

Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art
Volume 1 Number 1

© 2014 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/jcca.1.1.45_1

LAIA MANONELLES MONER
University of Barcelona

Explorations of genealogy in experimental art in China

ABSTRACT

This article aims to show how different artists propose an approach to their own family tree and, at the same time, examine new family relationships currently being established in China. These creators explore various issues such as maternity, paternity, and agreements and disagreements between grandparents, parents and children. Other realities that are reflected in their works are the processes of adoption, and how the one-child policy – that began in the 1970s – has affected and currently affects families and Chinese society.

Artists such as Song Dong, He Chengyao, Xing Danwen, Lin Tianmiao, Ma Qiusha, He Chongyue and O Zhang and Shen Yuan deal with their own genealogy in their artworks, linking the individual and the collective, the personal and the social. Their art becomes a tool to focus on different problems that remain in the domestic and intimate sphere. Here, the transition from private to public becomes a political act. The objective is to question, to create spaces for debate and reflection.

KEYWORDS

Chinese contemporary art
experimental art
performance art
art and society
sociology of art
genealogy

INTRODUCTION

‘Explorations of Genealogy in Experimental Art in China’ stems from the wish to show how different artists approach their own family trees and contemporary family relationships in China. In their creations, artists deal with issues such as maternity, paternity, adoption processes, and the interactions between grandparents, parents and children that are present in current family contexts.

1. Carol Hanisch coined the slogan 'The Personal Is Political' in an article in February 1969 (see <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>) and Kate Millett published *Sexual Politics* (1969), both authors delving into how policy perpetrates a system of domination in which the public and productive space is associated with male gender and private, domestic and reproductive space is associated with the female gender. Many artists of the time would develop these ideas that are still in force and being worked on today.

Song Dong, He Chengyao, Shao Yinong and Mu Chen, Lin Tianmiao, Ma Qiusha, He Chongyue, O Zhang and Shen Yuan, among others, reflect on the plurality of dynamics that can be established in each family's lineage, from both a personal and intimate perspective, as well as from sociological and political viewpoints. These artists belong to different generations and, as a result, it is necessary to contextualize their sources of inspiration during the final years of the Maoist period and within a later scenario in which the consequences of the population policy, starting in the 1970s with the aim of lowering birth rates, crystallize.

By delving into their own ancestry, their descendants and the transformation of parental relations, their need to understand and rebuild the family structure emerges, either to strengthen ties or to shine a light on the gaps.

The artworks that will be presented in this exploration merge the experience of the personal with that of the collective. It is thus relevant to recall that one of the most characteristic slogans of the feminist movement was 'the personal is political', a slogan widely disseminated throughout the 1960s and 1970s.¹ A reflection of this is found in the artistic expressions we shall examine, which perceive creation as a means to explore family relationships, challenge traditional gender roles and revisit the physical body and its symbols.

The passage of the personal and intimate to the public becomes a political act since the main aim is to bring awareness, share, launch questions, create spaces for debate and give food for thought. Within such parameters art becomes a social barometer, as historian and curator Gao Minglu also reveals when referring to the practices of experimental art and, especially, to performance art, born in the early 1990s in China. Gao Minglu uses etymology to explain how the Chinese translation of *performance* (*xingwei yishu*) corresponds to 'behaviour art', noting that the relationship between subject and community is fundamental to the socio-political thought and culture developed by Confucianism, as he explains in an interview:

The difference between *body art* and Chinese *performance* or 'behaviour art' is that the body to the Chinese is not individual, it is already part of the collective, it has already been ritualized, it is already socialized, politicized. It is a long tradition that originates with Confucius, the individual body didn't exist in Confucianism, as it always belonged to a collective.

(Manonelles 2009: 241–242)

Behaviour art, then, enters into the field of ethics and politics, as one understands the production of art as taking a socio-political stance.

FAMILY TREES: KNOTS AND POTENTIALITIES

The relationship between parents and children is the foundation in the construction of individual identity and, therefore, communal identity. Family trees provide nodes and potentialities, which are collected by several artists including Song Dong, He Chengyao, Shao Yinong and Mu Chen.

Song Dong (1966) is a conceptual artist who, in several of his creations, draws inspiration from his own family history to relate it to the socio-political context. He uses photography, video, installation and performance art to unravel daily life. An example of this is *Touching My Father* (1998), in which the artist projects his own hand onto the torso of his father, while the latter observes the unique caress which is generated.



Figure 1: Song Dong, *Touching My Father* (1998). Courtesy of Pace Beijing gallery.

In this piece, Song Dong reflects the difficulties in communication between himself and his father. This is the result of a social and cultural environment that suppressed the expression of feelings and affection between men, including fathers and male children. It is this physical and emotional contact the artist wishes to recover. He takes a step towards creating a first contact, although this new proximity is mediated by the virtual projection of the artist's hand on his father's chest. *Touching My Father*, as the title explicitly states, highlights the need to remove the distance imposed and to touch, hug, caress. With this piece, the author states that it is essential to establish physical and emotional links by questioning the emotional repression of that period:

When I touched the image of his hand when he was smoking, to my surprise, he had been looking at the hand, took off his jacket, took off his shirt and vest, and finally my hand was on his bare back.

(Song Dong 2013)

The father is an extension of social conventions and rules of the revolutionary regime led by Mao Zedong. He is a figure of power, is distant and cold. I quote the words of the artist:

An example of this is my work *Touching my Father*. This work has been shown in few places but it is one of my favourites because in it I deal with my relationship with my father and this relationship can be related to the relationship between people and their country, with the state. The relationship between one man who controls and another one that is controlled.

(Manonelles 2011: 145–146)

The artist, activist, curator and editor Ou Ning, in his article 'The Experience of Family and Social Change Song Dong's Home and Art' (Ou 2011), probes Song Dong's relationship with his father, Song Shiping. Ou Ning explains that Song Dong's father was an engineer accused of counter-revolutionary activities in 1970, during the Cultural Revolution, and was sent to a rehabilitation camp in Hubei Province. Consequently, Song Dong had very little contact with his father, and only saw him during the few family visits he was allotted. His father became a stranger and, as a powerful figure, he was distant. Ou Ning also reminds us that paternal and maternal roles are very clearly defined in traditional Chinese families, creating the dichotomy of 'the loving mother and the strict father'. In such family systems the realm of affection is assumed by the mother while the father focuses on schoolwork and teaching social customs.

