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Bridging the Past, Present, and Future

Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room

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A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006

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Right after the entrance to the exhibition *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room* at Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai, visitors were confronted with a wall covered by a black-and-white image. It showed a crowd of people standing in a row, tightly squeezed together. This iconic photograph was taken in December 1948 by Henri Cartier-Bresson, who was sent to China to document the turbulent transition from Kuomintang to Communist rule. The image captures the moment when the value of paper money plummeted and the Kuomintang decided to distribute forty grams of gold per person. Thousands waited in line for hours to exchange paper money for gold, and ten people were crushed to death. Instead of an introductory text on the gallery's wall, Shanghai-based curator Biljana Ciric presented this image as part of a preface area that included several artworks to set the tone for her exhibition. For Ciric, Bresson's photograph signals the change of direction that Shanghai took in 1949 (after the People's Republic of China was established), when the city started to focus on becoming an economic hub and no longer represented the image of a cultural centre where, in the 1920s and 1930s, most intellectuals had lived.¹

Photo on entrance wall by Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1948. Photo: Yves Yang. Courtesy of Henri Cartier-Bresson and Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.

The exhibition *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room* runs contrary to the idea of Shanghai as merely a consumer-oriented city. In this vein, it might be more telling that the same photograph was shown at the *Fuck Off* exhibition, held in Shanghai in 2000 and curated by Feng Boyi and Ai Weiwei. As Ciric points out: “For the exhibition, Ai Weiwei printed the image onto over ten thousand posters. The work, titled *Fuck You*, could be taken away by the audience.”² For Ciric, “this image provides a symbolic bridge between past and present and the issues that *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room* tries to introduce.”³ To understand this symbolic function, it is significant that the *Fuck Off* exhibition, which was a satellite event of the 3rd Shanghai Biennale in 2000, “positioned itself in a so-called un-collaborative manner with regard to the official art system, as well as in regard to the international commercial market for contemporary art since the Chinese title’s literal translation into English is something along the lines of ‘Uncollaborative Approach.’”⁴ This Biennale, curated by Hou Hanru, was the first Shanghai Biennale to develop into an international event, showing art with a wide range of media from China and abroad, whereas the two previous editions had been platforms for officially approved Chinese art. Some local artists, curators, and critics saw its new direction as a threat to the independence of experimental art; as Feng Boyi stated: “[It] marked the fact that the officially organized event had begun to accept and recognize so-called avant-garde art and artists to a certain degree.”⁵

In contrast to the development of an official contemporary Chinese art system indicated by the 2000 Shanghai Biennale, *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room* is related to almost thirty years of experimental art in Shanghai. It considers a period of time when the art market and the process of commodification had not yet taken over as dominant forces or were even completely absent, and no contemporary art system had yet been established. It is this aspect that the exhibition title takes up; in this title, Ciric quotes from Mladen Stilinovi’s manifesto “Praise of Laziness,” written in 1993 for a performance and first published in *Moscow Art Magazine* in 1998. Stilinovi’s text praises lazy artists from the East who are not caught up in the capitalist art system and have time to produce art:

Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore not artists but rather producers of something. . . . Their involvement with matters of no importance, such as production, promotion, gallery system, museum system, competition system (who is first), their preoccupation with objects, all that drives them away from laziness, from art. Just as money is paper, so a gallery is a room.⁶

A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006

As an extension of her recent book *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, Biljana Ciric’s exhibition takes artist-organized exhibitions in Shanghai between 1979 and 2006 as its starting point. The aforementioned *Fuck Off* exhibition is one of thirty-four exhibitions that can be found in

this publication, which mainly occurred without any institutional support and show the crucial role of artists in organizing and curating exhibitions in China. Ciric developed this comprehensive compendium out of curatorial research undertaken for her earlier exhibition, *History in the Making: Shanghai 1979–2009*, a comprehensive historical retrospective that included nearly fifty artists.⁷

