



8 April, 2011

## A Schema for Printmaking 版畫系

An Exhibition of Printmaking Works by Chinese Masters

Curator	:	Fang Lei
Artists	:	Chen Xiongwei, Fang Lijun, Hong Hao, Li Fan, Su Xinping, Tan Ping, Wang Yiqiong, Xu Bing, Yang Hongwei
Exhibition Date	:	14 April – 10 June 2011
Opening Cocktail	:	6 – 8 pm, Thursday 14 April, 2011
Venue	:	Contemporary by Angela Li G/F, 90-92 Hollywood Road, Central, Hong Kong
Website	:	<a href="http://www.cbal.com.hk">http://www.cbal.com.hk</a>

Contemporary by Angela Li is proud to present "A Schema for Printmaking", representing such highly acclaimed artists as Fang Lijun, Xu Bing, Tan Ping and Hong Hao.

Artists in this exhibition began their artistic journeys in printmaking, using various methods such as woodcutting, engraving, lithography or silkscreen printing, and each has made remarkable achievements in their printmaking practices, enriching the world of print art with their many works. In addition, they have all touched on a wide range of other fields such as conceptual art, oil painting, photography, installation, oil printing and other new media. As they use these other mediums, printmaking has provided sustenance, and as these various fields draw nourishment from and influence each other, these artists have created new possibilities for art.

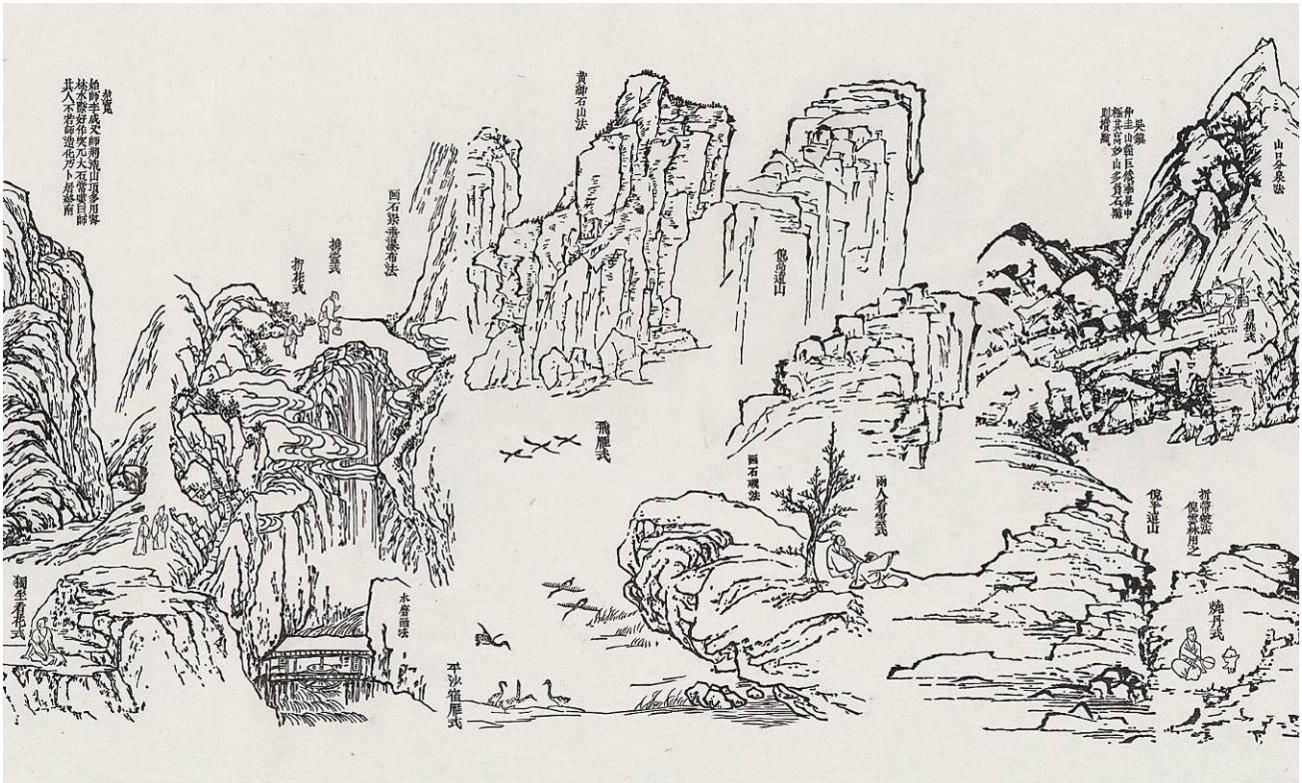
In this exhibition, we discuss one particular issue in printmaking, that of originality. This is a concept from western printmaking. According to this concept, artists must grasp a series of techniques, such as drawing, carving and printing, to engage in original creation.

