

GAFFER

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Song Ling

1961 Born Hangzhou, China

1984 Bachelor of Arts, National Academy of Fine Arts China

Prior to Song Ling's immigration to Melbourne, Australia, in 1988 he was one of several artists involved in the New Wave art movement in China. This movement is considered to be the birth of contemporary Chinese art and China in the 1980s was largely made up of various avant-garde, artistic activities and exhibitions. After graduating from the China National Academy of Fine Art in 1984, Song participated in notable exhibitions such as "85 New Space" at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. The exhibition rejected the experience of human emotion and strived for the rational; an existentialist mood prevalent amongst much of China's latter 1980s artistic groups in light of growing industrialization and which can be seen in Song's *People: Pipelines* series. Following on from "85 New Space", Song together with several other artists founded the Pond Society in 1987 and proposed for purity in art with the intention of evoking a state of immersion of saturation hence the term 'Pond'. Technique was secondary and sensation would be the driving force to move people.

Although the Pond Society was a short-lived artistic collaboration, its mission of returning art to the people and merging art with life was demonstrated in their first group event in June 1986. Titled *Work No. 1: Yang-Style Taichi Series*, it consisted of large-scale, recycled paper cut-outs of figures pasted on a wall opposite to the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art. Photographic reproductions of the event enabled wide distribution across the country and consolidated its ideology.

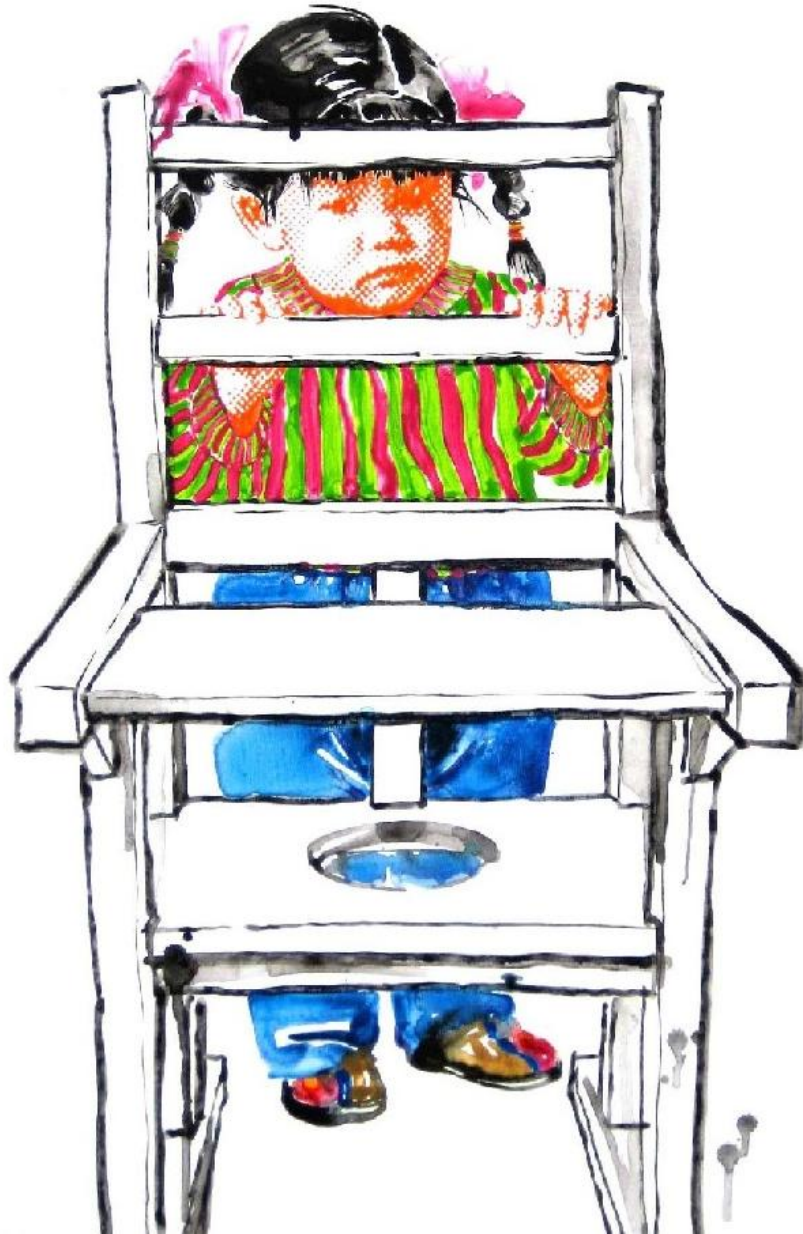
Despite Song's departure to Australia at a heightened time of the New Wave art movement, his presence during this important period influenced not only contemporary