To contribute to a broader picture of Shanghai's contemporary art history, Ciric felt an urgency to find, preserve, and study what documentation might exist of exhibitions that were often of an ephemeral nature and of which little evidence remains. In the introduction to *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, she talks about the difficult process of recollection in which reimagining became an important strategy: "My work in collaboration with artists to build an exhibition archive in Shanghai began in 2007 and continued for almost five years. As many of the original ephemera and documents related to the exhibitions have now been lost, some of the material presented in the archive . . . is re-imagined by the artists, according to their memories."⁸ Substantially relying on artist interviews, the book gives a rich image that provides subjective insights into how these exhibitions came into being, under what conditions they were developed, and what discussions took place around them. Alongside the interviews, Ciric applied a specific methodology for the book's overall structure: it is chronological in order, and each exhibition entry has an overview of the facts as far as they are known (information about the year, the title, the venue, the time period, the participating artist, the catalogue, the number of visitors, and sometimes additional information). Short introductions by Ciric place each exhibition in the context of its time and address its significance; she also reproduces floor plans and related visual material such as media coverage, catalogue pages, and photographic documentation when available. The book's strict format makes it easy to see the changes that have taken place in exhibition-making over the years; for example, since 1996 exhibitions became much more curatorial in nature as artists experimented with various formats of exhibiting. For Ciric, who in her own curatorial work is always concerned with challenging exhibition formats that serve purely to showcase material objects, the strong curatorial impetus of some of these artist-organized exhibitions was one important reason to build this archive. She believes it will become a valuable asset for the collective learning process about what curating means,⁹ while altogether the book provides an insightful understanding of how the underground art scene in Shanghai once functioned.¹⁰

Displacing the Narrative of the Archive

Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room draws attention to the fact that archives are, just like museum collections, tools for producing new knowledge and new working methods. While being "rooted in an archive of materials relating to artist-initiated exhibitions held in Shanghai from 1979–2006, the exhibition avoids presenting the actual archival material."¹¹ Instead, Ciric takes the grammar of artist-organized exhibitions as a point of departure to activate this archive. It was her curatorial decision to work



Marysia Lewandowska, *Shanghai. Exhibition Histories Distributed*, 2014, installation. Photo: Yves Yang. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.

with it “through inviting artists to respond to the archive.”¹² She selected four local and eight international artists¹³ to “open up possible passages for its revival, re-interpretation, and misinterpretation from today’s perspective;”¹⁴ for Ciric, “knowledge of this history also involves reflection on our practices today and their possible future.”¹⁵

While most artists chose to create works in connection with one particular exhibition, Marysia Lewandowska decided to take the whole archive as a conceptual starting point. With her installation *Shanghai. Exhibition Histories Distributed* (2014), she inserted new elements into the narrative of the original archive. Her chosen title shifts the emphasis from a “history” to “histories,” highlighting their multiplicity; she also questions the idea of origin and ownership by describing these histories as “distributed.” For her contribution, Lewandowska visited the former sites of the archived exhibitions across Shanghai and documented their current state. Out of this research, she produced a map that visitors could take away and use to go to the actual sites; at the same time, it functioned as a guide for her installation that consisted primarily of conceptual photographs.

The foldout map listed the historical exhibitions and performances and the venues where they had taken place, which were mostly non-art-related spaces. Most of the exhibitions took place in public buildings, like cultural palaces or university student clubs, and in some cases informal settings like outdoor public spaces and, from the late 1990s onwards, some commercial spaces. By contrasting these venues with an account of the types of buildings Lewandowska found in 2014 at the original sites, it becomes obvious how the city has since “embraced predominantly corporate enterprises,”¹⁶ as entries of shopping centres and hotels are now dominating the account. The created image of financial speculation does not only show the changes in the urban fabric of Shanghai; it also finds its correspondence in the commercialization of the Chinese contemporary art scene.

In Lewandowska’s photographs, the subject matter often focused on subtle links to the art-related events that formerly took place at these venues in the city. Sometimes this resulted in opposing undercurrents to the



Marysia Lewandowska, *Shanghai. Exhibition Histories Distributed*, 2014, digital print, 29.7 x42 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

commercialized status quo of the city. There was, for example, a photograph of a couple playing badminton in an empty corridor of a shopping mall. The shot was taken in the Hi-Shanghai HUGE Plaza Commerce and Leisure Village, which today occupies the building site, where, between 1991 and 1993, Hu Jianping's *Ranks Interventions* took place. For the *Ranks* series Hu Jianping displayed artworks in public space on the broken walls of old buildings that were under demolition.¹⁷ In comparison, the unconventional use of the shopping mall for recreational sports suggests that the experimental nature of Hu Jianping's interventions lives on. It also signals that what is important is not so much the materiality of the place itself, but how people will always find a way of using space beyond what its function is intended to be—very much in the spirit of Henri Lefebvre's *The Practice of Everyday Life*.¹⁸

Besides such subversive tendencies of the unexpected use of space shown in some of her photographs, Lewandowska was also deliberately adding another layer to her “city guide.” She expanded her survey by imagining Shanghai in 2044 as a city where the public sphere is no longer shrinking and where currently privatized spaces are released back to the public and become common property. This utopian projection into the future includes new institutional templates for the Shanghai art scene; the aforementioned shopping mall will, for instance, become the Osage Art in the Public Realm Research Cluster.

