consciousness. The traditions of anti-colonial resistance often emerged

in societies less structured through the conventional modernist schism between popular culture and fine art, associated with the European bourgeoisie. Rather, we encounter a situation in which popular culture (not yet so thoroughly commodified), still retains a meaningful grounding in the lifeworld of the poor and working class. As a result, it is available to be transformed, and mobilized, in conjunction with political resistance to colonialist domination.

We can observe this complex process in Gandhi's cultural activism during the fight for Indian independence. Here Gandhi made use of Indian traditions such as the *chakra* or spinning wheel and khadi cloth to assemble a set of politically charged symbolic armatures. The domestic spinning of cotton, which was proscribed by the British in order to force India to accept its foreign exports, was a key example. In response Gandhi sought to literally embody resistance by linking it with the physical performance of spinning cotton (which was required for all members of the Indian National Congress). In this manner he sought to not only contest British cultural domination, but also to level the class and caste distinctions between elite congress members and the Indian poor and working class. For Gandhi the most powerful tools of imperial domination were not economic or military, but cultural, evident in the tendency of upper caste Indians to adopt British or European fashion. Thus, the decision to wear simple, khadi cloth garments constituted a form of sartorial activism that also encouraged trans-caste solidarity.<sup>1</sup> Famously, Gandhi himself created a scandal when he wore a simple khadi dhoti for an audience with Queen Mary and King George V at Buckingham Palace in 1931. This same performative element is evident in his various perambulations, most famously the Salt March of 1930 in which he, along with thousands of followers, illegally harvested salt on the coast of the Arabian Sea. It is this same tradition of embodied activism that helped inspire the marches and occupations that occurred in the American south as part of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, such as the influential March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.

As noted above, the mobilization of prosaic forms of cultural production (weaving, fashion, gospel music in the Civil Rights movement, etc.) also signals the extent to which anti-colonial activism challenges the cultural hierarchy of the avant-garde. Rather than viewing these practices as symptoms of kitsch-like vulgarity (Greenberg) or repressive de-sublimation (Adorno), they are seen

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gonsalvez, *Khadi: Gandhi's Mega Symbol of Subversion*, (New Delhi: Sage Press, 2012). The struggle for liberation in India was more complex than this description suggests, given the reluctance of the Indian National Congress to challenge the caste-based repression of the Dalit, and Gandhi's own refusal to allow a separate electorate for the Dalit caste. These tensions came to a head in Gandhi's conflicts with Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar over the 1932 Poona Fast.

as essential elements in generating a broad-based resistance to colonialist domination. We can identify a parallel tendency in the Black Arts movement, which challenged the normalized racial and class conventions of the avant-garde during the 1960s by employing popular cultural forms drawn from the African diaspora and graphic arts practices associated with the Mexican Revolution.<sup>2</sup> We also encounter, within the broader history of anti-colonial resistance, a partial movement away from the conventions of the Leninist vanguard, with its normalization of cathartic revolutionary violence. This is evident in Gandhi's commitment to *ahimsa* or non-violence, which was inspired in turn by Maori traditions of passive resistance epitomized by the pacifist settlement at Parihaka.<sup>3</sup> Ahimsa would, of course, go on to influence Martin Luther King, Jr. and the American Civil Rights movement in turn. Finally, we encounter a challenge to the hierarchical authority of the revolutionary party, and a commitment to the collective elucidation of critical insight, in a number of influential practices in Latin America, including Paulo Freire's model of critical pedagogy, Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Throughout all of these practices we can identify a desire to break down conventional cultural boundaries and to nurture forms of embodied, performative resistance that combine both tactical and prefigurative elements in a manner that mirrors developments in engaged art since the 1960s.

