

PRESS RELEASE

THE CROCODILE IN THE POND

11 Artists from ShanghART

Baroque architecture and contemporary art from China starting this June 12th at St. Urban: there could be no better way of contrasting the buildings of the former Cistercian monastery, steeped in history, with the here and now of the current art scene.

With "The Crocodile in the Pond", curator Alexandra Grimmer introduces a radically new mind-set and proves primarily one thing with the works of 11 artists from ShanghART Gallery: This young generation does not want to fit into a certain image or an aesthetic school anymore.

Analogous to the metaphor of the crocodile which makes the fish swim faster as soon as it is placed in the pond with them, the art scene has been transformed by the young generation of Chinese artists. Contemporary Chinese art no longer hides behind role models and masters. A new mind-set has made an entrance into studios and thus into art production. A mind-set in which artists no longer define themselves as Bohemians, but rather as thinkers and successful think tanks for society. They have something to say and they say it loud and clear. They make use of 21st century technological innovations, comment on social conventions with a twinkle in their eye, and are intrepid in working in gigantic dimensions.

A new self-awareness has thus been established which has found expression in contemporary art production and is anything but conformist. On the contrary, conformity would be the complete opposite of this attitude.

The complete opposite of adaptation: idiosyncratic and venturesome

In June 2016 top-class new art meets with the tranquillity of the simple white baroque architecture of the Cistercians. In this unusual environment the exhibition of artworks from ShanghART Gallery runs in a circuit through the buildings of the St Urban Monastery from the cellars via the imposing baroque staircase to the ceremonial hall.

None of the artists presented at this exhibition balks at innovation in their work. Seldom were so many completely different approaches to be observed. And yet they all bear the same signature. This young generation no longer wishes to fit into a particular image, a certain tradition. What counts is absolute individualism, coupled with contemplation and talent.

Artists and critics in the West not uncommonly find their points of reference for evaluating the global art scene in their own history. Yet a vantage point in history that attempts to evaluate the present, encounters a void. While works used often to emerge over a period of years, and innovations, experiments and shifts in direction in works were subjected to



THE CROCODILE IN THE POND

11 Artists from ShanghART

Curated by Alexandra Grimmer

Press Conference

Sunday June 12, 3:30 pm

Opening of the Exhibition

Sunday June 12, 5 pm

In Collaboration with ART BASEL:

Monday June 13th, 11 p.m.

Art Talk: Uli Sigg in conversation with Sun Xun and Yang Zhenzhong

Friday June 17, 7 pm

Zhou Tiehai „Will/We Must“ (1996) in the cinema hall of the monastery

Shi Yong Solo Project at Abbey St. Urban

Opening times during ART BASEL week
June 13-19, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

MUSEUM ART ST URBAN &
ABBAY ST URBAN
Lucerne - Switzerland

press

Eva Bauer & Barbara Wetzlmair
presse@eveandbar.com
+43 660 636 59 80

rigorous contemplation, a high degree of risk-taking now characterises work in the art scene in China.

Sun Xun who has been celebrated as a young star since his time at the Academy has for years demonstrated a remarkable stringency in his work. Scarcely any artist born in the 1980s has been represented in so many prominent exhibitions and so extensively acknowledged at solo presentations as he has. Among Sun Xun's works to be presented at St Urban are his series of drawings "People's Republic Zoo" and the corresponding trick film, as well as his conceptual work "Jing Bang Country" (2014), for which one can acquire citizenship with the associated package of essentials for a new identity. A land full of promise, with 12 flags on which the cornerstones of the system, such as freedom of expression and open ideologies, are depicted. The guest refectory in which the genealogies of the bishops appointed to St Urban are documented forms the ideal space for this installation.

Xu Zhen attracted attention at an early stage for of his idiosyncratic work addressing taboo themes such as violence and sexuality. At the same time he was an early participant in major international collections. Today he impresses the viewer with his colossal sculptures, as is the case at "The Crocodile in the Pond" where his work "Eternity – Heracles, Tang Dynasty Standing Bodhisattva" (2014) ruthlessly combines the artistic traditions of West and East before the backdrop of the monastery's baroque staircase.

Once known as an enfant terrible, **Xu Zhen** has mutated in recent years into the darling of China's most elite collectors. In 2015 both the Long Museum in Shanghai and Kunsthaus Bregenz devoted a retrospective to the artist who was born in 1977. A year earlier he had a comprehensive solo exhibition at the UCCA in Beijing. Currently his works can be viewed at an exhibition together with 6 other artists from China at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris.

Call for innovation

Zhang Ding too attracted attention during the first ten years of his creative activity with brash, nonconformist projects. He has never repeated the same method. Each work has tested the acceptance of the viewer – a Chinese audience at the time – all over again. Then came large solo presentations, such as those in 2015 at the K11 in Shanghai and the ICA in London, where he created special installations as stages for rock musicians whom he orchestrated for his performances. For the opening of his solo exhibition at the ShanghART Gallery Beijing in 2014, he reconstructed the legendary 1993 "Monsters of Rock" concert at the military airport in Moscow, demanding communication as against rigid systems.

The aspect of ongoing innovation of his own work also applies to **Yang Zhenzhong**. The video artist who was born in the 1960s receives regular

invitations to collaborate with his younger colleagues. He is versatile in his thought and is aware of the many aspects of his area of work. Yang Zhenzhong never repeats himself in his forms of expression and reveals new possibilities in the field of video and installation art in each new work. The artist's work is fascinating thanks to his completely unique, totally focussed vision which enables the viewer to submerge himself in the artist's world during a video. For the exhibition at St Urban his work "Passage" (2012-13) with object images and a video was selected. Also to be viewed is his 6-channel video "Disinfect", created in 2016, in which the viewer finds himself confronted with wordless vituperations in the sense of Kierkegaard's frozen moment in time.