In the list of places Lewandowska managed to visit,¹⁹ one venue was a hub during the early-to-mid-1990s, and several influential exhibitions took place there.²⁰ Ciric refers to this basement space at the Huashan Vocational Art School “as one of the most experimental venues in the whole country.”²¹ Today, this space still exists, but in a somewhat dormant way. It was abandoned after the last exhibition was held there in 1996. When Lewandowska saw it during her research, it looked like a “dumping ground” for artworks left behind by students from the art school. Wanting to highlight this relic from a time of visionary exhibition making, Lewandowska decided to “make a kind of trompe l’oeil”²² of this former basement gallery to frame her own installation. Therefore her series of photographs was presented on a wall with yellow painted panels that held the same width as the real panels she encountered in this space, and even more significantly, she reproduced a remarkable floor pattern from this former exhibition space onto the floor of Osage gallery as part of

her installation. With its peculiar shape and colours, those who knew the basement space would immediately recognize the pattern and would be transported back in time in their imagination.²³

Let's Talk about Money

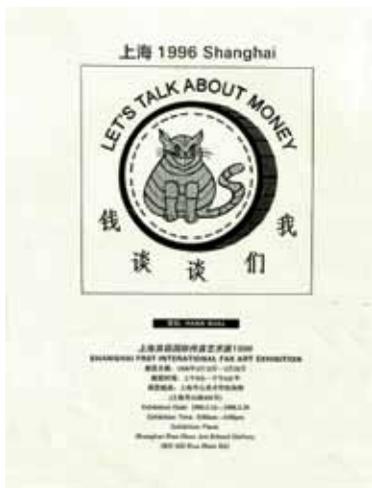
Not far from Lewandowska's reproduced floor pattern, Shi Yong, an artist from Shanghai who has been active since the early 1990s, directly referred to that basement space where the floor decoration originated. As a part of his installation, Shi Yong reassessed two of the influential exhibitions held at Huashan Vocational Art School: *Two Attitudes of Identity* (1993) and *Let's Talk about Money—Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition* (1996), which he both took part in and helped to organize. Through spoken monologues, the artist looked back at his practice and the surrounding conditions during the early and mid-1990s. In his version, the celebrated basement gallery becomes demystified:

“Underground!” “Underground!” This word is used by many and is always associated with resistance, a backbone to stand for strong arguments. But in actual fact, most of the time it is only because we don't have a choice! . . . Those who did have control over the mainstream art scene did not provide us with any official kind of exhibition venues and we didn't have any money to rent decent places. The only choice we had was the underground exhibition hall at the school where I taught. This humid space with low ceilings was provided for free by the school and fulfilled the needs of many other local Shanghai artists.²⁴

Shi Yong, *“Previously, form often originated from a passiveness rather than resistance, like how we use umbrellas when it starts to rain. What about now?”* 2014, faxes, metal box. Photo: Yves Yang. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.



Let's Talk About Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition, 1996, exhibition poster. Courtesy of Shi Yong.



Prominently placed in the middle of Shi Yong's installation is a box full of faded faxes. They are the remains from the last exhibition held at the underground space in 1996. This innovative exhibition is the first and only one that was international in scale, according to Ciric's compiled archive—"one of the rare projects in China organized by artists to attempt to establish a dialogue among artists from both inside and outside the country."²⁵ It was curated by the artists Ding Yi, Shi Yong, Shen Fan, and Zhou Tiehai and initiated by Hank Bull, one of the directors of Vancouver's Western Front, among the city's first artist-run centres, established in 1973. Over the course of the exhibition, the artworks arrived in form of faxes

from abroad²⁶ alongside the Chinese artists' faxes. They were mounted onto the gallery walls on a daily basis.²⁷ Today Shi Yong says that his faxes are "[l]ike ghosts that escaped from a moldy tissue—they were transformed from the cheapest form of communication to a form valued for something else. I just thought—what if we used the theme *Let's Talk About Money* to ask how much these facsimiles are worth today?"²⁸ At the time, to choose money as a thematic served as a warning about the direction China's art world was taking, "while the artists continued to struggle to gain recognition in such an environment."²⁹ As Ciric points out, "the organizers fully understood when discussing money, one can't avoid also discussing the economy, politics, and society's structure. The theme was a deliberate provocation."³⁰

Charda Adytama, *Going Home*, 2014, installation, performance. Photo: Yves Yang. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.