These traditions have a particular salience for the forms of engaged art practice documented in this study. Here it is necessary to note that engaged art in East Asia is produced at the intersection of a complex set of both residual and emergent ideological formations. The first, as I've already noted, involves the history of European colonialist domination, which has extended into neo-colonialist ideologies that remain active to the present day in western attitudes towards the region. The second is the effect of various forms of state communism or socialism, evident most obviously in the People's Republic of China, and the evolution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This informed a series of regional tensions throughout the Cold War period, as East Asia became a central theater of influence and contestation between China, Russia, the U.S. and Western Europe. The third factor entails the growing influence over the past

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<sup>2</sup> Jo-Ann Morgan, "Emory Douglas: Revolutionary Artist and Visual Theorist," *The Black Arts Movement and the Black Panther Party in American Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2019). This is a tendency that is reflected globally in the emergence of "negritude" in the 1930s. See, for example, Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance*, edited by Te Miringa Hohaia, Gregory O'Brien and Lara Strongman (Wellington, NZ: City Gallery, Wellington/Victoria University Press/Parihaka Pā Trustees, 2001).

four decades of neo-liberal capitalism, which has taken root across the region, including in the PRC itself, which has transformed itself into a quasi-state capitalist system. In each case we can observe a process by which these ideological and institutional forces took up an antagonistic relationship to existing forms of collective experience and identity. Thus, the CCP, with its imperative to produce, *ex nihilo*, a Communist “New Man” or “New Woman,” was just as willing to obliterate earlier Chinese cultural traditions as the most enthusiastic proponent of market-based globalization. And yet, these indigenous traditions, of mutual aid and “vernacular wisdom,” of sustainability and “locally-specific” knowledge, have survived, and remain strikingly salient today as part of the “East Asian grassroots regionalism” that is so eloquently documented in this anthology.

The appeal to local or regional practices suggests the relative isolation of this work from broader currents of social change or political transformation. However, socially engaged art practices can also exhibit a nuanced understanding of the complex interaction between micro-political gestures and macro-political forces. Much of this work is based, in fact, on a temporal paradigm of political transformation that breaks with the syntagmatic mythos of revolution as an instantaneous and all-encompassing rupture. Instead, it acknowledges the necessarily diachronic and capillary nature of change, running from the incremental transformation of the individual consciousness through forms of praxis which seek to produce concrete changes in existing political and social structures at the local, regional and even transnational level. Each stage along this trajectory carries a generative and creative potential that exists in a dialogical relation with more extensive or expansive forms of social change. This accounts for the distinctive scalar nature of engaged art projects, which unfold along a continuum that runs from small scale interactions among a handful of interlocutors to projects that can involve dozens or even hundreds of participants. This is evident in a number of the projects discussed in this volume, from the subtle disruptions of gender norms in Bao Ho’s street art, to the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza in Seoul by hundreds of artists to protest then-president Park Geun-hye’s persecution of his critics.

As I noted above, one of the key historical vectors necessary for understanding the significance of engaged art in East Asia can be found in the distinctive cultural practices associated with the traditions of anti-colonial resistance. Three factors are of particular relevance here. The first, as noted above, entails the creative mobilization of popular or prosaic cultural forms (storytelling, graffiti, Haka hill songs, gardening, karaoke, cooking, etc.) as a set of symbolic resources through which communities threatened by large-scale development projects (both urban and rural) might challenge their erasure by the state. We can observe this process in Chuen Lung’s work in Hong Kong and Ou Ning’s Bishan Commune,

among many other examples. The second factor entails a commitment to both the tactical and the prefigurative dimensions of activist practice, which is reflected in a concern with non-hierarchical forms of decision-making and collective forms of creative production. This tendency is evident in projects such as Space Beam, where the participating artists became directly involved with anti-gentrification struggles in Incheon, while also creating a series of participatory programs that sought to preserve local history and cultural traditions. We can observe it as well in the traditions of mutual aid that were mobilized in the Dinghaiqiao Mutual-Aid Society. Here the participants drew on the legacy of the Prolekult movement that emerged in Russia during the 1920s, and influenced subsequent developments in China during the 1930s, to challenge conventional forms of artistic subjectivity through a concept amateurism that seeks to reveal the creative potential inherent in quotidian forms of experience.