Printmaking is a system. It is one of the oldest international art forms. It can be traced back over a thousand years in China, or even earlier, beginning with woodcut printing traditions. From the earliest recorded woodblock printed scroll, the Tang dynasty Dharma Sermon (868 AD), to the woodcut illustrations of serial novels and folk New Year calendars in the Ming and Qing dynasties, printmaking has served the dual functions of printing and dissemination; western printing, which emerged roughly 500 years after its appearance in China, belongs to the same realm. It was not until the 18th century, when western artists began to directly draw images, carve and print them, that the concept of "printmaking" became independent from printing technology.

## Selected Works of The Exhibition



**Xu Bing** (B. 1955) is currently the Vice President of Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts.



Xu Bing, "The Mustard Seed Garden Landscape Scroll" (details), 34 x 527.5 cm

"When I was in Nepal for the Himalaya with Helsinki exchange program, I experimented with painting landscapes composed of Chinese characters. In China, there is no boundary between books and paintings. People in the past thought of them as being homologous when considering that they utilized the same brushstrokes. I realised later that the core of their homology lies in semiotics. Simply stated, when I was painting the Himalaya in Nepal, painting the mountain and writing the Chinese character for 'mountain' used the same movement. Chinese people see poems, books, painting and prints as one entity. I incorporated the first three components in this series - one can say it is calligraphy, a poem or a painting - it reveals the true uniqueness of Chinese culture.

When I used Chinese characters to paint, it naturally formed many *cun* strokes as presented in the manual. I realized that the manual is a dictionary containing many radicals. When you memorize all the radicals or symbols, you can use the components to paint everything, realism is deemphasized. This is the crux of Chinese painting.