Regarding parent-child relationships, it behoves us to recall the struggle during the Maoist period to transform the rigid family structures typical of Chinese patriarchal society, while carrying out the ideals of the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Sociologist Amelia Sáiz López, in the article 'Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Society' (*Mujeres y género en la sociedad china contemporánea*, 2009), explains how Mao's government decreed the Marriage Act of 1950 to 'democratize' family relationships and neutralize any hierarchy attributed to the criteria of generation, gender and age. However, the traditional authority granted to men within the household and the economic dependence of women hindered practical application of the new laws.

However, it should be noted that Song Dong's father – despite not understanding why his son had left painting for experimental art – collaborated in the execution of the aforementioned artwork, creating a new space of encounter and dialogue between the two.

Song Dong explores his memories, as can be appreciated in the exhibition he conceived for the art space Pace Gallery (September 9 to November 27, 2011, Beijing). In *Touching My Father Complete Trilogy* the artist showed – for the first time in China – that this work included two additional sections. The second fragment, filmed by Dong Song, captures the direct contact of the artist touching the body of his late father with his hand. In the third fragment, again from the virtual relationship created by the projections, the artist greets his father in the water before his death. In the three projections, the art becomes a tool to connect with his father, to express these unique rituals of approach.

In *Father and Son* (1997–1998) the artist also explores the relationship with their ancestors by projecting the head of his father onto his own face. He establishes a simulated virtual exchange; both individuals become one when juxtaposing their features. Song Dong refers to genealogical lineage while questioning the relationship men establish in Chinese culture and, above all, claiming the need for emotional contact with his father. Along the same lines, in *Father and Son in the Ancestral Temple* (1998), he projects the face of his father in the columns of the Tai Miao Temple in Beijing. Here, it should be noted that this temple evokes the Confucian virtue and values of filial piety and, thus, the artist interrelates his family history with the history of this iconic space of ancestral worship of Imperial China. With the same desire to create and strengthen generational bonds, in *Song Dong, Father and Son with my Daughter* (1998–2010) he overlaps – with the help of technology – the projection of his own portrait with those of his father and his daughter, Song Errui (2003), who was not able to meet her grandfather since she was born after his death. The three portraits are juxtaposed one above the other, displaying genetic bonds

and similarities, but mainly seeking to strengthen contact between them in a symbolic way. In superimposing images of his own face and that of his father the artist reveals his need to be caressed by his father; the skins of both touch as a demonstration of love and affection. At the same time, the inclusion of Song Dong's daughter's face in the merging of the portraits is essential in this work, as in this way the artist metaphorically unites his daughter with himself and her grandfather, reinforcing emotional and family ties. The presence of those who have died sourced from his memory, reworked and rebuilt, helps to deal with the absence of the deceased and, in turn, is a way to introduce them to new generations.

This approach to his own lineage is not limited to the artist's relationship with his father, but also includes other members of his family, as we have seen. Several of his initiatives involve his mother, Zhao Xiangyuan (1938–2009), his sister, Song Hui, and his wife, Yin Xiuzhen,² also an artist.

Waste Not is another work that Song Dong has carried on for several years. The artist, with the collaboration of his wife Yin Xiuzhen and her sister, helped his mother to sort out a large amount of items that she had been systematically collecting after the death of her husband in 2002. In *Waste Not*, the artist and his mother gradually empty her home, classifying about 10,000 different everyday objects, such as plastic bottles, empty tubes of toothpaste, soaps, shoes, clothes, watches, ropes, kitchenware, bags and dolls, to be exhibited in several museums, institutions and exhibition spaces, including the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) in New York. Accompanying all exhibitions Song Dong installs a phrase in neon lights which proclaims: 'Dad, don't worry, Mom and we are fine.' Since 2009, after the sudden death of his mother, Song Dong accompanies the exhibition with the following phrase: 'Dad and Mom, don't worry about us, we are all well.'

Song Dong investigates, through the figure of his father, the relationships of power – in connection to tradition and the state – and the need to pass them down. Also in *Waste Not* we can see how the artist shares in the mourning of his deceased father with his mother, sister and wife. In *Waste Not*, time is essential, the piece of work is open; it is understood as a continuous process. It is a way to remember, to process the vacuum generated after a death in any family structure. The artist explains in an interview:

In 2002 my father passed away very suddenly and my whole family was deeply sad. My mother stopped talking with other people. She stayed silent and would just cry. She not only held onto everything, she let it build up everywhere, all over the table, all over the bed, all over the floor. I, with my sister, tried to organize her room, to make it clean and perfect, but this made my mother really angry and for a whole night I couldn't sleep. I knew I didn't want to control her again. So I had this discussion with my mother and said, 'Maybe in the future we can show all of the things you have'. My mother, in the beginning, didn't agree. She said 'If you show this, everyone will know your mother is messy'. So I told my mother, 'If we show this work I think it will really help me and our family' and then my mother agreed, she said, 'If it will be good for you then I can do everything for you'. We first showed the work in 2005 in the Tokyo Art Gallery in Beijing. When the show opened lots of people came to talk with my mother because our family had a similar story to theirs. Talking with these people during this time helped my mother get better. So this work really changed her life. [...] I think 'Waste

2. It should be noted that Song Dong and Yin Xiuzhen, his wife, participated in the phenomenon called Apartment Art by the historian Gao Minglu. This movement emerged in the 1990s after the censorship that followed the massacre at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Several couples of artists, including Lin Tianmiao and Wang Gongxin, Ai Weiwei and Lu Qing, and Zu Jinshi and Qin Yufen, stand out. They created an exhibition circuit in their own homes, with a small circle of intellectuals, diplomats and artists as their audience.

Not' really reflects normal life and the difference between generations. For example my grandfather and grandmother had a different life from the rest of my family, which you can see by the different objects and the relationship the object's history has with normal life. In the exhibition you can see my grandmother's shoes, small shoes because her feet were bound, so the size is small but the style is really traditional. There are also sports shoes belonging to my niece so you can see how different generations of woman have a different sense of what is beautiful. In *Waste Not* you can see the cultural life of everyday people. So it is like a little history.