Finally, due in part to the heightened level of control exercised over the public sphere in several countries in the region, we encounter a commitment to non-violence in East Asian engaged art. We can observe this in Wu Mali's long-term environmental works produced during the post-Martial Law period in Taiwan, which abjure direct action and instead focus on extended forms of pedagogical interaction. We can observe it as well in the various projects associated with the Team of Migrant Worker's initiative in Beijing, which sought to mobilize informal or migrant workers whose existence is highly precarious. In this view migrant workers in China constitute something like a contemporary proletariat, whose plight has been "de-politicized" as the CCP has prioritized social stability over social justice, implementing a "no debate" (*bu zhenglun*) policy which stifles any acknowledgement of the systemic nature of their suffering. Here we encounter the ambivalent legacy of the Maoist period, as artists seeking to validate projects which might be seen as indirectly critical of the CCP invoke Maoist ideals of "art for the masses," exemplified by the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art of 1942. At the same time, any project that implies, even indirectly, that significant class divisions still exist in China after 70 years of CCP rule will risk censure. For this reason, artists in mainland China must tread a cautious line in the forms of criticality they promote. Yan'an, of course, was also the source of the infamous "Rectification Campaign" of the early 1940s which sought to root out Mao's rivals and consolidate his hold on power through techniques of "thought reform" (struggle sessions, etc.) that laid the groundwork for the Cultural Revolution over two decades later. The Migrant Workers programs epitomize the complex negotiations necessary for engaged art practices to be sustainable in the context of East Asia. Throughout all of the examples discussed in this book we can observe artists and art collectives seeking to understand the cultural politics at work in specific communities in order to work alongside their residents in a manner that has emancipatory and creative potential both

now and in the future. These projects have a great deal to teach us about the evolving nature of socially engaged art more generally, and will provide a valuable addition to the emerging scholarship on engaged art in the Caribbean, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Collective Situations: Readings in Contemporary Latin American Art 1995-2010*, edited by Bill Kelley, Jr. and Grant Kester (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), Izabel Galliera, *Socially Engaged Art after Socialism: Art and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), Justin Jesty, *Art and Engagement in Early Postwar Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), Carlos Garrido Castellano, *Beyond Representation in Contemporary Caribbean Art: Space, Politics and the Public Sphere* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019) and “Creative Uprisings: Art, Social Movements and Mobilization in Africa,” special issue of *FIELD* edited by Nomusa Makhubu and Carlos Garrido Castellano (Spring/Fall 2017), <http://field-journal.com/category/issue-17>.

# Introduction

## Public art in action

Meiqin Wang

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### Abstract

The introduction chapter contextualizes the rise of Socially Engaged Public Art (SEPA) in East Asia and illustrates how it contributes to the growth of translocal public spaces, fosters vibrant interactions of art and activism across the region, and essentially produces informal life politics. It posits that public art in East Asia has ventured into an expanded field of practices, a site of new possibilities where disparate domains such as aesthetics, sustainability, placemaking, social justice and inclusion, and politics mingle. In their efforts to tackle common challenges of ordinary living, the chapter argues, SEPA practitioners have engaged in a paradigm shift from perceiving art as “being” to art as “doing” as they strive to create opportunities for alternative encounters, multidisciplinary collaborations, and collective actions that enable people to work together to activate space, place, and community that matter to the everyday life of ordinary people.

**Keywords:** Socially Engaged Public Art (SEPA), activism, translocal public spaces, regional connectivity, ordinary living, informal life politics

### Introduction

Art, like other cultural forms created by human beings, constantly evolves along with the evolution of human society as it responds and sometimes partakes in the changing social conditions that involve politics, religion, economy, technology, etc. This is particularly so with public art, a category of art that is supposed to respond more keenly to the changing public needs than any other artistic categories due to the nature of it being closely associated with the public space. Originally a manifestation of the values and aesthetic standards upheld by the dominant power or elite social groups in a nation, city, or town, public art has become evidently more discursive, disparate, and diverse worldwide in the past several decades. Many grassroots individuals and organizations have employed public art to challenge the status quo of

established values and aesthetic norms in a bottom-up manner in order to make art more relevant to the lives of ordinary people, to formulate new social and power relations, to foster new ways of life, to establish alternative value systems, or to solve concrete everyday problems, among others.