Chinese art but also the work he would continue to produce in Melbourne. Most recently, his merging of the traditional and contemporary has resulted in his use of dots to produce images that carry strong influences of Pop art, modern-day print processes and digital technologies. These hand-painted dots which are applied in bright, contrasting colours are a direct comment on the symbolism used in traditional Chinese embroidery and folk art.

Song Ling had his first solo show in Melbourne in 1992 and has been a finalist in numerous art prizes including the ABN AMRO Emerging Artist Award (2006, 2007), the Fletcher Jones Arts Prize (2006), the Sulman Prize (2009) and The Archibald Prize (2008, 2011).

Artist Statement

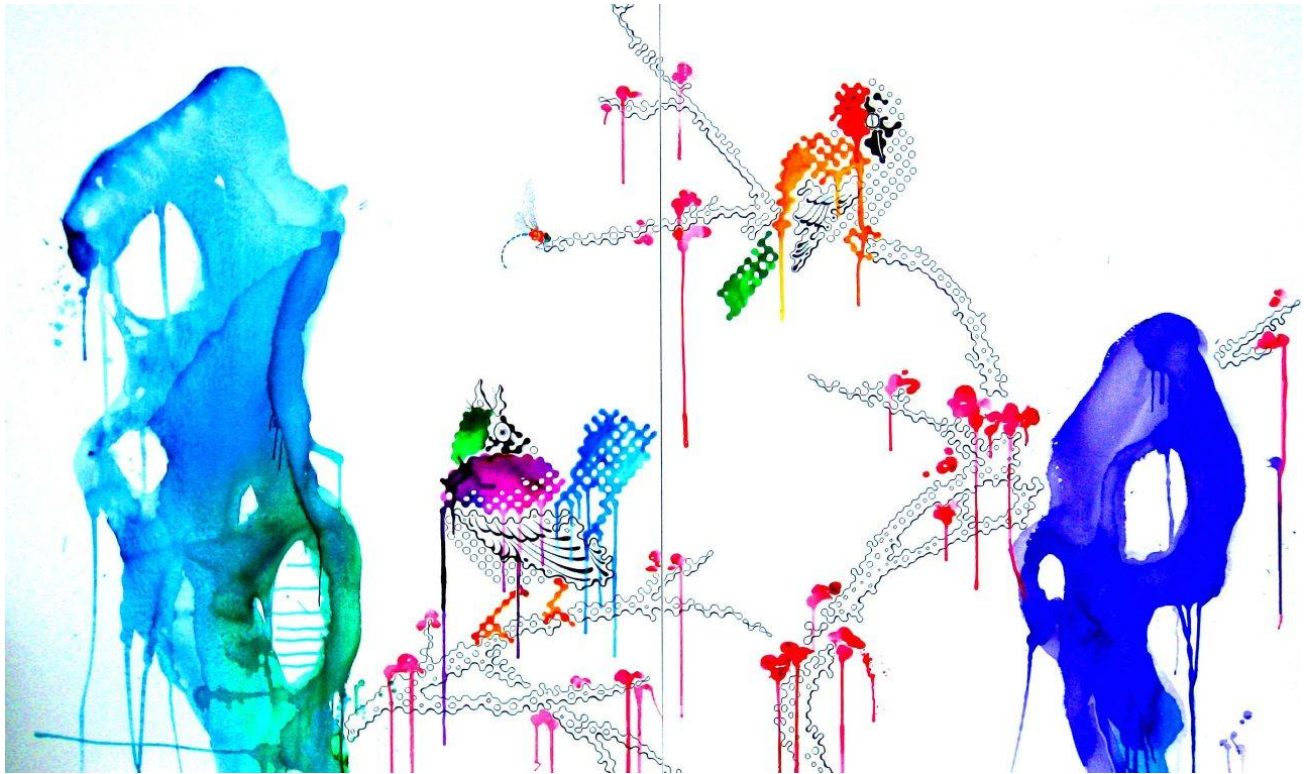
I took my inspiration from traditional printing technology. By abandoning the traditional approach to painting in the creation of material images, I produced the dot/shape effect as in printing technology and formed images through dots and shapes in an attempt to represent the digital age as it is now by giving the paintings a sense of the times and by merging it with the age.