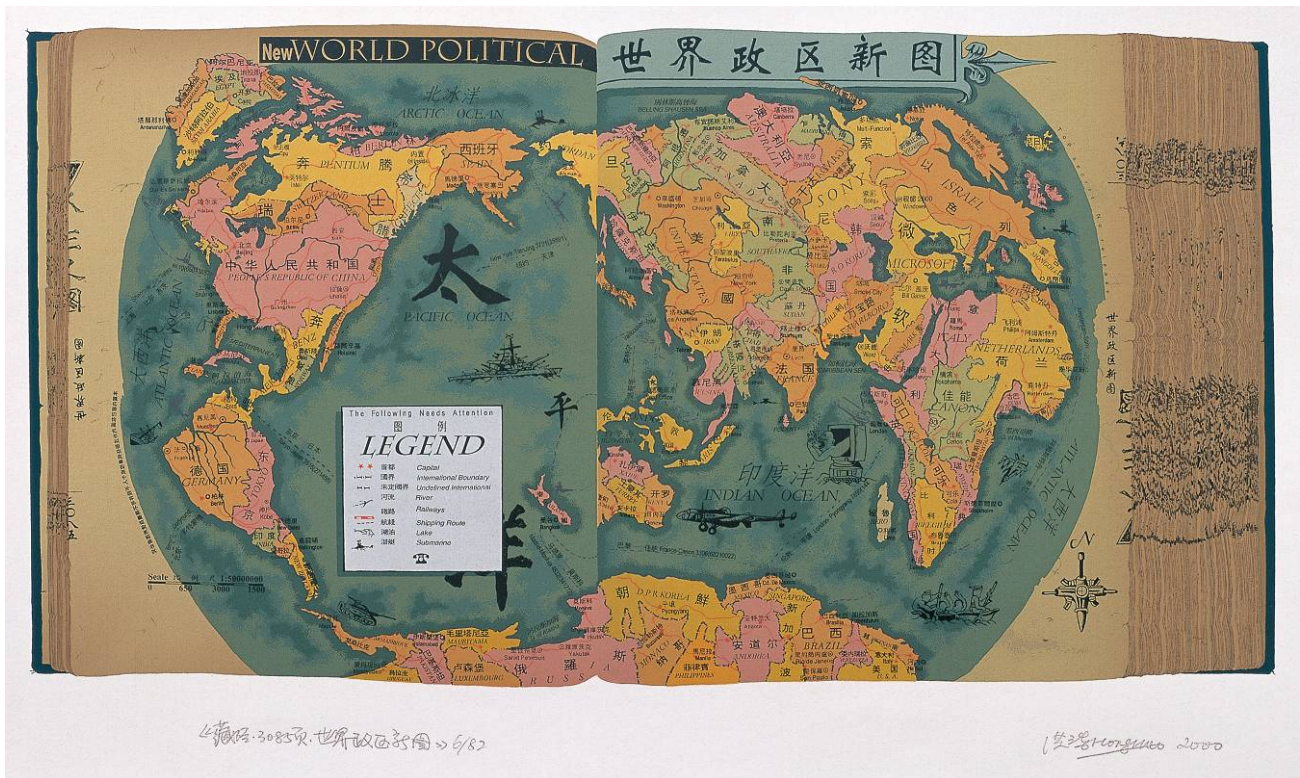
The core of Chinese art, which differs greatly from that of Western art, is on many levels about achievement within set parameters. Development is not measured by whether or not one breaks traditions or the creation of something new. Many generations of artists operated under the same standards, the same subjects are painted over and over again - it is a matter of who can 'play' the best and who possesses the highest taste. The actual merit of the painting is less important than what the painting reveals about the artist's character.

We should not use only a Western framework to explain the complex nature of Chinese culture. Perhaps we do so because we haven't formed a modern theoretical language to explain Chinese art and culture yet. I found that the many principles in the manual touch upon the essence of Chinese culture. The many different versions over the years are testament to its power and influence."



The manual is a dictionary of standardised components that has no personality although they were derived from the works of the great masters. The *Mustard Seed Garden Landscape Scroll* pieced back the components into their original long scroll form like replying a tape. From this work, you can see what the artist is interested in, his thought process, point of view and attitude towards craftsmanship. His taste is seen in the details such as the paper used, the mounting and presentation and the composition of the radicals. Art can truthfully reflect the artist and fate determines one's artistic style and taste – it cannot be planned.

Hong Hao (B. 1965) currently lives and works in Beijing as a full time artist.



Hong Hao, "Selected Scriptures, Page 3085, The New World Political Map"

Hong Hao makes use of second-hand forms. He borrows pre-existing forms and puts them in Chinese books. Particularly noteworthy is the borrowed form of an old book that he uses in his "Selected Scriptures" series. As we "first move" into his work, we encounter a first obstacle (the old book). This obstacle manifests itself as a unique even if contrived historicism that makes us sense the differentiating characteristics that distance us from the rest of the world, in geographical, national and cultural terms.

**Li Fan** (B. 1966) is currently Head and Lecturer of Printmaking Department, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China.