(Volpi 2013)

In this work the artist, as discussed, takes on a close working relationship with his mother. The art becomes a tool for channelling mourning while at the same time strengthening the relationship between them and other family members, joining and weaving those threads across distinct generations. Ou Ning points out that in this installation the artist follows the Confucian dictates of filial piety: 'When they are alive, serve them with love and respect; when they are dead, serve them with grief and sorrow', and through the process of constructing the installation he resolves a conflicted situation between generations in his own family (Ou 2011). The historian and curator Wu Hung, regarding *Waste Not*, stresses that not only is it about activating memory, but also about converting a memory into a new experience:

He created this installation to facilitate three kinds of transformation. First, the project redefines 'waste' as 'art'. Second, it transforms an ordinary woman into an artist. Finally, it changes Song Dong's relationship with his mother, as they now form a partnership in creating contemporary art. *Waste not* finds meanings in bringing memories of the past with artistic experience of the present.

(Wu 2008: 254)

This project takes place in the realm of experience, as art fuses with life. It starts with the everyday and transfers the personal into a public sphere and, in this way, manifests a transformation, an individual and collective metamorphosis, resorting to empathy, to emotion.

This work can also relate to his exhibition proposal: 'The Wisdom of the Poor', presented simultaneously at the UCCA (Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing) and the Arsenale of Venice Biennale (2011). This time Song Dong recreates various spaces that evoke the houses and streets of the traditional *hutong* neighbourhoods. The artist recaptures his memories to emphasize the connection between space and individual and community life in the *hutong* neighbourhoods. He emphasizes values such as recycling, solidarity and creativity, typical of popular wisdom, putting them in contrast with a new scenario in which traditional neighbourhoods and the network of neighbourly relationships are destroyed to develop new urban plans.

In her chapter 'Socialist Nostalgia', in her work *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism* (1999), Lisa Roloff analyses this nostalgic look at the past found in the installation *The Wisdom of the Poor*. Roloff reflects on how history is reinterpreted and examines the symbols and discourses generated from the perspective of a nostalgic memory, referring to what she calls 'memory-practice'. The author focuses specifically on working women and

how history is constructed from their memories of the socialist ideals of the early years of the Revolution. Rofel explores these feelings and stresses their political nature:

Nostalgia is not an innocent sentiment. Indeed, it is not just a sentiment, for it also exists as a strategy of representation. Most social theorists perceive nostalgia critically, as a way of redeeming an idealized past that naturalizes contemporary relations of domination.

(Rofel 1999: 135)

An essential part of Rofel's recount of working women addresses the practice known as 'speaking bitterness', from which women created platforms to report and share their discomfort, their bitterness. Rofel emphasizes the effectiveness of the experience of 'speaking bitterness' in the potentiality of reinterpreting one's life from a new perspective. As such, many workers were attracted to socialism through such platforms. I quote the words of the author:

Speaking bitterness was a political praxis honed and disseminated by the party in the process of revolution. Party cadres used it as a vital method of teaching peasants and later workers how to speak as socialist subjects of the new nation. Speaking bitterness, in other words, provided a means of interpellation; it led people to conceive of themselves as new kinds of subjects, as subaltern subjects.

(Rofel 1999: 138)

In this performative exercise the experience itself is linked to the experience of other people, creating new subjectivities and a commitment to community. This practice continued beyond the initial years of the Socialist Revolution, and in the years just after Mao's death intellectuals were encouraged to talk about the difficulties they experienced during the previous decades, the main objective being to support the economic reforms started at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s.

This need to communicate intimate experiences through the 'speaking bitterness' community platforms, developed both in rural and urban areas, can be directly related to the need to expose one's privacy in artwork affecting family relationships, such as those of Song Dong and He Chengyao, among other artists.

He Chengyao (1964) examines her genealogy and shares the same determination to weave the past with the present, the personal with the collective, and the poetic with the political.

In her early work she incorporates oil portraits that reveal female nudity in blatant and provocative ways, breaking with the Chinese painting tradition and showing a new approach to the female body that was shared by other writers and artists, as we shall see. Art critic Liao Wen points out in her article 'Women's Art as Part of Contemporary Chinese Art since 1990' (2003) how transgression arises upon displaying the intimate, prodding the viewer to develop his or her own interpretations.

He Chengyao realized her first performance in the year 2000, currently being one of the few women artists active in performance art in China. In several of her performances we discover her interest in exposing and delving into her autobiographical experiences in which she searches out her family ties. In *Testimony* (2002) the artist shows three images in which she interacts

with her mother and son, investigating the link between different generations, that is, the transfer of genes. In *99 needles* (2002) she shows her face and chest with 99 needles, referring directly to the acupuncture treatment her mother received – against her will – from the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.

He Chengyao relates this performance to her childhood memories, especially the episodes in which her mother left the house naked, being mocked by the neighbours because of her mental illness. It is the artist who, this time, is presented naked and receives in her own skin the acupuncture treatment to rework a traumatic situation. With this performance she connects the past with the present, digesting the events, transforming the creative process into an antidote that shapes and channels discomfort. To quote the artist:

I thought about my mother's illness and her suffering and I got the inspiration. When I did *99 needles* I realised that when my body suffers my spirit gets released, so I used my body as a subject of suffering to free my soul. [...] By reading psychology books I found out that the doctor can hypnotise patients to make them explain their suffering in order to help them; this is why I think my performance returning to the past can be compared to this therapeutic method applied by some psychologists.

(Manonelles 2011: 60)

This can be related to the filmed performance *Mitchell's Death* (1977) by Linda Montano (1942). In this work, the American artist narrates – with the rhythmic cadence of a mantra – the emotions, dialogues and all the events occurred when she received a phone call announcing the death of her ex-husband. In the video that records the performance there is a close-up, in black and white, of the artist's face with closed eyes and acupuncture needles on her. Both



Figure 2: He Chengyao, *99 needles*, (2002). Courtesy of the artist.

He Chengyao and Linda Montano make up a ritual to reluctantly shape, to process a traumatic family experience, transforming creation into a therapeutic method designed by and implemented on themselves.

As previously seen, Song Dong approaches the father figure through his creations to smooth out rough spots and, in his work, his mother also participates as the main contributor to *Waste Not*. He Chengyao mainly focuses on the difficult relationship with her mother. Both artists turn to art to bring shape to family conflicts, to their emotional deprivation, and they invite their parents to participate in their creations to try to metaphorically resolve what could have been problematic or traumatic in childhood and adolescence.