A day in the life - baby chair
2011
101 x 122 cm
acrylic on canvas



Blue Bird on a Chinese Rock
2010
122 x 122 cm
acrylic on canvas



Bonsai (2 panels)
2009
101 x 202 cm
acrylic on canvas

SONG LING

Born in Hangzhou, China
Bachelor of Arts, China National Academy of Fine Arts, China
Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 *A Day in the Life*, Michael Reid, Sydney
2010 *Kaleidoscope*, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne
2009 Eva Breuer Art Dealer, Sydney
2008 *When We Were Young*, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne
2007 Eva Breuer Art Dealer, Sydney
2006 Niagara Galleries, Melbourne
2001 *Contemporary Ink Work by Song Ling*, Zhejiang Painting Academy, Hangzhou, China
1997 Caulfield Arts Complex, Melbourne
1996 *Paintings by Song Ling*, Pinacotheca, Melbourne
1994 *Paintings by Song Ling*, Pinacotheca, Melbourne
1992 *Paintings by Song Ling*, Pinacotheca, Melbourne
1991 *Mystical East*, Chinese Museum, Melbourne
1989 *Impounded Visions*, Frank Hardy Fine Art, Brisbane

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 *2011 Festival of Fisher's Ghost Art Award*, Campbelltown Art Centre, NSW
Art for Science, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
2011 Savage Club Art Prize Exhibition, Melbourne
Mosman Art Prize, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney
Citizen Collectors, Newcastle Regional Art Gallery, NSW
Prometheus Visual Arts Award 2011, Merrimac, QLD
Archibald Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Wynne Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Artwork to Tapestry, Tarra Warra Museum of Art, Victoria
Calleen Art Award, Cowra Regional Art Gallery, NSW
2010 *The 2010 Stan and Maureen Duke Gold Coast Art Prize*, Gold Coast City Gallery, Gold Coast, QLD
2010 Festival of Fisher's Ghost Art Award, Campbelltown Art Centre, NSW
Paul Guest Prize 2010, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
Melbourne Art Fair, Niagara Galleries, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
Wynne Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Williamstown Festival Contemporary Art Prize, Melbourne
The Stanthorpe Art festival Award, Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery, QLD
2009 *The Eutick Memorial Still Life Award*, the Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, NSW
Art for Science, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
Sunshine Coast Art Prize 09, Caloundra Regional Gallery, Queensland
2009 City of Darebin and La Trobe University Art Prize, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne
Recent Acquisitions from the Deakin University Art Collection, Deakin