The way Shi Yong talked about the fax art exhibition highlighted how its conceptual format was very much a strategy framed by the reality they lived in at the time. As Shi Yong stated: "[I]n the pre-internet days of the 1990s in China, fax was one of the most convenient and economical ways to communicate with people overseas. Back then, we had no money and non-mainstream ideologies were still sensitive. So, when we used facsimiles as a medium and the theme of *Let's Talk about Money* to facilitate an interesting international exchange exhibition, it pointedly addressed all the issues we had before us."³¹ Different from Western idea-based exhibition formats, the fax exhibition was not informed by the desire to reach beyond the stable ground of institutions; instead, it was the lack of them as well as the specific political and economic context of China at the time that shaped the idea to use such an exhibition format. Its chosen medium also meant that it was possible to organize an international exhibition without censorship: "[I]t obviated the need to obtain official approval from the Cultural Bureau for artworks entering the country via the usual channels; because there were no physical artworks crossing borders, there was no customs agent checking their paperwork."³²

Fictionalizing the Archive

Another contribution related to the fax exhibition was made by Charda Adytama, an artist from Indonesia. His link to Ciric's archive is via Rachmansyah, "a long lost high-profile Indonesian artist"³³ who was said to be trying to participate in the First International Fax Art Exhibition in Shanghai. In the exhibition space, Adytama presented several handwritten documents on yellowed paper loosely lying on a table, where they could be studied. During the opening the artist invited people to join him around the desk and presented the story of Rachmansyah, his uncle, who had been trying to participate in the fax exhibition, although none of his faxes were ever transmitted. As Adytama told his audience, this probably had to do with Suharto's authoritarian regime from 1966 to 1988, which restricted and censored communication between Indonesia and China; violent outbreaks during the 1998 riots caused President Suharto to resign. We also learned from him that Rachmansyah's wish to connect with his own past constituted a huge part of his motivation to participate in the First International Fax Art Exhibition. Along with his fax art contribution, he wanted to send to Shanghai images of his Chinese family ancestors and



was hoping to receive information about them. But *Going Home* (2014), as Adytama named his installation, was nothing that Indonesians of Chinese descent would have been able to do at that time, highlighting the fact that Rachmansyah could not connect with his personal family history in China.

On the wall beside the table, Adytama hung a colourful oil painting, depicting a ship in a rough sea painted with expressive brush strokes. Titled *Perahu Kusamba*, this painting was conceived by Rachmansyah in 1997, just before he decided to go into hiding, where he remains to this very day. From the account that Adytama gave, his exile seems to be related to the fact that he was a spy during the Suharto era. It was through his mother that Adytama was able to reach out to his uncle and to fulfill his wish to present his artwork in China. In relation to the overall story, the painting gains the status of a “document”; it relates to an artist whose very existence is questionable because we learn about him only from Adytama. The installation uses the general ambiguity in the relationship between historical and fictional narratives and enables Adytama to “open up a place and space that prompts new associations and meanings, a place where memory and imagination are unveiled and meet.”³⁴ It is within this space that a political moment can emerge, a moment that hints at the centuries of discrimination faced by generations of Chinese Indonesians.



Rachmansyah, *Perahu Kusamba*, 1997, oil on canvas (150 x 200 cm). Photo: Yves Wang. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.

But there is a more general issue at hand. For Adytama, the act of juxtaposing and letting two different memories collide is also a way of reclaiming, reconstructing, and criticizing the authoritative gesture of the formation of an archive and the institutionalizing consequences behind it.³⁵ By destabilizing and dislocating the boundaries between fact and fiction, as well as through re- and de-contextualizing the archive, the artist questions the archive as a means for creating truth in general and points to its mutability and constructed status.

Displays of Resistance

Next to Adytama’s contribution, Hu Yun selected three historical artworks from the early 1990s as his focus. One of these works was directly related to Shi Yong’s installation, as Hu Yun decided to show a documentary image of one of Shi Yong’s installation pieces, *Incising, Erecting, Then Filling In* (1993). While

Shi Yong used a pile of photographic paper he found in his studio—wrapped up in paper, but long expired—in reference to the experimental works he had created for the *Two Attitudes of Identity '93* exhibition, Hu Yun's choice of an archival image revealed the conceptual nature and the fragility of Shi Yong's installation with its photosensitive material.