Other authors that address the importance of lineage and the impact of the socio-political framework in relation to the development of identity are Shao Yinong (1961) and Mu Chen (1970). In their work *Family Register* (2000), the two artists recreate – from the imaginary – the lost family tree of Shao Yinong. They trace the family saga along 38 metres of sepia photographs showing members of four generations. The artists complement the portraits of each family member by indicating their names and adding their stamp and several additional annotations. Several family members wear the uniform used in the Maoist period on top of their everyday clothing and thus we see how the artists contrast the homogeneous, collective identity with the individual identity. Shao Yinong and Mu Chen, like Song Dong and He Chengyao, show how memory, souvenirs, the real and the imagined are mixed, distorted, and are reconstructed.³

3. This interest in lineage and autobiography is shared by several artists. Within the visual arts, the painter Zhang Xiaogang developed over several years his series *Bloodline: The Big Family* in which – from official family photographs of the Maoist period – he shows absent people, with blank stares. These large paintings display a fine red thread that links the characters and is reminiscent of their blood ties. These family portraits reveal discomfort, distress, and diverge from the heroic representations disseminated by socialist realism.

NEW APPROACHES TO MOTHERHOOD

Within these parameters, another angle that cannot be missed is the experience of motherhood and how it is structured in different life stages.

The photographer Xing Danwen (1967), in her series of three portraits in black and white, *Born with the Cultural Revolution* (1995), captures the naked torso of a pregnant woman in an interior space in which the Chinese flag and several portraits of Mao Zedong acquire a special prominence. Xing Danwen reviews the omnipresence of the great leader during her own generation, in a scenario in which the collective and the individual merge. The photograph of Mao Zedong in the room retells his presence in everyday life and at the same time alludes to gender equality policies – carried out during the three decades of Maoist power – while questioning the oppression experienced.

Another artist that explores motherhood is Lin Tianmiao (1961), who was one of the first creators to begin exploring experimental art in China. Jointly with her husband Wang Gongxin, she participated in the phenomenon that historian and curator Gao Minglu called Apartment Art, developed in the early 1990s, and, as the artist herself explains, was one of the first creators of her generation to begin working with conceptual art. She remarks that at that time there were only five to seven women who were interested in investigating new artistic languages (Manonelles 2011: 103).

In her installations the artist uses needles, thread and silk, referring to her own life in which she helped her mother in sewing tasks, while at the same time transporting us into the history of the Chinese seamstress. We find an example of this in one of her first installations set up in her own home (1995). For two months, and with the help of her friends, she drew up 20,000 balls of string connected with needles located in the centre of a bed. In her series *Focus* (2006) she presents a series of blank portraits in which the faces are covered

with a web of strings preventing the viewer from deciphering the identity and the sociocultural context of the portraits. The author herself comments that her generation portraits had a markedly political significance, recalling the glorification of Mao, and through *Focus* she aims to deconstruct the hegemony of the iconography of power that she had experienced (Manonelles 2011: 104).

In her exhibition 'Mother!!!' (2008), which took place at the Long March Space in Beijing, she offers an installation in which several headless female bodies are displayed and in which reality and fiction are juxtaposed.

Lin Tianmiao probes the passage of time on the female body, in its transformation. The artist reflects on maturity and how not only the body changes but also how relationships with her son, husband and friends transform. In relation to the absence of heads on the bodies of these women, the artist explains:

When I look at a traditional sculpture, if it has a head, the attention goes immediately to it. For me, in this series, the body language is more important than the head. This is why I take the heads off. I think that when I remove the head I'm speaking of my generation, not only Chinese but also of Western women my age.

(Manonelles 2011: 104)

Xing Danwen, in her series *Born With the Cultural Revolution*, addresses how that context affects the period of time that is pregnancy, while Lin Tianmiao focuses on another point in the lives of women: maturity. Both artists hold the body and its relationship with the environment as a starting point. In the case of the pregnant woman photographed by Xing Danwen, the emphasis is on the daily scenario of this young girl, full of allusions to national power figures symbolized by the portraits of Mao Zedong. Lin Tianmiao, however, does not depart from documentary photography but builds a series of evocative sculptures of headless women, sometimes with their bellies torn open. Lin Tianmiao, as she has stated, talks about the passage of time on the female body and the new relationships established in the social sphere.



Figure 3: Lin Tianmiao, *Mother!!!* (2008). Courtesy of the artist.

The psychological, emotional and social dimensions of Lin Tianmiao's work also relate to the artist Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), as can be seen in the exhibition 'Louise Bourgeois & A Tribute to Louise Bourgeois: Lin Tian Miao, Hu Xiaoyuan', at the James Cohan Gallery Shanghai (2011). This exhibition connects the work of Louise Bourgeois with two Chinese artists of different generations, Lin Tianmiao (1961) and Hu Xiaoyuan (1977),⁴ emphasizing common denominators while exploring memories, childhood and motherhood. The personal history and social history of the artists intertwine; a disturbing relationship with motherhood appears, expressing vulnerability, fragility.

Following this course, Harriet Evans, in her article 'Sexed Bodies, Sexualized Identities, and the Limits of Gender' (2008), observes how the representation of the 'sexed body' becomes a metaphor for social and political relations. The current context has abandoned the androgynous model of the feminine, neutered and asexual, pertinent to the Maoist period, to project a new archetype of feminine beauty that obeys the canons of consumer culture. The female body represented in the hegemonic media is young, sexually desirable and always dependent on the male gaze:

The metaphoric rewards held out to women for identifying with the images in women's magazines were the material and emotional emblems of commercial success; romantic engagement with wealthy young entrepreneurs, good looks, and exciting social and travel opportunities. The female subject of these images, however, was denied the power of agency given to the absent male spectator. As the home-maker, she consumed the commodities her husband created. As the beautiful and gentle companion, she awaited the guidance and protection of her husband. Her completion as a woman depended on the implied presence of the male. [...] Her eternal youth and urban identification denied the possibility of success to those women whose images were never seen in the same privileged places – the old women, the peasant women, the young female migrants working 16 hours a day in the factories of Shenzhen; in other words, all those who had the benefit neither of foreign travel nor of education and whose socioeconomic and cultural position prevented their access to the fashionable urbanite's pleasures.