- University, Melbourne
Coming Home, Linda Gallery, Beijing, China
Now 2.0, ACGA Gallery, Federation Square, Melbourne
Salon des Refuses Exhibition, The National Trust S.H.Ervin Gallery, Sydney
- 2008 *Sulman Prize*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Art Singapore 2008, Gaffer Hong Kong, Singapore
Melbourne Art Fair, Niagara Galleries, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
From Mao to Now, Sydney Olympic Park, Sydney
Australian Contemporary, the Rotunda, Exchange Square, Central Hong Kong
Archibald Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 2007 *Linden Postcard Show*, Linden, Melbourne
The 2007 Stan and Maureen Duke Gold Coast Art Prize, Gold Coast City Gallery, Gold Coast, QLD
ABN AMRO 2007 Emerging Artist Award Finalists Exhibition, Sydney
2007 Blake Prize Exhibition, National Art School, Sydney and Tour
Savage Club Art Prize Exhibition, Melbourne
ABN AMRO 2007 Emerging Artist Award Melbourne Exhibition, Melbourne
2007 MLC Acquisitive Art Exhibition, Melbourne
The City of Darebin and La Trobe University art prize 2007, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne
Art for Science, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
Crossroads, Toyota Community Spirit Gallery, Melbourne
The 2007 Prometheus Art Exhibition, Gold Coast
Art@mgs Contemporary Art Exhibition, Motor Works Gallery, Melbourne
Tattersall's Contemporary Art Prize Exhibition, Melbourne
- 2006 *If You Were To Collect...*, the Deloitte Art Exhibition, Melbourne
Geelong Contemporary Art Prize exhibition, Geelong Gallery, Victoria
ABN AMRO's Emerging Artist Award Finalists exhibition, Sydney
New Social Commentaries F.J.Foundation Art Prize Exhibition, Warrnambool Art Gallery, Victoria
ABN AMRO's Emerging Artist Award Melbourne exhibition, Melbourne
Melbourne Art Fair, Niagara Galleries, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
- 2004 *Sydney Affordable Art Fair*, East and West Art, Sydney
- 2001 *New Space-2000*, Hangzhou, China
- 1999 *International Contemporary Calligraphy*, Hangzhou, China
- 1997 *Pinacotheca Artists*, Pinacotheca, Melbourne
Chinese Painting, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 1995 *Chinese Artists Association*, Fire Station Gallery, Melbourne
- 1994 *A Place of Refuge*, Ballarat Art Gallery, Victoria
- 1993 *1993 Diamond Valley Art Award Exhibition*, Melbourne
- 1992 *Transitional Chinese Art in Australia*, East and West Art, Melbourne
- 1990 Raja Idris Gallery, Melbourne
- 1989 *The Light of Asia*, The Centre, Gold Coast, Queensland
- 1988 *Australia in the Mirror of the East*, Galleria Di Tonetto E Salla, Gold Coast, Queensland
Mayoon Fine Asian Art, Los Angeles, USA
- 1986 *The Pond*, a series of art events, happenings and environmental installations, China
Beyond the Open Door, Pacific Asia Museum, Los Angeles then touring

1985 *New Space*, Hangzhou, China
Sport in Chinese Art, China Art Gallery, Beijing, China
Young Advancing Chinese Artists, China Art Gallery, Beijing, China

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Terry Ingram, "Pond artist swimming in it", *The Australian Financial Review*, December 8, 2011
Suzanne Carbone, "Artist's multicultural palette", *The Age*, November 24, 2011
Kate Just, Song Ling Pop Artist, *ARTicle*, Volume 12, Number 1 and 2, 2011, Melbourne
Galleries, *The Age Melbourne Magazine*, Issue 64, Feb, 2010
Helen Redmond, "A stable influence", *Vogue Living*, Autumn/winter 2010.
Kate Just, Song Ling-Kaleidoscope, Exhibition catalogue, Niagara Publishing, Melbourne
Paul Gladston, "Song Ling in Conversation with Paul Gladston", *Yishu*, Volume 7, November 2008
Harriet Fesq, "Strokes of Genius", *Art Market Report*, Issue 29, August 2008
Megan Backhouse, "Art around the Galleries", *the Age*, February 2, 2008
Jeff Makin, "New point of inspiration in dot matrix", *The Herald Sun*, January 29, 2008
Alison Barclay, "Artist's brush with a deserving cause", *The Herald Sun*, July 28, 2007
Lu Peng, "A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China", December 2006, China
"New social commentaries 06", *Artwork*, Issue 65, December 2006
Christopher Heathcote, "Ideas along an artist's journey", *The Age*, April 29, 1992
Rebecca Lancashire and Mike Daly, "Chinese Culture Goes on Display" *The Age*, February 1991
Of Contemporary Chinese Artists, Chinese Research Institute, Beijing, 1988