Specifically, the practice of public art has gone through significant transformation from mainly consisting of monuments, sculptures, and murals as objects for commemoration or aesthetic appreciation in parks, plazas, and other important public areas in the cities to a wide range of socially engaged public art (SEPA)<sup>1</sup> that can take place everywhere, such as a rundown house in an old urban neighborhood, a remote mountainous rural village, or a common everyday living space. Initially known as new genre public art, this paradigm shift was first articulated in depth by Suzanne Lacy and her colleagues in the early 1990s in their discussion of new practices of public art in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Philosopher David H. Fisher, inspired by the emerging new genre public art, commented positively the development of art “as a vehicle for establishing connections at multiple levels and through varied media between persons and communities.”<sup>3</sup> Adopting people-oriented, community-based, and multi-medium approach to establish multi-level connections is indeed the ground-breaking contribution of new genre public art, which has inspired continuous interest in SEPA ever since. Across the Euro-American societies, we see artists and art collectives engaging in new ways of making public art in order to expand its capability for public engagement and social intervention.<sup>4</sup> This is accompanied by a growing body of publications from scholars who seek to articulate, theorize, and debate over the histories, modalities, potentials, and

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<sup>1</sup> Socially engaged public art (SEPA) is used here to differentiate itself from a more well-known term, socially engaged art (SEA). Although in many instances SEPA and SEA are overlapping and interchangeable, I propose that SEPA can be seen as part of SEA. The object of comparison for SEA is the practice of art as a whole while the point of departure for SEPA is specifically the traditional public art represented by monuments and sculptural installations in established public spaces.

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995). Also see Cameron Cartiere, “Through the Lens of Social Practice: Considerations on a Public Art History in Progress,” in *The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art, Space, and Social Inclusion*, eds. Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 13-26.

<sup>3</sup> David H. Fisher, “Public Art and Public Space,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 79, no. 1/2 (1996): 51.

<sup>4</sup> See Cartiere and Zebracki, *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*.

limitations of art that seeks to engage with the public and broaden participation from ordinary citizens not necessarily familiar with the profession of art.<sup>5</sup>

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, art professionals from various countries and regions in East Asia have been active participants of this global development of SEPA since the 2000s with their art-led social practices that involve creative ways to engage with specific sites, local communities, and the broad public in both urban and rural areas. In their practices, public art is no longer limited to producing physical objects to propagate the mainstream ideology or beautify established urban public spaces. Rather, it can take any or the combination of many established or novel cultural forms such as art exhibitions, workshops, cooperatives, dialogues, educational programs, ethnographic research, festivals, gardening, and performances. The primary purpose for artists and their collaborators who embrace SEPA is to enable the participation of people from all walks of life through artistic and creative means. Their public art calls for processes, experiences, and new forms of publicness that foster exchanges and collaborations among the publics for various civic, environmental, and political discourses such as community building, sustainable development, and historical and social justice. Along the way, existing public spaces are often repurposed and new forms of social interactions, civic spaces, and publicness invented through the collective endeavors of art professionals and citizens of various professional, social, and cultural backgrounds.

### **Translocal public spaces and SEPA activism in East Asia**

This new development has rapidly expanded and complicated the public art scene in East Asia, which by the turn of the twenty-first century was still dominated by monuments and sculptures commissioned by official institutions or commercial establishments. Benefited from the accelerated process of globalization, in which transnational communications have become

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<sup>5</sup> Major publications that lay down the foundation for or carry on the momentum of debates in the Euro-American societies include Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002); Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Cher Krause Knight, *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Willis, eds., *Practice of Public Art* (London: Routledge, 2008); Grant Kester, *The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in A Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Nato Thompson, ed., *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hell: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012); and Cartiere and Zebracki, *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*.

the norm and ideas have travelled at a much faster speed, art professionals have not only taken inspiration from new artistic theories and practices in the Euro-American contexts but also from their own Eastern Asian neighbors. For example, the practice of employing art to revitalize declined rural regions in Japan has greatly influenced similar undertakings in Taiwan, as discussed by Wei Hsiu Tung in Chapter 4. Then, the advancement of SEPA in both Japan and Taiwan is a source of inspiration for art professionals from mainland China and there is a constant, albeit small, flow of artists, curators, and scholars from the latter to the former for on-site observations at locations where major SEPA projects are staged.<sup>6</sup> The flow also comes the other way around as artists and curators from the former are invited to give talks sharing their work or to participate in SEPA projects organized in different places across mainland China. Furthermore, experimental art spaces in Hong Kong have hosted many collaborative projects and residency programs in which Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese artists work along with local artists and communities, fostering translocal interactions and networks of support.