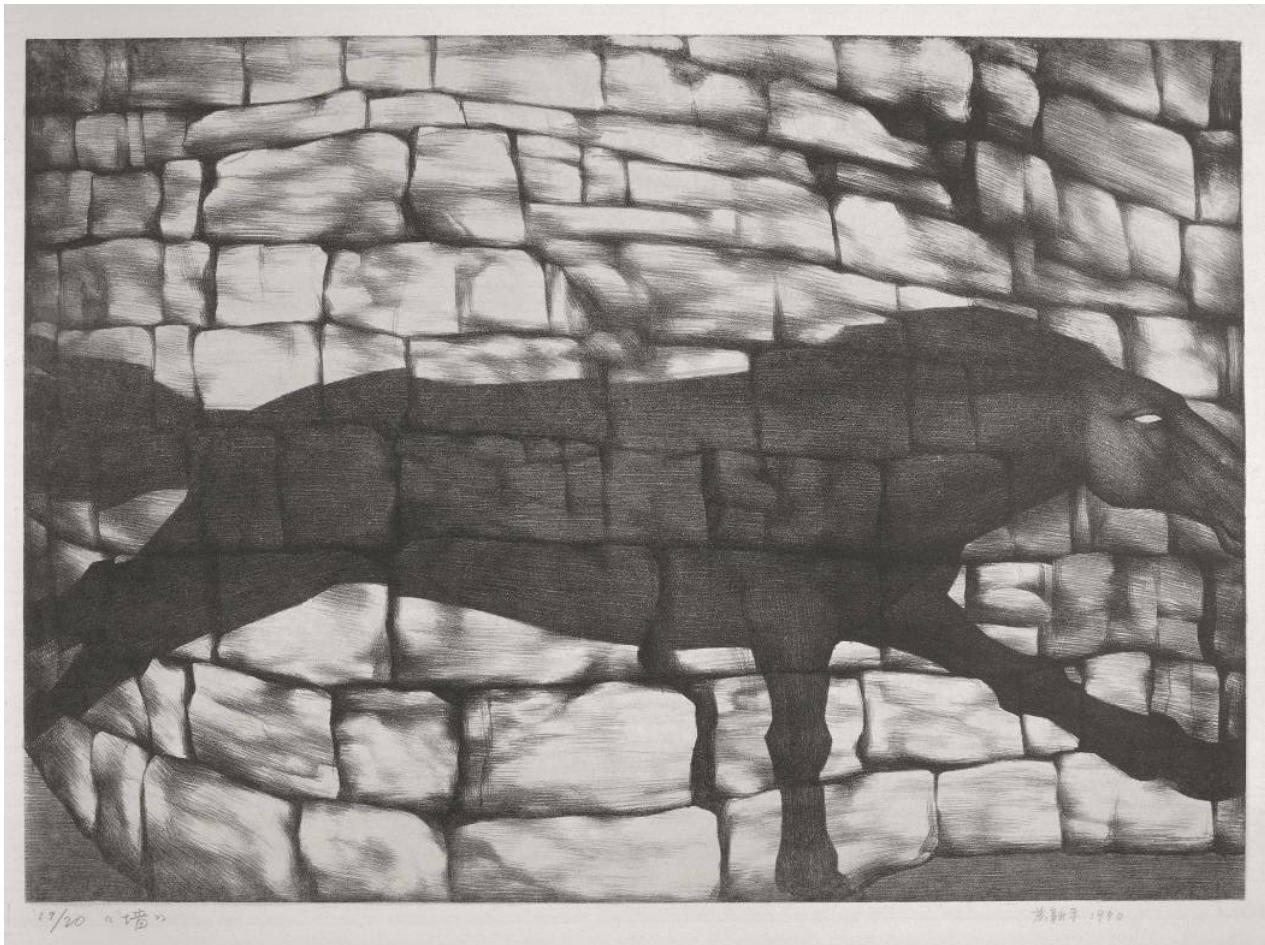
Li Fan's *Inner View*, *Five Minutes Every Day*, *Concerto* and *Street* lithographs, which were all created in the past two years. From the titles we can gain a sense that the artist feels these are all new things, things that are happening just about every day, and are a part of the popular culture of everyday life. To borrow the words of Li Fan, these are little things that take place in life. People might not even be aware of the unfolding of these fashions, and are certainly not aware of their cultural significance or the contradiction between old and new ways of life. Li Fan's selection of these things in itself entails commentary. For instance, the title *Concerto* is a double entendre. The picture is divided into two sections along the middle, with the performers on one side and the audience on the other. The trend of refined art does not only allude to the rise of the white collar class, it also has a certain political significance, but just as cultural refinement cannot be attained in a sudden leap, the audience in the hall seems to be sitting through boring political studies, sleeping, chatting, applying makeup, doing just about everything. This uncoordinated relationship hints at a microcosm of cultural conflict.