COLLECTIONS

Art Bank, Sydney
ANZ Bank Collection, Melbourne
Deakin University Art collection, Melbourne
Hawkesbury One Art Group Collection
Pacific Asia Museum, Los Angeles
Private collections, Australia, Hong Kong, USA and UK

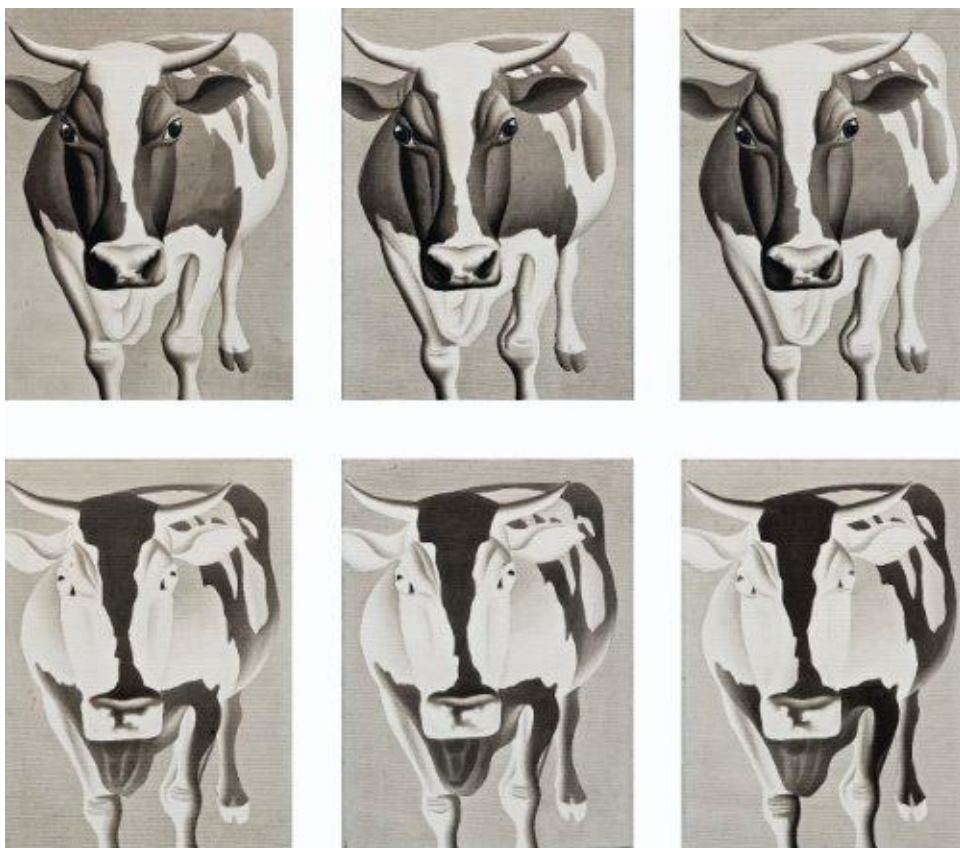
COMMISSIONS

Deakin University Tapestry Commission, "I'm Ready", 2009
Private portrait commissions, Australia

Sotheby's

Contemporary Asian Art

Hong Kong | 02 Apr 2012, 05:30 PM | HK0382



LOT 801
SONG LING

B. 1961

MEANINGLESS CHOICE? NO. 2 (SET OF SIX)

each signed in Chinese on the reverse and executed in 1986, framed
ink on paper

each: 87.5 by 63.5 cm.; 34 1/2 by 25 in.