These kinds of exchanges have created many translocal spaces which, in Setha Low's words, contribute to the production of new kinds of emergent public spaces because they "link multiple places through the bodies and embodied spaces."<sup>7</sup> Low believes that as people and ideas move across national or regional boundaries, the places they inhabit and the public spaces they produce work together to form "the network of political awareness, protest and strategies for participating in a global public sphere."<sup>8</sup> Public sphere here is not so much the eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere conceptualized by Jürgen Habermas based on the European context. Rather, it is the one that has taken on a global scale and become part and parcel of the rising global civil society where people from all walks of life and nationalities could "come

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Japan's Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Setouchi Triennale have attracted many Chinese curators and artists who visited the sites and wrote about them. For Taiwan, because, as Bo Zheng observed that among contemporary Chinese speaking societies, Taiwan has the most vibrant scene of socially engaged art, the practices there attracted much attention from its counterpart in mainland China. See Bo Zheng, "An Interview with Wu Mali," *FIELD: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, issue 3 (2016), accessed August 4, 2020, <http://field-journal.com/category/issue-3>.

<sup>7</sup> Setha Low, "Public Space and the Public Sphere: The Legacy of Neil Smith," *Antipode* 49 (2017): 153-70.

<sup>8</sup> Low, "Public Space," 166.

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# Author biographies

## Stephanie Cheung

Stephanie Cheung works primarily as a curator specializing on interdisciplinary, site/context-specific, process-based and participatory projects in communities and public space. In her capacities as lead curator of Hong Kong-based non-profit Make A Difference Institute and an independent practitioner, she approaches curating as a practice of care and responds to social and environmental challenges with lively syntheses of art and the everyday. Her curatorial portfolio includes *After the Deluge* (2017), an immersive installation reflecting on urban development and sunken histories in a monumental underground storm water tank; *Hi! Hill—Art In-Situ* (2018), a community-based art project in a 600-year-old village in Hong Kong; *Haneure Byeolttagi* (2019), a public art project co-created with families in Gyeongju, South Korea; *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2020), a walk-the-talk exhibition about sustainable living; *Aria* (2020), a pandemic-responsive promenade performance through a night-time greenhouse in the heart of the city; *Before a Passage* (2021), an orchestration of art, music, dance and literature at the poignant site of an idled pier; *Peoples' Art Connective* (2020-2023), a multi-part undertaking on cultural inclusion. With an MPhil in public art from the University of Hong Kong, she is currently completing her PhD study on participatory art, agency and worldmaking at the University of the Arts London. Her critical and scholarly writings have been published in journals such as *CAA Reviews*, *Asian Art News*, *World Art*, etc. She also writes fiction and poetry, and her text-cum-mixed media installations were presented in Hong Kong, Taiwan, the UK, America and Canada. She received an Asian Cultural Council fellowship in 2015.

## Yuxiang Dong

DONG Yuxiang is currently a Doctoral Candidate in Media, Art, and Text at Virginia Commonwealth University and an Adjunct Instructor in the School of Art at the University of Cincinnati. His research broadly speaking focuses on the relationship between aesthetics and politics, the de(globalization) of Chinese contemporary art in the age of post COVID-19 pandemic and the intersection between art, technology, and society amid global tech fever and tech race. His dissertation entitled *Repoliticizing the Depoliticized: Social Practice and Experimental Ethnography in Chinese Media Art* examines the origin and development of Chinese media art in the historical context of the depoliticized politics in the postreform age and repoliticizes the discourse of Chinese media by bringing social class and ethnicity back into its historical narrative. He has presented his research at College Art Association Annual

Conference; Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; OCAT Institute, Beijing; Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, China; and other international institutions and conferences. He has also published in *Media-N: Journal of the New Media Caucus* (forthcoming), *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* (forthcoming), and other journals. In addition to academic writing, he extends the scope of his work through popular writings. Since 2017, he has been an Accredited Correspondent for *Chinese Photography*, a Chinese magazine of photography, covering various aspects of photography and media art. In 2018, he was a recipient of the Joint Second Prize in the International Awards for Art Criticism.