Left: Page from exhibition brochure for *Two Attitudes of Identity '93: Qian Weikang & Shi Yong Installation Works Show*, 1993. Courtesy of Shi Yong.

Right: Hu Yun, *you see it on purpose, I did it by chance*, 2014, installation, dimensions variable. Photo: Yves Yang. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.



Tang Guangming, production still for *An Outing Once Failed*, 1992. Courtesy of the artist.



Of the three artworks he chose, Hu Yun, in a strong curatorial gesture, only made this piece clearly visible for the viewers. What the audience would have to detect on their own was that this reproduction of Shi Yong's work was shown on a

moveable wall that led into a small room, which they could enter. Inside this room, Hu Yun presented an old pair of wooden scales that were used in work by Qian Weikang in 1994 to measure in a physical experiment the biological input and output of his body, as well as a black-and-white film by Tang Guanming titled *An Outing Once Failed* (1992). In an almost dreamlike way, the film revolved around a performative event in which a group of young people in disguise met by a bunker in a suburb of Shanghai. Through his chosen mode of presentation, Hu Yun critically addressed current habits of exhibition viewing and art consumption. By calling his piece *you see it on purpose, I did it by chance* (2014), Hu Yun wanted to point out that exhibition viewers are always the ones who choose what they want to see, while artists are often not willing or able to explain every choice that goes into the making of their work.³⁶ For attentive visitors, Hu Yun provided some instructions that would help them find the two concealed works: the guidebook presented all three artworks, and he showed on the outside wall a floor plan of the hidden space. "But the reality is, most of the audience is already used to being 'pushed' to see artworks, and they don't have the time or the patience to read, to discover, to think," says Hu Yun.³⁷

Another work addressing the reception of visual art by the public deliberately resisted being experienced in its entirety. In the video installation *One Word per Minute* (2014) by Zhang Peili, a Chinese character was illuminated only once every minute on a small screen, thus dividing the content into segments that were ungraspable as a whole, and as the duration of this installation was not indicated, this gave the viewer the feeling of an



endlessly evolving sequence of characters. To further accentuate its fleeting nature, the video was installed in the transit area of the staircase between the two floors of the gallery. Also, in collaboration with Zhang Peili, Biljana Ciric decided to present

Zhang Peili, *Document on Hygiene No. 3*, 1991, multi-channel video installation, exhibition view at *Garage Show*, 1991, Shanghai. Courtesy of the artist.

an enlarged photograph documenting Zhang Peili's iconic multichannel video installation *Document on Hygiene No. 3*, from the 1991 *Garage Show*, mounting it onto the wall in the stairwell as a complementary image for *One Word per Minute*. By employing this mode of display, Ciric wanted to highlight that *Document on Hygiene No. 3*, an important work in Shanghai's exhibition history, can be seen as one of the artist's early attempts at creating a sense of distance between the work and the viewer.³⁸ As the photograph of Zhang Peili's installation at the *Garage Show* illustrated, the artist had placed a field of bricks in front of the four television screens, which were staggered in a row and all showing the same video. Interpretations of this early work often (primarily) focus on the content of the video, in which a chicken is being washed in a small basin. It is generally viewed as an absurdist commentary following the launch of a nationwide hygiene campaign in 1991.³⁹ In contrast, Ciric's emphasis on the distance created by both works—a spatial distance in the case of the video and temporal one in *One Word per Minute*—can be read as an indirect critique of the alienating effects of consumerism and entertainment culture.

Mapping Abstraction in Shanghai

While all the contributions mentioned so far concentrated on exhibitions from the early- to mid-1990s (except for Lewandowska's involvement with the whole archive), *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room* started with a focus on the abstract painting movement in Shanghai, which was influential during the 1980s. For this section Ciric invited Yu Youhan—who produced his abstract *Circle* series in the 1980s and was an influential teacher at the time—to show the development of abstraction in Shanghai through a subjective choice of abstract paintings by artists who had started to experiment with abstraction during that time. Besides works of his contemporaries (some were his students), Yu Youhan's mapping of abstract painting included an expressionist work from the early 1950s by Fan Jiman, an artist who influenced his own practice. The time span between the chosen works went from this early work through the 1980s and into the 1990s. While the works by Feng Lianghong, Zhang Jian-Jun, Shen Fan and Yu Youhan show an organic tendency (all from the 1980s), the more recent works, such as Qin Yifeng's *Line Field 2* (1993) and Ding Yi's *Appearance of Crosses 1989–7* (1989), are more abstract and rigid in their display of striped and grid-like forms.