(Evans 2008: 370)

We find subjugation and inequality both in women caught up in precarious economic situations and in young women dependent on the protection of their successful husbands. Precisely in contrast to these female stereotypes, we find artists such as Lin Tianmiao and Xing Danwen presenting us with new approaches to the female body and its 'reproductive duty', revealing knots and conflicts. Also, the decision to venture into other ways of approaching family roles and motherhood relates to the appearance, in the 1990s, of certain literary works which explored some aspects of female sexuality that had remained invisible. An example is Xue Xinran, who for eight years led a daily radio programme aimed at women in order to discuss their experiences, deconstruct prejudices and educate. In her book *Being a Woman in China* (1997) Xue Xinran collected the testimonies of women who described abuses they had suffered, the existence of marriages of convenience, and other situations of economic and psychological insecurity. Also, in the 1990s – from another angle and using the first person singular – several writers, such as Wang Anyi,

4. Hu Xiaoyuan resorts to memory in her installation *Those Times I* (2006), in which the artist brings together memories of her mother and grandmother on three large canvases bearing objects belonging to each of them (Manonelles 2011: 82).

Tie Ning, Chen Ran and Lin Bai, began to narrate their sexual and emotional experiences. They were initially censored by the Chinese government as it considered their work to be obscene. This line of work continued with various writers born in the 1970s, such as Wei Hui, Mian Mian and Zhou Jieru, adding encounters with drugs to their accounts of sexual experiences, all within a new consumerist framework promoting promiscuity and excess.

Professor and researcher Lingzhen Wang, who analyses transnational feminism in the context of a globalized world, studies contemporary autobiographical literary practices from a gender perspective. Lingzhen Wang applies feminist theory and the specific historical and social situations of these authors in China; she notes that the women are showcasing experiences that clash with the dominant institutionalized model:

Although Chinese women have been writing autobiographically throughout history, the selves they represent do not necessarily correspond to the dominant, institutionalized notions of the self and writing. They either fall outside the frame of official historical and literary studies or are appropriated by the dominant cultural discourse to further codify female personhood as the other/mirror of the endorsed male self: either feminine/traditional/virtuous or immoral/transgressive/dangerous. [...] The subaltern – modern and contemporary Chinese women here – do sometimes speak. The question, however, is how we can hear their voices without reducing them to the meanings produced by the dominant mode of representation.

(Lingzhen 2004: 4–5)

It is about listening to other voices, other discourses, to catch a glimpse of the plurality that nourishes all of society, avoiding any biased and reductionistic observations. Lingzhen Wang explains that the authors must negotiate with society and with themselves, executing a process of transformation through imagination. Another essential point is the impact and reception of their works, which will inevitably condition their relationship with society (Lingzhen 2004: 11).

IMPACTS OF FAMILY PLANNING

The family planning policy (*jihua shengyu zhengce*), known as the 'one-child policy', was initiated in 1979 accompanied by various measures of persuasion, reward, coercion, intimidation and sanctions to ensure its success. 'One-child' started as a recommendation and became a requirement in January 1980. It aimed to impede second-child births in rural areas, where the government mandate was constantly breached. Therefore, specific campaigns were established in rural areas starting in mid-1982 through propaganda campaigns and the relocation of 138,000 physicians and nurses and millions of Party cadres to rural villages. However, starting in April 1984, the birth control policy became more permissive and less strict in the countryside and also towards national minorities with populations of less than 10 million. Rural families who had a daughter were allowed to seek a second child if the two births were separated by at least four years. This was intended to reduce levels of confrontation among the population and the systematic violation of the regulations. In urban areas authorities granted a second child if the first child was born with mental deficiencies or had died. The Population and Family Planning

Law was adopted in 2002, and since that time those who did not follow the rules were not committing an offence in breach of the law, rather a wrongdoing. Also, since 2002, married couples consisting of two only-children were allowed to have two children (Gomà 2011).

This population control law creates serious social problems such as gender disequilibrium, a growing aging population, low birth rates and increasing social inequality. Those who have money can afford government fines, while the more disadvantaged are forced to obtain sterilization or abortion. Currently, there is a political debate evaluating the possibility of relaxing the family planning regulations and allowing families to have two children in urban areas by 2015.⁵

It is important, therefore, to address the perspective of artists of different generations, both those who have a solid trajectory as well as emerging artists. Among the younger generation, it is worth highlighting the work of one of Song Dong's students: Ma Qiusha (1982). In the exhibition 'Ma Qiusha: Address', curated by Song Dong in the UCCA (Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, 2011), this young artist showed her video *From No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili* (2007), among other creations, in which she narrates her own experiences while holding a razor blade in her mouth. This action is filmed in a static shot that frames the face and torso of the artist, coiffed and dressed as a Chinese schoolgirl, while she details different episodes of her life and reflects on her art studies from infancy to the last day of filming. Ma Qiusha herself states that in the video there are two storylines interwoven: the visible one and the hidden one. The visible aspect is the one she explains and the hidden aspect is what is in the razor blade she is holding in her mouth (PekinUnderground 2013).

The filming becomes the artist's diary in which she expresses – through her narrative and facial expressions – the pressure she feels to succeed, to meet society's expectations. Ma Qiusha says that when she showed this performance to her Chinese colleagues of the same age they expressed a clear empathy, since they had felt and experienced the same. Here, it is worth recapping that this pressure is connected to the population policy in China which focuses on the single child. Ma Qiusha talks about her own emotions and conflicts, the difficulty of meeting family demands and obtaining social approval. Ultimately, she presents the challenge of building her own identity. *From No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili* transmits the distress and tension experienced by the artist, the physical and psychological pain. Quoting her words:

From No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili is a piece filled with love and pain. In China, family relations are very strong, and parents give children their selfless love with a sense of forcefulness. This story is not only my personal story but it is also a story of many people in my generation. Therefore, many Chinese audiences can easily relate to the love and pain after they watched the video. I have designed a very simple and straightforward backdrop for this video, one that is very similar to the image of an ID photo. My language and my face are two clues/paths in this video. There is one obvious clue that indicates pain, and there is also another clue that indicates the pain hidden in my mouth, both clues have the same destination – pain. One is the psychological pain; the other is the physical pain. For someone who doesn't understand Chinese, he/she can reach the final destination at the first viewing, he/she can understand

5. At present, in rural areas it is only allowed to have two children. The merger with the National Committee for Population and Family Planning is explained in this article of *La Vanguardia* (2013), 'China practicó casi 330 millones de abortos entre 1971 y 2010', <http://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20130316/54368469844/china-millones-abortos.html#ixzz2Noepk8lo>. Accessed 28 January 2014.

the physical pain (because I spoke with a painful expression). After the first viewing, he/she can rewind the video and watch it again with the English subtitles which would act as the vehicle that works as an effective narrative for the pain. For Chinese audiences, they can foresee the outcome by reading the synopsis (where the psychological pain is more vividly portrayed). At the end of the video, the moment when the razor is taken out of the mouth becomes the entrance to another path: it will then return the story to the beginning of the video.