### **Hong Kal**

Dr. Hong Kal is Associate Professor in the department of Visual Art and Art History at York University. She wrote about expositions, museums, memorials, and urban built environment in colonial and postcolonial periods of Korea in relation to the construction of Korean nationalism. In her book *Aesthetic Constructions of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, Politics and History* (Routledge, 2011), she examined exhibition culture by linking concepts of visual spectacle, urban space, and cultural politics. Her recent research explores visual representations of historical and social injustices with attention to transformative potentials of images in bearing witness to traumatic pasts. It investigates the critical role of artists and the affective modes of visual expression in engaging in ethical witnessing of past wrongdoings. In particular, her research focuses on visual representations of state violence in a history of Korean: the civilian massacres before and during the Korean War (1950-53), political deaths during the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, the Sewol Ferry disaster which killed 305 passengers including 250 high school students on April 16, 2014, and continuing deaths of workers in precarious and hazardous working conditions in contemporary Korea. In line with her interest in arts as social practices, her research includes socially engaged community arts that find alternative spaces for resource-sharing, social critique, and collective betterment and creative ways to take part in dialogical interactions and communal actions, while recognizing the contingent nature of communities. She published articles in journals including *Asian Studies Review*, *The Asia Pacific Journal*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Inter Asia Cultural Studies*, and *Korean Studies*.

### **Wei Hsiu Tung**

A native of Kaohsiung City, Taiwan, Dr. Wei Hsiu Tung is Associate Professor of Theory of Art & Design at National University of Tainan, Taiwan. She completed her Master of Arts degree in art education at the University of Warwick (1999) and wrote her doctoral thesis in social anthropology of art under anthropologist Nick Stanley at the University of Central England, Birmingham (2003). In 2010-2011

she was Research Fellow of Public Art at the Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture & Design, London. She has published in peer-reviewed academic journals such as *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, and *Culture and Dialogue*. Her book publications include *Art for Social Change and Cultural Awakening: An Anthropology of Residence in Taiwan* (Lexington Books, 2013) and *The Challenge of Aesthetics: Social Practice in Contemporary Art* (Artist Publishing Co., 2019). Tung's research interests cover public art, socially engaged art, community-based art practice in East Asia, social anthropology of art East/West, and contemporary Chinese and Taiwanese arts. She has directed a number of curatorial projects for contemporary art spaces and museums: *Remembering the Glorious Days of the Military Veterans' Villages* was commissioned by the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Tainan (2018-2019) and addressed issues of memories of the diaspora communities in Taiwan in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War; *Special Exhibition of Deaf Culture: Deaf People Can Do Anything* was hosted by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature and Cultural Affairs Bureau as part of the 2018 Tainan Museum Art Festival.

### **Minna Valjakka**

Dr. Minna Valjakka is Professor in contemporary art history and theory from a global perspective at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS). Before joining Leiden University, she was Senior Lecturer of Art History in the University of Helsinki, Finland. After receiving her PhD in Art History (2011), she opted to fully focus on research and she has won several research fellowships and grants that have enabled her to work in several East and Southeast Asian cities for extensive periods of locally engaged study. Through an interdisciplinary and comparative approach bridging together Art Studies and Urban Studies, Professor Valjakka examines urban creativity as a response to the distinctive trajectories of environmental issues, geopolitical circumstances, developments in arts and cultural policies, and translocal mediations. She has published extensively, including journal articles in *Cultural Studies*, *City, Culture and Society*, *Urban Design International*, and *China Information*. She has also written book chapters, exhibition essays, and a co-edited both special issues and books, such as *Visual Arts, Representations, and Interventions in Contemporary China. Urbanized Interface* (AUP, 2018, with Professor Meiqin Wang). She is currently finalizing her book, *Urban Encounters*. Besides her academic work, she also collaborates with art institutions and organizations in terms of research, exhibitions, workshops, and publications.

