



A WOMAN LOOKS AT "CLOTH WRINKLE STUDYING - RIGHT ARM," A SCULPTURE REPRESENTING THE RIGHT ARM OF MAO BY ARTIST SUI JIANGUO (CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM OF LYON, JUNE 2004).

The next big art movement will come out of China – at least, that seems to be the general consensus in the art world. Major fairs from Canada and Italy to Japan and Australia promote Chinese artists as the hot new thing. Trend-spotting shows of "Chinese maximalism" or the "new" Chinese video art regularly circulate the international museum scene. Even the US Federal Reserve in Washington DC has organized "The Face of Contemporary Art in China."

At the auction houses, works by celebrated '90s painters like Zhang Xiaogang (b. 1958) and Yue Min Jun (b. 1962) are gobbled up. Yet in the wider cultural market, it seems as if capital is hungry for anything Chinese (a recent Bloomberg report on Chinese art collector Richard Born even admitted that, though he owned a Yue painting, he couldn't identify him by name, referring to him as "the smiley guy" after the figure in his work).

While the Chinese art of the '90s was characterized by images that were almost classical in Western terms, spiked with subtly political content, the art becoming dominant now takes its cues more from the popular Cai Guo Qiang (b. 1957), whose specialty – fireworks – seems the perfect symbol of an aesthetic that is at once high-impact and unwilling to hold still.

Cai's recently completed rooftop installation for the Metropolitan Museum in New York is typically polymorphous: It incorporates daily fireworks, alongside a freestanding pane of glass with fake dead pigeons beneath it, two stuffed

alligators stabbed with sharp objects, and a limestone frieze featuring wildly divergent images from recent history. The feeling is of diverse experiences strung together, to carnival effect.

In step with this vibe, a young artist like Cao Fei (b. 1978) can offer an installation at Lombard-Freid in New York incorporating hip-hop performance and videos projected onto slapdash environments representing a montage of three different cultures: Japan, China and the US. Xu Zhen (b. 1976), appearing in the 2005 Yokohama Triennial, presented the sculptural evidence of a performance he had embarked on to "saw the peak off Mount Everest."

In itself, the slightly psycho aura of such projects is not that original (in fact, it's just a subtle intensification of the schizoid character of contemporary art in general). What's important is that their mixed-up, anything-goes character is the logical reflection of capital's mixed-up will to buy anything Chinese.

The most characteristic "style" in today's art world may be its "sectorism" – the building up of whole geographic sectors of production, regardless of whether their ideas are new or make sense. This is what sets the tone for artistic production, and it happens to be perfectly suited to capital's triumphalist take on the East. What it also means, however, is that those waiting for a Chinese art movement in the style of Western avant-gardes may be unfortunately out of step with the times.

*Ben Davis*