Next to the selected paintings, Yu Youhan showed brochures and catalogue covers from two influential foreign exhibitions that were held in Shanghai during the late 1970s and early 1980s. One exhibition was called *French Rural*



Yu Youhan, *Mapping Abstraction*, (in collaboration with Ding Yi, Fan Jiman, Feng Liang Hong, Qin Yifeng, Shen Fan; archival materials are provided by Zheng Shengtian). Photo: Yves Yang. Courtesy of the artists, Zheng Shengtian, and Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.

Landscape Paintings from the 19th Century and focused on Impressionism and Fauvism; this show was held at the Shanghai Exhibition Center in 1979. The other was *American Paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, which exhibited Abstract Expressionist work at the Shanghai Museum in 1981. According to Ciric, these exhibitions “influenced the work of a whole generation of artists that became active in the 1980s.”⁴⁰ Ciric’s book also includes archival materials from two other important but unofficial exhibitions in Shanghai that introduced abstraction: *The Experimental Painting Exhibition*,⁴¹ held at the Fudan University Teachers Club in 1983, and the *Modern Painting: Six Men Group Exhibition*,⁴² shown at the same venue in 1985. In the latter exhibition, which included works by Yu Youhan and his students Qin Yifeng, Ding Yi, and Feng Lianghong, as well as works by Wang Guqing and Ai Dewu, only abstract paintings were presented, “which was a very radical approach at the time,”⁴³ according to Ciric.

While the more open social atmosphere after the adoption of Deng Xiaoping’s opening-up and reform policy in 1978 made it possible for artists to withdraw from the official academic painting style, by no means did it mean that the emergence of abstraction was widely accepted. With respect to this, Ciric’s book is more insightful than the exhibition in offering insight into the sociopolitical background in which these exhibitions took place. In the book, Zhang Jian-Jun explains why the *Experimental Painting Exhibition* was closed after only one day: “It was considered improper. The public could not understand abstract painting. Moreover, the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (1983) just started.”⁴⁴ The book also reproduces a newspaper article from the *Liberation Daily* that harshly criticized the exhibition and condemned the artists who produced abstract art, claiming that “[t]hose who created these works only indulge themselves in ‘self-admiration’⁴⁵ and do not serve the people.⁴⁶ It is through such

comments that one can see how, at the time of their emergence, abstract works possessed a certain criticality. The decision to create abstract paintings could be seen as a belief in art as an autonomous practice, and as a call for freedom of expression, which stood in opposition to the official understanding of the role of art.

Reaching into the Past to Create the Future

While the part of the exhibition that dealt with abstract art felt a bit like a canonizing gesture by Ciric, the way her exhibition revolved around the archive in general attested to the fact that the narrative in the archive she helped to create is only one way of looking at these historical exhibitions. *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room* had no ambition to settle into a definitive history about particular exhibitions; instead, the individual contributions by the invited artists had different focal points, which together achieved a rich texture of cross-references, especially when they dealt with the same exhibitions.

With *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room*, Ciric not only brought together artists from different backgrounds to revive and intervene into an alternative artist-focused history of local exhibitions, she also paved the way for future developments in artistic and curatorial discourse and knowledge production on a broader level. This became most apparent in her decision to invite the Slovenian artists' collective Irwin,⁴⁷ founded in Ljubljana in 1983, to revisit their unrealized proposal from 1993 to establish a Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) Embassy in China.⁴⁸ The idea of this invitation is to work on the possibility of opening the NSK Embassy in Shanghai in 2016.

In Ciric's exhibition, a hypothetical architectural model of the proposed NSK Embassy for Beijing from Irwin's archive was included as well as a video about the group's embassy in Moscow, which was "a month long live installation with a program of lectures and public discussions"⁴⁹ held in 1992 at a private apartment. "The aim of the event was to confront the similar social and artistic contexts of the ex-Soviet Union and ex-Yugoslavia."⁵⁰ Obviously, Slovenia and China share less common ground, and although two decades have passed, what Irwin wrote in their artist statement for the NSK Embassy in China in 1992 is still valid for them today: "While in our embassy in Moscow, due to cultural and political similarities, we could expect mutual understanding; we cannot expect any such thing in Beijing. We enter a space completely new to us."⁵¹ To aid the artists, Ciric initiated a first encounter for the implementation of this long-term project. In November 2014 she invited Miran Mohar, one of the NSK's five members, to Shanghai to establish relations with the local art community through conversations with artists and curators. While most of the discussions were private, in a program of public talks held at Osage gallery, Irwin's practice was introduced, and a trans-local encounter between Irwin and some invited Chinese artists took place. One interesting aspect that was addressed by Mohar on this occasion was how Irwin's Moscow-Ljubljana project had been based on the attempt to create an alternative structure for their artistic practice in the absence of a working art system in their transitional society at the time. To work on an exchange