ESTIMATE 600,000-800,000 HKD

PROVENANCE

From the artist

LITERATURE

Mei Shu, issue 230, People's Fine Arts Publishing House, Beijing, China, February, 1987, p. 8

Gao Minglu, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Art 1985-1986*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, Shanghai, China, 1991, p. 166

Gao Minglu et al., *The '85 Movement Vol. 1 -The Enlightenment of Chinese Avant-Garde*, Guangxi Normal University

Press, Guilin, China, 2008, p. 204

Gao Minglu ed., *The '85 Movement Vol. 2 -An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin, China, 2008, p. 620 (installation view at artist's studio)

Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*, MIT Press, London, England, 2011, p. 247

CATALOGUE NOTE

Rational Painting

The definition of the historical lineage of "Rational Painting" was crucial in both the artistic practice and theoretical discourse of the entire '85 New Wave movement. In the 1980's, when a myriad intellectual currents emerged, there was nonetheless a certain overall tendency shared among various artistic phenomena and practices across the entire country. First used alongside such terms as "lofty", "solitary" and "profound" as general descriptors of style, "rational" was ultimately elevated into an academic concept, and Rational Painting concomitantly came to designate an artistic current. This was due largely to Gao Minglu's essay "On Rational Painting", published in 1986.

In retrospect, the year 1986 was a crucial point in the entire '85 New Wave movement, and this was definitely not a coincidence. In the seven or eight years before 1986, Chinese youths experienced Scar Art and Stream of Life Art, which for the first time allowed artistic expression of the previously suppressed traumas and humanistic concerns. The "Stars Exhibition" also made them realize the importance of mass movements and the right to participate in discourse as the only means to acquire cultural-political power through art. On the other hand, Western modernist philosophy and art gradually arrived in China in the 1980's, immediately drawing the fanatical devotion of young Chinese. In this period, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre were among the most influential philosophers, and no doubt supplied the intellectual foundation of art. At first, people's thinking was dominated by concerns about individual existence and existential desperation, but gradually it shifted towards broader reflections on society as a whole and on human cultural traditions. In art, this intellectual shift manifested itself as a "transition from experience to interpretation, from emotions to rationality,"¹ as Gao Minglu put it. Different intellectual responses among the different young artist communities across the country also generated their respective kinds of art.

In this historical context, a "National Symposium on Oil Painting" was held in Beijing in April 1986. On this occasion, Gao Minglu gave a speech entitled "The '85 Artistic Movement," which summarized the discourse of rationalism originating in 1985 with such terms as "rational spirit", "current of rationalism", and "rational painting" and articulated its transition into a self-conscious movement. Several groups of artist representatives in the audience were inspired and agreed to organize a national large-scale exhibition using slide projections. This ultimately resulted in the "'85 Youth Art and Intellectual Currents Slide Exhibition and Academic Conference" co-organized by the China Art Journal and the Zhuhai Academy of Painting. The event took place in Zhuhai, Guangdong from 15 to 19 August, 1986. The "Zhuhai Conference," as it is known, can be considered the first self-conscious collective endeavour by participants in the Rationalist discourse. The three young artists Li Shan, Zhang Peili, and Shu Qun were designated representatives of Rational Painting, which confirmed their art historical status. In an issue of *Meishu* from the same year, Gao Minglu published the article "On Rational Painting," which further cemented the centrality of this concept in art theory. When the above history is considered, it becomes evident that the rise to prominence of "Rational Painting" was a historical necessity and not a coincidence.