*Silver Street* has the same meaning, but here, Li has applied some methods from traditional Chinese painting, particularly the concealment of finishing touches within the structure of the image, so that the audience must seek out these potential clues to the theme from within the picture. This search is a delight, like the enjoyment of telling a good story. When the audience comes across these rare allusions while reading into pictures of their own lives, it forms thought associations of new meaning. *Silver Street* has a panoramic structure, like a horizontal scroll from traditional Chinese painting. In this scroll of normal folk life, he uses the contrast between the background and the figures to allude to the conflict between fashion and tradition. A fashionable sign hangs from an aging traditional building, seemingly alluding to the essentially uncoordinated nature of modern life. It is the same with the people in the foreground. The mixture of fashionable women with migrant labourers entering the city seems to represent the two extremes of urban civilisation. Of course, his real implied meaning is the same as with *Concerto*: the stacking of old and new cultures has become the unique spectacle of contemporary Chinese culture.



Li Fan, "Love My Eyes", Lithograph

**Su Xinping** (B. 1960) was born in Inner Mongolia, China. He is currently Professor & Deputy Head of Printmaking Department, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China.



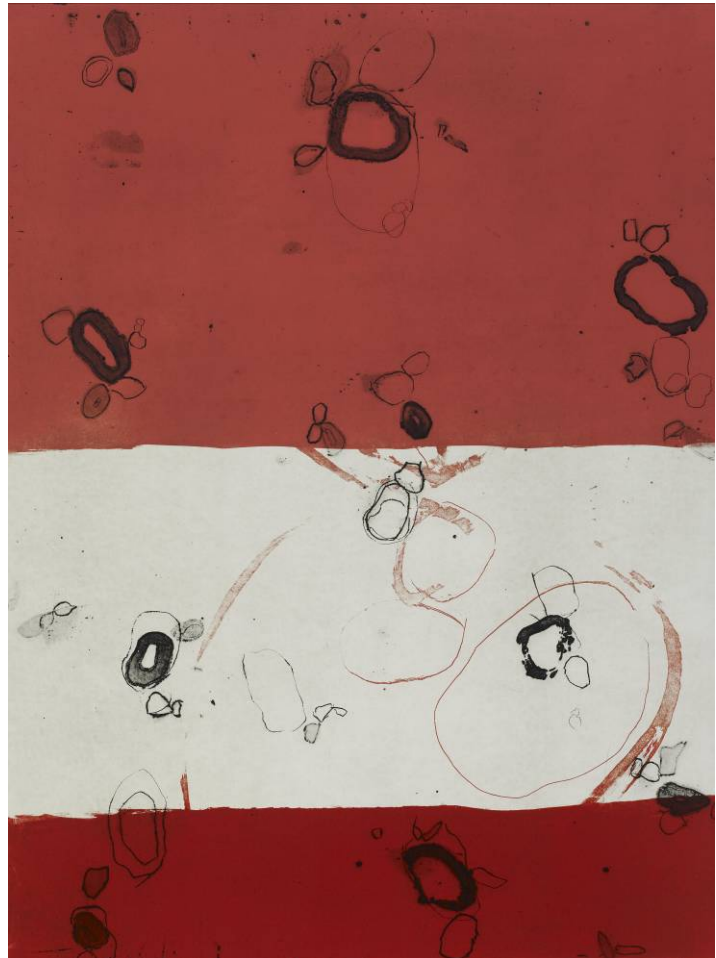
Su Xinping, "Wall", Lithograph

The space in Su Xinping's art is imaginary, subjective. That is because the horizon is virtual; the light is self-made, with the directions and intensity defined by his needs; the sky is always black and the ground is always white; externally, the three dimensional perspective focus is false, as the forms and their projections can all stand alone in segments, so they are imbued with the logic of a flat perspective. The gazes of the figures are not focused, nor are they fixed on each other. All of these "methods" provide us with a fantastical, yet real scene. This enigma created in the space between fantasy and reality has led people to many historical and transcendent ideas about the lives of the Mongolian people. These ideas have done away with the superficial cultural projections of 'folkways' from times past, so that people could focus on the deeper cultural consciousness of that group.

The space in this batch of artworks is more abstract, less specific. It becomes pointless to discuss heaven and earth, or the sun and moon. The figures in the images are mostly the same person or same type of person. There is an overlying trend towards monotony. The lighting became more simple and mysterious, highlighting the fakeness and sense of motion of the shadows. More importantly, these works heightened the sense of connectivity and logic in the motions of the figures from the previous period. We can almost get a sense of the order behind the various prone, standing and moving postures in the image, hence unlocking the order of the "absurdity".