Extreme experiments and the tranquility of the pictures

Similarly focussed are **Jiang Pengyi** and **Han Feng** when they drift off in their work. Jiang Pengyi achieves the results he aims for in his photographs by means of extreme experiments in which he uses the camera as a paintbrush or on another occasion, as in the "Dark Addiction Series", shown at St Urban, creates the result solely by means of lighting effects used during the development process.

Han Feng's fine and quiet pictures are reminiscent of the techniques from Chinese traditional ink wash painting. While working, he retires into his own world by creating congruent objects and pictures evocative of common reference points: his large-size canvasses recall fragile paper works and his "Clothes for...", "Shoes for..." remind of meticulous casings and forms.

Other artists

The artist duo **Birdhead** attracted attention 10 years ago thanks to their apparently fleeting, but extremely apt surveys of their home city of Shanghai. Between moments of experience and echoes of documentation the numerous photographs travel through the life of a whole generation. As Lorenz Helbling so aptly says in his interview with Xenia Piëch, you have to have seen many photographs by Birdhead to have seen a single one. An inner unrest which can also be interpreted as creative aggression drives the work of the two artists who were born in Shanghai in 1979 and 1980.

Works involving installations will be seen by respectively **Chen Xiaoyun**, **Lu Lei** and **Shao Yi** at St. Urban. Lu Lei likes to include transistors in his pieces so the observer is constantly being brought to mind a form of movement, where an unstoppable shape takes course of in the placement of things.

The work of **Shao Yi** is multifaceted and characterised by the use of a wide variety of materials. The artist, resident in Hangzhou, uses glass and metal. He has created objects in scaffolding and changed the function of diverse recycled materials. His works are closely associated with the structures of society and with its articles of daily use which have changed considerably with the social transformation of the last 20 years. In his

“Exposure Series” shown at St Urban he includes everyday items such as buckets and boxes which were in use over generations and makes them function as cameras recording incidental images.

In his work, **Chen Xiaoyun** combines different media through which the artists’s thought runs like a clear line. Photography and video complement each other in his exhibits and installations, charged with content and often based on literature.

Literature also plays a significant role in the works of **Shi Yong**. He makes texts illegible, reduces the content of his works to a minimum, thus reaching the ultimate consequence of beautiful forms. In the unique sanctuary of the monastery church the installation from Shi Yong’s latest series: “Let All Potential Be Internally Resolved Using Beautiful Form” is to be viewed. As a result, the opulent baroque architecture gains in the work of this versatile artist a counterpart which is minimalist in form but charged with content due to illegible texts. The poem, “A Bunch of Happy Phantasies”, in inverted neon script, will be shown above the architecturally unique baroque staircase at St Urban. Despite, or perhaps even because of the difficulty of understanding its content, the poem exudes an all the more intensive atmosphere.

ARTISTS

Birdhead 鸟头 (est. 2004 in Shanghai, Ji Weiju *1980, Song Tao *1979)	Photography
Chen Xiaoyun 陈晓云 (*1971 in Hubei, based in Beijing)	Photography, Installation
Han Feng 韩锋 (*1972 in Harbin, based in Shanghai)	Paintings, Objects
Jiang Pengyi 蒋鹏奕 (*1977 in Hunan, based in Beijing)	Photography
Lu Lei 陆垒 (*1972 in Jiangsu, based in Beijing)	Installation
Shao Yi 邵一 (*1967 in Hangzhou, based in Hangzhou and Shanghai)	Installation
Shi Yong 施勇 (*1963 in Shanghai, based in Shanghai)	Installation
Sun Xun 孙逊 (*1980 in Liaoning, based in Beijing)	Drawings, Objects, Animated Cartoon
Xu Zhen 徐震/ Madeln (*1977 in Shanghai, based in Shanghai)	Objects, Installation
Yang Zhenzhong 杨振中 (*1968 in Hangzhou, based in Shanghai)	Video, Image Objects
Zhang Ding 张鼎 (*1980 in Gansu, based in Shanghai)	Installation

DATES DURING ART BASEL WEEK

Please RSVP to all events

info@global-art-st-urban.com

+41 79 123 23 00

June 12th	03:30 p.m.	Press Conference
June 12th	05:00 p.m.	Opening of the Exhibition followed by a Reception
June 13th	11:00 a.m.	In Collaboration with Art Basel: Conversation between Swiss Collector Uli Sigg with Sun Xun and Yang Zhenzhong [free Shuttle Service from ART BASEL]
June 16th	11:00 a.m.	Guided Tour of the Exhibition by the Curator
June 13th – June 19th	At every full hour	In Collaboration with Art Basel: Film Projection Zhou Tiehai »Will/We Must« (1996), Single-channel, 35mm transferred on DVD, b&w, at St. Urban Cinema [free Shuttle Service from ART BASEL]

Museum Art-St-Urban und Abbey St. Urban

4915 St. Urban/Luzern (CH)

global-art-st-urban.com

Opening times during ART BASEL Week:

June 13-19, 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

CONTACT PRESS

Eva Bauer & Barbara Wetzlmair // presse@eveandbar.com // +43(0)660 636 59 80

An Exhibition Catalogue will be published in Kerber Verlag, including an interview by Xenia Piëch with Lorenz Helbling.

photo credit page I: Zhang Ding, Orbit-Black Guardians, 2014

THE CROCODILE IN THE POND
11 Artists from ShanghART

Curated by Alexandra Grimmer