In his article, Gao Minglu unequivocally categorized Wang Guangyi and Zhang Peili as representatives of Rational Painting. Members of the Northern Art Group, led by Wang Guangyi, "attempt to strike out its own path in the gap between the competing cultures of East and West. Through serial works, they reveal the world's breadth and profundity and the eternal principles of humanity. They believe their philosophy can be expressed through the

religious but anti-mystical atmosphere of 'solemn grandeur' and 'lofty stasis'.² Zhang Peili had come under Gao's attention ever since the '85 New Space exhibition. Gao wrote that works by Zhang and others in his circle "try their best to avoid rustic sentimentality, purposefully working against Stream of Life art and discovering modern consciousness within everyday urban life... On the one hand, they reduce the reality around them into microscopic and static details such as a street corner or a single person. On the other hand, they also enlarge such details to a cosmic spatio-temporal context. At first glance, this context appears dark and vague, bathed in the cold glow of outer space. A certain relationship is established between realistic space and the cosmic space of the imagination (often informed by indirect knowledge)."³ It is easy to see that Rational Painting, as Gao Minglu defined it, was a specific reaction against Scar Art and Stream of Life Art, with their overflowing humanism. As such, it had every reason to abandon the creative means of Socialist Realism and to explore the potential for abstraction and conceptualization in art. In other words, around 1986, when Chinese art had retraced Western artistic modernism in under two decades, the key question became how to progress towards postmodernism.

As representative spearheads of Rational Painting, works by Wang Guangyi and Zhang Peili from this period accorded completely with Gao Minglu's theorization. In 1986, Wang Guangyi underwent his first change of direction and began the *Post-Classical* series, in which he directly appropriated iconic images from Western art and subjected them to rational analysis and "correction" in a clean, orderly language to underscore the visual experience of classical art in contemporary times. Such familiar works as Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and David's *The Death of Marat* under "correction" in this process, which was also Wang Guangyi's period of practical experimentation in Rational Painting. The experience of the *Post-Classical* series would manifest itself directly in his later *Red Rationality* and *Black Rationality* series. Here Wang overlaid grids and English letters taken from Wittgenstein over his images, turning them conceptual. The artist's own subjective position became abstract and hard to detect, which of course ensured the "rationality" of his creative work in addition to clarifying his interpretation of ambiguity. Rationality would later inspire the *Mao Zedong* series, important to Wang's career and to art history alike. Wang Guangyi would later reflect on this period that "I believe my painting methods precisely expressed the rational spirit of the 1980's."⁴

Around 1986, easel painting was Zhang Peili's primary artistic medium. In the New Space exhibition he exhibited two works from the *Swimming* and *Music* series. Contrary to Wang Guangyi's meditations on profound philosophical questions, Zhang Peili focused on urban life and individual experience, and yet he addressed even such seemingly subjective and familiar topics without any trace of emotion. Whether in *Swimmers* or *Let You Enjoy Jazz*, what the viewer sees is a snapshot from life frozen and collected by the artist. In such scenes, according to Gao Minglu, "in order to re-examine things in a purely intellectualized manner, in order to transform the natural experience of the world into a solemn meditation on it, he [i.e. Zhang Peili] freezes his subjects' time, space, and activity. In so doing, he shields his meditation from interference from the sensible world and ensures the intellectual coherence of his imagination."⁵ Zhang's way of representing the world was not the same as the immensely influential Realism from before. It was not to depict a specific scene objectively, but to render faithfully an impression of a whole gained through a vision of a small detail. This is why details in his works are often omitted—a rational representation outweighs the delineation of details. Gao Minglu has described Zhang Peili's representational style as a kind of Neo-Realism and a prototypical kind of Rational Painting.

Around 1985, before the emergence of Political Pop and Cynical Realism, Rational Painting held universal sway in the Chinese painting scene. Works from this period laid the foundation for Rational Art and abstract aesthetics and paved the way for the later development of abstract and conceptual art in China.

¹ Gao Minglu, "About Rational Painting", *Meishu*, 1986 issue 8

² & ³ Refer to ¹

⁴ "I Express the Spirit of Rationality Appropriately - Wang Guangyi discovers the beauty of 'Cold War'", *Guangzhou Daily*, December 2007

⁵ Refer to ¹

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