around self-institutionalization might be one productive point of departure, which became noticeable in the talk between Mohar and the artist Huang Xiaopeng.⁵² In the spirit of a social art practice, Huang Xiaopeng teaches at the HB Station in Guangzhou, an alternative research-oriented art education project supported by the Guangdong Times Museum. Currently it is too early to predict if Irwin's Embassy project for Shanghai will become a future reality, but the inclusion of such a proposal in the exhibition *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room* has already been a fruitful step in creating a desire for the emergence of unexpected cross-cultural alliances.

Notes

1. Biljana Ciric, interview with the author, Shanghai, November 28, 2014.
2. Biljana Ciric, "Introduction: Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room," in *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room*, exhibition booklet, 2014.
3. Ibid.
4. Biljana Ciric, "2002 Fuck Off, Introduction," in Biljana Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006* (Manchester: Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, 2014), 379.
5. Biljana Ciric, "Interview with Feng Boyi," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 390.
6. Mladen Stilinovic, "Praise of Laziness," 1993, <http://mladenstilinovic.com/works/10-2/>.
7. *History in the Making: Shanghai 1979–2009*, Ju Men Road 436, Shanghai, September 10–October 10, 2009. The research for the exhibition was published in Chinese, in Ciric, ed., *History in the Making: Shanghai 1979–2009, Artist Interviews and Work Archive* (Shanghai: Shanghai Peoples Fine Arts Publishing House, 2010).
8. Ciric, "A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006, Introduction," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 2.
9. Ibid., 3.
10. One thing that is noticeable, though, is that almost no women were part of these exhibition-making artists' groups. Since the book does not address this, it remains unclear whether they were not involved or whether this would be yet another history to research and write about.
11. Ciric, "Introduction: Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room."
12. Ibid.
13. The artists invited to activate the archive were: Charda Adytama, Yason Banal, Hu Yun, Irwin, Marysia Lewandowska, Shi Yong, Luke Willis Thompson, Mona Vătâmanu and Florin Tudor, Yu Youhan, Zhang Peili, and 3-Ply (an artist-led publishing initiative directed by Fayen d'Evie that chose the exhibition catalogue for *Let's Talk About Money* for their *Re-print* series; see <http://3ply.net/2014/12/02/shanghai-fax/>). The preface compiled by Ciric included artworks by Gong Jianhua, Hu Yun, Marysia Lewandowska, Li Ran, and Zhou Zixi.
14. Ciric, "Introduction: Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room."
15. Ciric, "A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006, Introduction," 2.
16. Biljana Ciric, "Marysia Lewandowska: Shanghai Exhibition Histories Distributed," in *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room*.
17. For further information about Hu Jianping's *Ranks Interventions*, see "1993 Ranks Interventions and exhibition by Hu Jianping," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 256–273.
18. Paraphrased by the author from a Skype conversation with Marysia Lewandowska, March 21, 2015.
19. Due to time constraints, Marysia Lewandowska could not visit all the sites of the former exhibition venues.
20. The exhibitions held at the basement gallery at Huashan Vocational Art School, and included in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006* are the following: *October Experimental Art Exhibition*, 1992; *Two Attitudes Towards Identity: Qian Weikang and Shi Yong Installation Work Show*, 1993; *Ape' 94 Art Show*, 1994; and *Let's Talk about Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition*, 1996.
21. Ciric, "A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006, Introduction," 3.
22. Skype conversation with Marysia Lewandowska, March 21, 2015.
23. Ibid.
24. This quote is from Shi Yong's installation titled *Previously, form often originated from a passiveness rather than resistance, like how we use umbrellas when it starts to rain. What about now?*, 2014.
25. Biljana Ciric, "Hank Bull, Shen Fan, Zhou Tiehai, Shi Yong, and Ding Yi, *Let's Talk About Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition*, 1996," in Elena Filipovic, ed., *The Artist as Curator, Issue #6* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2014), 24.
26. The fax art exhibition included international artists from the following countries: Japan, the United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, France, Belgium, Australia, Italy, Hungary, Mexico, Russia, Argentina, Uruguay, Austria, and the Philippines. See, Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 304–305.