### **Meiqin Wang**

A native of Fujian province (China), Dr. Meiqin Wang received a B.A. in art education from Fujian Normal University in Fuzhou, a M.A. in art history from China Academy of Arts in Beijing, and in 2007 a doctorate degree in Art History from the State University of New York at Binghamton. Currently, she is a professor of Art Department at California State University Northridge, teaching Asian art courses that cover historical and contemporary arts from the vast continent. As an art historian, Wang researches contemporary art from China in the context of commercialization, globalization, and urbanization of the Chinese world and has written on topics such as artist villages, creative cultural industries, art and urbanization, and socially engaged art. Her major publication includes two research monographs *Urbanization and Contemporary Chinese Art* (Routledge, 2015) and *Socially Engaged Art in Contemporary China: Voices from Below* (Routledge, 2019), and a co-edited volume *Visual Arts, Representations and Interventions in Contemporary China* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018). She has also contributed many articles to peer-reviewed academic journals such as *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, *Cultural Studies*, *China Information*, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, and *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*. Socially engaged art and its related categories such as public art and ecological art are topics that she sees herself devoted to researching in the coming years.

### **Hiroki Yamamoto**

Born in Chiba, Japan in 1986, Dr. Hiroki Yamamoto graduated in Social Science at Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo in 2010 and completed his MA in Fine Art at Chelsea College of Arts (UAL), London in 2013. In 2018, Yamamoto received a PhD from the University of the Arts London. From 2013 until 2018, he worked at Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN) as a postgraduate research fellow. After working at Asia Culture Center (ACC) in Gwangju, South Korea, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University until 2019 and Assistant Professor at Tokyo University of the Arts until 2020. He is currently a Lecturer at Kanazawa College of Art. Since the PhD study, Yamamoto has chiefly investigated socially and politically engaged practices in contemporary East Asian art in relation to the region's history of war and colonization. He is the author of the academic writings that discuss socio-political works and projects of contemporary East Asian art, such as "Decolonial Possibilities of Transnationalism in Contemporary *Zainichi* Korean Art" (*Situations*, 2019) and "Socially engaged art in postcolonial Japan: an alternative view of contemporary Japanese art" (*World Art*, 2020). His publications include *The History of Contemporary Art: Euro-America, Japan, and Transnational* (Chuo Koron Sha, 2019), *Media and Culture in Transnational Asia: Convergences and Divergences* (Rutgers University Press, 2020), and *Thinking about Racism*

(Kyowakoku, 2021). He is currently working on the topic “art and ecology” in an attempt to reconsider the human–nature relationship in the history of post-war Japanese art.

### **Yanhua Zhou**

Dr. Yanhua Zhou is an art historian and curator, and associate professor at Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. Her research interests embrace transnational socially engaged art in neoliberal context, contemporary Chinese art and its geopolitical imagery. Her approaches include poststructuralism, cultural Marxism, feminism and affect theory. Her first book (in Chinese) *Artistic Engagement: The Aesthetic Paradigm of Socially Engaged Art* (China Social Science Press, 2017) addresses current theoretical research on this art phenomenon. Based on a semiotic study of the aesthetic paradigm of socially engaged art, the book explores three of the theatrical paradigms and found that the aesthetic paradigm of socially engaged art is a theatrical, dialogical-based and inter-subjective paradigm. Yanhua is an internationally active scholar in socially engaged art. She organized and co-organized various seminars and workshops in both China and the United States, and was invited to give presentations in several countries such as China, U.S., U.K., Canada, France, Japan and Mexico. Her research appears in peer-review journals, magazines and books including *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, *Journal for Cultural Research*, and *caa.reviews*. She is currently working on her second book project (in English) entitled *Art for the New Masses: Participation and the Institution of Art in Post-socialist China* which investigates the changing political and aesthetic meanings of “the masses” in art practices of post-socialist China, and attempts to provide an alternative scope to examine how socially engaged practices have become central to the negotiation of emerging categories of political identity of Chinese people in neoliberal era.



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