**Tan Ping** (B.1960) is currently the Vice President of Central Academy of Fine Arts. He is also the deputy director of the Arts Committee in Education Department, Director of Design Sub-committee, Deputy Director of Environmental Design at Arts Council of China, Olympic Evaluation Committee member of China Artists Association, Vice Chairman of Graphic Design Arts Council at the German Artists Association, Member of China Industrial Design Association, Member of the Chinese Print Association, Member of China Stamps Review Committee.

In the work of Tan Ping, you can see round clumps scattered around the surface of the painting. Because the space of the painting is separated into colour fields, these round clumps appear to float. They have a particular sense of sequence, spreading in a form that is free and diffusive. They extend with the face of the picture in what seems to have the tendency of trajectories. It is obvious that these clumps originate in Tan Ping's life experience. This was the personal



experience he went through in hospital with cells. The state of cells is the motivation for the painting. He firmly grasps the spread of cells, making it the theme of the painting. His paintings' flattened backgrounds are frequently formed by simple and violent colours. But between the central image and the background he uses fine brushstrokes to create an intermediary stage, so that the subject is not dissociated from the background but adheres to it, rather like the space between breathing and growing.

Starting and entering the expression of abstract art from specific feelings for things is what is most individually emblematic of Tan Ping's art. This also reminds us that abstract painting is always a traditional language. But under new cultural conditions, artists can still rely on their actual social circumstances and life experiences and create a new form of abstract art. In this sense, Tan Ping's abstract paintings have sociological connotations. From the starting point of a concern for reality, he takes his feelings for actual life, the actual world or actual things as the starting point, or critical juncture, of his expression. It is only in the process of his narrative that he uses abstract language or abstract forms.

**Fang Lijun (B.1963)**



Fang Lijun, 2000.4.20, 122 x 81 cm, Woodcut

In Fang's early works, he followed the pattern of single black and white colour.

And in his recent works, he began to create colorful woodcuts, among which the two-dimension nature of his oil paintings was close to the etchings of later 1990s, especially after 1998.

No matter from the angle of technique or form, Fang's woodcut bears some relationship with the artistic tradition of both before the revolution or after the founding of New China. The size of his painting adopts the vertical format, borrowing from the ancient rolling picture. And the big size and the appealing effect of his character associate the audience with the Cultural Revolution posters and movie posters, which he had studied specially in his early period. Since the last year, Fang began to produce small-size works, and the theme of most paintings are tightly-clustering heads with eyes looking up the sky, which seem to be the magnifying of part of his former woodcut scenes.



Yang Hongwei, "Millennium Monument", 1076 x 45 cm