27. See Biljana Ciric, "1996 Let's Talk about Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition, Introduction," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 306.
28. This quote is from Shi Yong's installation titled *Previously, form often originated from a passiveness rather than resistance, like how we use umbrellas when it starts to rain. What about now?*, 2014.
29. Ciric, "1996 Let's Talk about Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition, Introduction," 306.
30. Ciric, "Hank Bull, Shen Fan, Zhou Tiehai, Shi Yong, and Ding Yi, Let's Talk About Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition, 1996," 25.
31. This quote is from Shi Yong's installation titled *Previously, form often originated from a passiveness rather than resistance, like how we use umbrellas when it starts to rain. What about now?*, 2014.
32. Ciric, "Hank Bull, Shen Fan, Zhou Tiehai, Shi Yong, and Ding Yi, Let's Talk About Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition, 1996," 30.
33. This is quoted from a text displayed next to the work at Osage Art Foundation: "Rachmansyah, a long lost high-profile Indonesian artist was trying to participate in the 1996 Let's Talk about Money: First International Fax Art Exhibition in Shanghai, but some unfortunate event rendered it impossible for him to send his works. He also meant to seek and reconnect his own past through the exhibition. This occurrence led to his disappearance, adding more mysteriousness to his present."
34. Charada Adytama, "Going Home," in *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room*.
35. Paraphrased by the author from an e-mail exchange between Charada Adytama and the author, March 24, 2014.
36. Paraphrased by the author from an e-mail exchange between Hu Yun and the author, March 28, 2014.
37. E-mail exchange between Hu Yun and the author, March 28, 2014.
38. For earlier works by Zhang Peili in this direction, see Zhang Peili, "Against the Public: The Point of Departure for Art Project No. 2 (*Yishu Jihua Di Er Hao*), 1988/2008," in Wu Hung, ed., *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 112–13; and Gao Minglu, "Metaphorical Abuse in the Reception of Art: Works by Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi in the Late 1980s," in Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 242–51.
39. See, for example, Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 178.
40. Biljana Ciric, "Mapping Abstraction—Shanghai," in *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room*.
41. For more information, see "'83 Experimental Painting Exhibition," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 32–48.
42. For more information, see "1985 Modern Painting: Six Men Group Exhibition," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 50–68.
43. Biljana Ciric, "1985 Modern Painting: Six Men Group Exhibition," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 51.
44. Biljana Ciric, "Interview with Zhang Jianjun," in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 44.
45. Hunag Ke, "Abstract Painting, New Form and National Conditions," *Liberation Daily*, 1983, in Ciric, ed., *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, 39.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Irwin's members are Dušan Mandić, Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek, and Borut Vogelnik.
48. "The NSK State was created in 1992 by the groups comprising the Slovene arts collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). Amongst others these included the groups Laibach, Irwin, Noordung, New Collectivism and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. Neue Slowenische Kunst was founded in Ljubljana in 1984 as socialist Yugoslavia began to fracture. . . . The NSK State was created in the aftermath of Slovene independence. It has carried out a series of temporary 'Embassy' and 'Consulate' events in locations including Moscow, Ghent, Berlin and Sarajevo plus other collective actions. The State is conceived as a utopian formation which has no physical territory and is not identified with any existing national state." Excerpt from The NSK TIMES blog, *About NSK State*, <http://times.nskstate.com/about-nsk/>.
49. "NSK Embassy was conceptualized by Irwin as a month long live installation with a program of lectures and public discussions, organized in cooperation by Irwin and Eda Čufer. The project was part of Apt-Art International and co-organised by Ridzhina Gallery." See Irwin, *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East*, May 10–June 10, 1992, <http://www.irwin.si/works-and-projects/nsk-embassy-moscow/>.
50. "The lecturers were Rastko Močnik, Marina Gržinić and Matjaž Berger from Slovenia, Vesna Kesić from Croatia, and Viktor Misiano, Valeri Podoroga, Aleksandr Yakimovich, Tatiana Didenko and Artiom Troitsky from Russia. The aim of the event was to confront the similar social and artistic contexts of the ex-Soviet Union and ex-Yugoslavia." *Ibid.*
51. Irwin, "Revisiting the Project Proposal for the NSK Embassy in Beijing," in *Just as money is the paper, the gallery is the room*.
52. Public talk "Bella Ciao!—The Institutionalisation of Friendship," with Irwin member Miran Mohar (Ljubljana), Huang Xiaopeng (Guangzhou), and Sang Tian (Beijing), November 28, 2014, Osage Art Foundation, Shanghai.