(PICA 2009)

The artist talks about her mental and physical suffering and thus it is necessary to return to the previously-noted concept of 'speaking bitterness'. It should be recalled that in the process of 'eating bitterness' and 'talking about bitterness' sufferings are processed and creation becomes a tool that transforms reality. Sociologist Amelia Sáiz López, in her book *Utopia and Gender: Chinese Women in the Twentieth Century (Utopía y género. Las mujeres chinas en el siglo XX, 2001)* explains:

Study groups were meetings where attendees recounted the bitterness of their lives, which was called *chiku* (literally eating bitterness) and *shuoku* (talking about bitterness). Through the exchange of experiences and the guidance provided by the Communists, they came to understand their situation and the origin and causes of submission, offering them a new framework to interpret their lives and the possibility to change them.

(Sáiz López 2001: 105)

From No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili arises from a subjective experience, but the artist is interested in prompting that her perception is not a purely individual matter but part of a situation in which many young people of her generation find themselves. Ma Qiusha reflects on how the one-child policy has affected and continues to affect families and Chinese society. Amelia Sáiz López states that another important point to note is that urban families do not differentiate the education of their children based on gender, placing the same expectations on both sons and daughters and improving, therefore, the levels of education of Chinese youth (as exemplified by Ma Qiusha). However, the author alerts us to the existence of gender inequality and recalls that 'after more than 50 years of egalitarian socialism, Chinese women hold up half the sky, but they do not yet occupy it' (Sáiz López 2009: 187).

Ma Qiusha's video ends when she removes the razor blade (which remains hidden) from her mouth to return it to the community. With this symbolic action Ma Qiusha aims to give food for thought and to encourage dialogue on current social issues.

He Chongyue (1960) is another artist who shares the same desire to focus on the consequences of the one-child policy in China. His work – belonging to a different generation from that of Ma Qiusha – does not draw on autobiographical experience but departs from an anthropological and sociological study based on interviews and photographs.

Starting in 2007, He Chongyue began developing the *Family Planning* project, for which the artist toured various rural areas photographing the iconography of political propaganda promoting family planning laws. To build the project, he collected images of different slogans appearing in towns and

on highways such as 'Birth control makes a great contribution to the present age and its benefits will last thousand years', 'Fewer birth is the best way for those who want to grow rich rapidly' and 'Boys and girls are all the same, and girls are also our successors' (He Chongyue 2013).

The family planning policy, as noted, was particularly unpopular in rural areas and, consequently, the rules were not followed. This resulted in the intensification of propaganda campaigns and, in 1984, the government relented and allowed two children if the first was a girl. As Amelia Sáiz López reports, mothers belonging to rural migrant populations⁶ and the wives of self-employed businessmen have been those who conformed least to the one-child policy (Sáiz López 2009: 187).

Family planning can be directly linked to the project *The End. An Aging Population: The Family Planning Series*. In this project, He Chongyue documents (through photography and video) the daily life of families staying in their home towns awaiting the money sent by young relatives who have migrated to the big cities to find employment. He Chongyue began to investigate the impact of family planning in China starting from fieldwork, conducted together with sociologists and philosophers, which consisted of interviewing elderly peasants from different provinces such as Hebei, Shanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou. These elders have lived through both the agricultural reform, developed by Mao Zedong, and the current technological transformation and unemployment in rural areas. It is them who, in the first person, explain how their children have had to move to big cities to find work and support the family, while grandparents stay in the villages to care for their grandchildren.

He Chongyue creates monumental photographs in which he portrays villagers as one big family. He captures those who remain, that is, the parents and children of the floating population that migrates in search of work. Within the framework of the photographs the enclave is essential, whether it consists of the town's public places or whether natural landscapes. All this helps to enhance the theatrical and dramatic effect of the portraits, using a monumental scale of photographic prints to render visible those who the government omits or excludes. *The End. An Aging Population: The Family Planning Series* also underscores another consequence of this process of migration from rural areas to the big cities: the progressive aging of the social fabric in rural areas, which paradoxically possess insufficient resources to attend to the needs of local residents. That is to say: it reflects on the unequal and unfair distribution of wealth in Chinese society.⁷

The End. An Aging Population: The Family Planning Series, like *Family Planning*, stems from fieldwork that is reminiscent of methodologies used by anthropologists and sociologists, with photography as a documentation tool. Moreover, it offers food for thought and to stimulate debate among a population that must deal with such government policies. He Chongyue gathers within these projects official codes and statutes to decontextualize them, giving them a new focus and as such provoking a '*Detournement*'⁸ in order to encourage reflection. Quoting Roland Barthes: 'The best subversion is to alter the codes, instead of destroying them' (A.F.R.I.K.A. 2000: 1).

The enforcement of family planning has affected Ma Qiusha and He Chongyue differently. He Chongyue has lived through and experienced the consequences of the process from the adoption of the rules through the past three decades, while Ma Qiusha speaks from the experience of being an only-daughter upon whom all the expectations of family prosperity fall.

6. Historian Daniel Gomà presented as a consequence of family planning the appearance of a floating population of migrants (*liudong renkou*). That is, people who are not registered in the official census but live and participate in society. In the early 1990s an estimated floating population numbered about 70 million and, at present, the figure probably exceeds 100 million people (Gomà 2011).

7. I develop this matter in my article 'Diasporas and Migration Flows in Chinese Experimental Art' relating He Chongyue's initiative with the proposal of the Spanish artist Marisa González, as both take an interest in revealing the reality of those who start a migration process to financially support their families, and warn about the impact of the absence of these people in their family framework. Quoting the article: 'This kind of family dismemberment also is discussed by Spanish artist Marisa González, who analyses Philippine women who emigrated to Hong Kong to work as interns in domestic service. The photographic and video project *Filipinas en Hong Kong* (2010) records the experiences of those women. They live alone because the law of family grouping does not exist and there is no work permit for the men and, on their only free day, Sunday, all of them gather in the city center where they invade and occupy the most cosmopolitan streets and the large buildings. Marisa González records these encounters and not only interviews these women but also contacts their relatives in the Philippines to

talk with them and to discuss how they live in the absence of their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters.' (Manonelles 2012: 63–80).

8. The concept of 'Détournement' refers to the alteration of certain symbols used by the hegemonic systems to give them a new meaning and use them as a weapon of political awareness. Here what is essential is the ability to surprise, to distort, to use irony to provoke thought.

CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

From the initiatives outlined here, the close connection between family structures and the socio-economic and political context in which they live is clear. Adoption processes are another possible core idea for analysis in relation to the present review on how different creators approach genealogical lineages and new family relationships established in the contemporary scene.

We must remember that since the late 1980s one of the direct consequences of family planning policy was the abandonment of girls. It is estimated that in the 1990s 160,000 children were abandoned, mostly girls, who became wards of the state (Gomà 2011). This situation influenced the processes of child adoptions to international families, as we shall see in the artistic works of O Zhang and Shen Yuan.

Artists of different generations such as O Zhang (1976) and Shen Yuan (1959) address this issue from an international perspective. Both emigrated to the United States and France, respectively, to develop their artistic careers, and it should be noted that their works reflect this transnational view.

O Zhang, in his photographic series *Daddy & I* (2005–2006), portrays Chinese girls with new adoptive parents.

The images are framed in luxurious well-kept gardens, yet the scene allows a glimpse of some friction, disagreements and concerns. There is a tension between these young girls and adult males who hold them in their arms or on their knees. In addition, it should be noted that O Zhang highlights the contrast between two different cultures by juxtaposing the Chinese girls with their Caucasian American parents.

Shen Yuan's installation *Le Premier Voyage (The First Trip)* (2007), presented at the '52nd Venice Biennale' in the project curated by Hou Hanru *Everyday Miracles*, also probes cultural identity. In this work the artist places in the gardens of the Venice Biennale large nursing bottles along with a video showing the first trips to the West made by Chinese children who are adopted abroad.

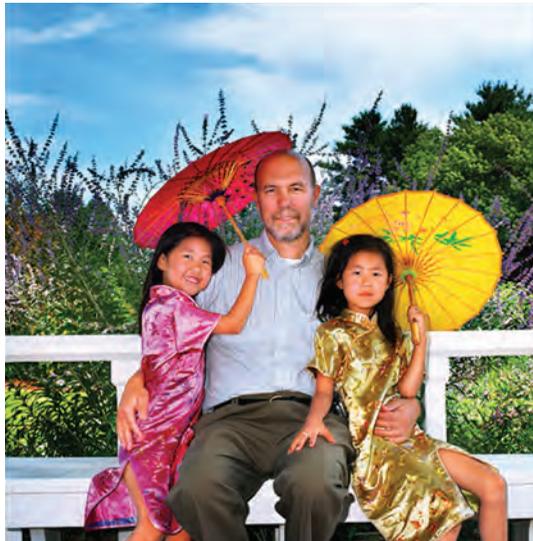


Figure 4: O Zhang, *Daddy & I* (2005–2006). Courtesy of the artist.

Like O Zhang, Shen Yuan explores international adoptions in the context of globalization. Several of the issues raised by these works deal with what happens when you arrive in a new country, how the integration process of these children into their new host families develops, how the culture of origin is amalgamated with the new cultural framework and how these people build their identity.

In conclusion, the proposed itinerary sets out from the work of several artists who blend both life and artistic experience. The approach to the family tree itself can be tackled from a wealth of angles that help artists to understand the frictions, show what is hidden, rebuild relational structures and strengthen ties. Many of the initiatives outlined here rework family situations merging the past with the present, the real and the imaginary, the poetic and the political.

However, it is important to remember that the social, economic and political environment is decisive in articulating all family lineage. Individual history and memory merge with the collective, and artists from different generations delve into transfers between socio-political structures and their subjective experiences. Thus, it can be noted how the artists – such as Song Dong, He Chengyao, Xing Danwen, Lin Tianmiao and Shen Yuan – who were educated in the Cultural Revolution regain their childhood and memories of youth under Maoist doctrines. On the other hand, the new generations of creators – such as Ma Qiusha and O Zhang – who have grown up as an only-child analyse their experiences in the context of a system where socialism is hybridized with a neoliberal economy. These artists reflect the evolution of a communist and communal regime towards a new individualistic and hedonistic model. It should be noted that – paradoxically – in a society in which hedonism is established, young people experience the anxiety to meet high expectations, as they have to deal with family and social pressure.

The daily routine is captured from a documentary angle or from a more biographical, metaphorical and poetic viewpoint. Similarly, we have to bear in mind that in many of these initiatives the connection between individual and social memory is not limited to the history of China, as many of the reflections raised by the artist must be placed in a transnational map. The challenge is not only to build their own identity but also to shape a cultural identity in a global scenario.

To summarize, the essential – as discussed previously – is that all these proposals share a common artistic goal: to shine light on certain problems that linger in the domestic sphere and offer them back to society. In this exploration, the artists' inspirations stem from family stories or from their own life stories in order to illustrate alternative discourses to the official hegemonic models. These creators take responsibility for focusing on that which others have wanted to obviate, omit or hide and, as such, have strengthened their commitment to social and political change. Thus, we should remember, as historian Gao Minglu states when he points to the use of the term 'behaviour art' to speak of performance art in China, that this artistic praxis integrates itself into the fields of ethics and politics. As was previously described, in the communal practice of 'speaking bitterness', the artists travel deep into their existence and its connection to the historical and social context in order to create consciousness and transform the reality in which they live.

The art becomes a tool to share, question and rethink these realities at the collective level. The artists presented here create new spaces for dialogue and delve into the potentiality of vulnerability, recovering the world of emotions and

claiming the ability to be emotional and to emote, to affect and to let oneself be 'affectionate' in order to transform – through routine praxis – society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is one part of the investigation projects I + D + I MEC: GREGA/1 (University of Barcelona, HAR2011-24212/2012-2014) and Interasia (Autonomous University of Barcelona, FFI2011-29090).

REFERENCES

- A.F.R.I.K.A Group/Blisset, Luther & Brünzels, Sonja (2000), *Manual de guerrilla de la comunicación*, Barcelona: Virus editorial.
- Evans, Harriet (2008), 'Sexed bodies, sexualized identities, and the limits of gender', *China Information*, Vol XXI (2): pp. 361–386.
- Gao, Minglu (2005), *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese art*, Buffalo and Beijing: Albright-Knox Gallery and the Today Art Museum.
- Gomà, Daniel (2011) '¡No más niños!: Análisis y balance de la política china del Hijo Único treinta años después de su implantación', in *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*. Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 1 January 2011, vol. XV, n° 348, <http://www.ub.es/geocrit/sn/sn-348.htm>. Accessed November 2013.
- He, Chengyao (2013), *He Chongyue*, <http://www.hechongyue.com/photo1.html>. Accessed 28 January 2014.
- Liao, Wen (2003) 'Women's art' as part of contemporary Chinese art since 1990', in Wu Hung, Wang Huangsheng and Feng Boyi (eds), *The First Guangzhou Triennial. Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990–2000)*, Guangzhou: Guangzhou Museum of Art, pp. 60–66.
- PekinUnderground (2013), 'Décryptage de l'oeuvre No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili par l'artiste Ma Qiusha', recorded interview with Ma Qiusha, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xp392n_decryptage-de-l-yuvre-no-4-pingyuanli-to-no-4-tianqiaobeili-par-l-artiste-ma-qiusha_creation#.UR6ShtkueCk. Accessed 28 January 2014.
- PICA (Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (2009), 'ON SIGHT: Ma Qiusha – From No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili', interview with Ma Qiusha, http://urbanhonking.com/pica/2009/08/31/on_sight_ma_qiusha_from_no4_pi/. Accessed 28 January 2014.
- Manonelles Moner, Laia (2009), 'Arte de acción en China: La producción artística como compromiso' (Performance art in China: Artistic production as a commitment'), *InterAsia Papers*, 9, pp. 1–20.
- (2011), *Arte experimental en China: Conversaciones con artistas* (Experimental art in China: Conversations with artists), Barcelona: Bellaterra.
- (2012), 'Diasporas and migration flows in Chinese experimental art', *International Journal of Current Chinese Studies*, 3, pp. 63–80.
- McDougall, Bonnie S (2005): 'Discourse on privacy by women writers in late Twentieth century china', *Sage publications*, London, thousand oaks, New Delhi. Vol. XIX (I), pp. 97–119.
- Montano, Linda (1977), *Mitchell's Death ...*
- Ou, Ning (2001), 'The experience of family and social change: Song Dong's home and art', in *Song Dong: Dad and Mom, Don't Worry About Us, We Are All Well*, San Francisco, CA: Yerba Buena Center for Arts, <http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/article.asp?id=848>. Accessed 28 January 2014.

- Rofel, Lisa (1999), *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- (2007), *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality and Public Culture*, United States of America: Duke University Press.
- Sáiz López, Amelia (2001), *Utopía y género. Las mujeres chinas en el siglo XX (Utopia and Gender. Chinese Women in the Twentieth Century)* Barcelona: Bellaterra.
- (2009), 'Mujeres y género en la sociedad china contemporánea' (Women and gender in contemporary Chinese society), *Visions de la Xina: cultura multimil·lenària, 2009*, Lleida: Institut d'Estudis Ilerdencs de la Diputació de Lleida, pp. 169–190.
- Song, Dong (2013), 'Interview with Song Dong', <http://www.pace-beijing.com/en/newsdetails.aspx?id=14>. Accessed January 2013. Link no longer active, February 2014.
- Shu, Yang (2005), 'Performance art and live art in China. Why do "live art" in China?', in Shu Y. and D. Brine (ed.), *China Live, Reflections on Contemporary Performance Art*, China: Chinese Arts Centre, Live Art UK, Live Art Development Agency, DaDao Live Art Festival, Beijing, pp. 17–39.
- Volpi, Bruna (2013), 'Song Dong: Waste Not', interview with Song Dong, www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/12683/1/song-dong-waste-not. Accessed 28 January 2014.
- Wu, Hung (2008), *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art, China*, Hong Kong: Timezone 8.
- Xue, Xinran (2003), *Ser dona a la Xina (Being a woman in China)*, Barcelona: Edicions 62.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Manonelles Moner, L. (2014), 'Explorations of genealogy in experimental art in China', *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 1: 1, pp. 45–63, doi: 10.1386/jcca.1.1.45_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Laia Manonelles Moner is a Ph.D. in History of Art at University of Barcelona. She is a lecturer professor at the University of Barcelona and she has taught contemporary Chinese art in the Master of Chinese studies at the University Pompeu Fabra of Barcelona. She is a member of the research groups GREGA (University of Barcelona) and Interasia (Autonomous University of Barcelona). Also, she is a researcher associate at SOAS (School of African and Asian Studies, London).

Currently her research focuses on Chinese art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; performance art in China; Interactions and cultural relations between China and the West; Chinese artists in the international Diaspora; Chinese experimental art and transnational exhibition practice. She published the book *Arte Experimental en China: Conversaciones con Artistas (Experimental Art in China: Conversations with Artists, 2011)*.

Contact: Universitat de Barcelona, Facultat d'Història de l'art. Carrer de Montalegre 6, Planta 5, 08001 Barcelona, Spain.
E-mail: laiamanonelles@ub.edu

Laia Manonelles Moner has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

Intellect books

publishers of original thinking | www.intellectbooks.com



Photo: © Ed Glendinning, George Stoll, *Untitled*, 2012.

Living and Sustaining a Creative Life

Essays by 40 Working Artists

Edited by Sharon Loudon

ISBN 978-1-78320-012-2 | 176pp
£24.95, \$40.00 | 2013
Paperback | 230x170mm
eBook available

In this day and age, when art has become more of a commodity and art-school graduates are convinced that they can only make a living from their work by attaining gallery representation, it is more important than ever to show the reality of how a professional, contemporary artist sustains a creative practice over time. The 40 essays collected here are written in the artists' own voices and take the form of narratives, statements and interviews. Each story is different and unique, but the common thread is an ongoing commitment to creativity, inside and outside the studio. Both day-to-day and big picture details are revealed, showing how it is possible to sustain a creative practice that contributes to the ongoing dialogue in contemporary art. These stories will inform and inspire any student, young artist and art enthusiast, and will help redefine what 'success' means to a professional artist.

Sharon Loudon is a practising, professional artist living and working in Brooklyn, USA. Her work has been exhibited at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Birmingham Museum of Art, Neuberger Museum and the Weisman Art Museum, among other venues, and it is held in public collections such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, Weatherspoon Art Museum and the National Gallery of Art.



We are here to support your ideas and get them published. To send us your new book or journal proposal, please download a questionnaire from www.intellectbooks.com.



To view our catalogue or order our books and journals visit www.intellectbooks.com

Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Road,
Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 3JG.

Tel: +44 (0) 117 9589910
Fax: +44 (0) 117 9589911