

# From a chinese perspective

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Contemporary Art in China unravels as a budding butterfly out of its cocoon. Years of militant ruling and the imposition of state-centered concepts made contemporary art mundane and stagnant. At the onset of globalization, modern artists from China found more room to wiggle as they begin to showcase their talents in a more matured Chinese setting. Unable to resist the pressures of globalization, Chinese modern art has slowly opened up to the challenge set by global competitors as it hones its craft into the local and international scene with a distinctive Chinese mark.

This new found freedom has resulted in emboldening Chinese artists to meld different mediums and points of view into their artwork, creating a time capsule that pays homage to the past and elucidates the future. Most of the world renowned Chinese artists such as Zhang Xiaogang, Zhang Huan, Ai Weiwei and Liu Xiaodong have made themselves visible because of their unique perspectives about Chinese life and I do not think that their creative impact would have been grand if it did not involve a disturbing quality, especially a distorted one.

The function of these artists was not merely to beautify the tedious surroundings of modern China but to diversify its angle on Chinese culture, unfettered from the shackles of its restrictive past. In this respect, I believe that the responsibility of the contemporary artist lies in creating ripples within their immediate environment. I also deem that contemporary artists also have the opportunity to make use of modern tools in order to produce an artwork that is relevant in today's society of technological advancement and multiculturalism.

I have had the prospect of visiting the Museum of Contemporary Art in Shanghai recently wherein the current theme was “ Couples in Contemporary Art”. It featured the artworks of 15 coupled artists in celebration of their varied outlook on gender and power relations between sexes. The artworks exhibited the use of different materials and mediums such as acrylic on canvas, watercolor on marble, bronze and stainless steel sculptures, ceramic and mineral color on silk among other things.

I was specifically entranced by the works of the couple Chen Xiadan and Yang Jianping as they used bones and Silica gel for their artworks. It was the first time I had ever seen an exhibition wherein couples were involved so it was very interesting to see the polarities in their viewpoints. Another art showcase that I am very fond of is the selected paintings of Zhang Xiaogang in Charles Saatchi’s gallery. Although I have not been to London, I have seen some of his paintings online and in magazines and I believe his artworks depict our cultural past in its barest form.

His paintings merge Asian and European techniques through his use of surrealism and portrait like images of the Chinese family. These artworks incorporate the aesthetics of traditional Chinese charcoal drawings, which give off hues of grey, black and white. A likeness to old photo studio shots, it illustrates the continuous link of the past to the present. The paintings demonstrate a timeless appeal that places emphasis on genealogical roots as each character is a mirror image of another, distinguished only by certain features or marks.

The occasional interruption of such marks and colors indicate a focal viewpoint that Zhang had intended for the observer to ponder. The dream-like distortions of Zhang's paintings signify a complex psychological dimension of Chinese culture in the past, as can be observed in the way the body parts were portrayed such as characters with big heads and eyes and small arms. These suggest narrative readings about personality and a claustrophobic sense of self as images distort the cultured past.

Learning about Zhang's artworks being patronized by people all over the world made me realize how China has matured in order to allow artists like Zhang to represent the country in the world of art. If it were not for globalization, many creative talents from China would still be bottled up in a trend of conformity. Outside influences has greatly affected the crafting of contemporary art in China, which has placed Chinese artists at par with their foreign counterparts.

This is why I believe that being exposed to an environment where diversity of culture is encouraged and established among daily interactions could bolster the creative identity of an artist. Constructing art and interpreting its parameters establishes a concrete notion of the abstract realm. As an artist seeking approval from his or her peers, I regard that such activities that expand one's knowledge would also be culturally beneficial since I would be able to acculturate myself to the modern ways of western thinking and at the same time, impart my Chinese heritage to the fellow artists that I come into contact with.

I trust that the network of people that will cross my path would also be able to contribute in strengthening cordial relations between the Chinese and the Americans. I believe that change is important for the growth of an individual artist as that is how creative identity is isolated and constructed. It would be interesting to see and learn from the different viewpoints and techniques of other artists, as well as the opportunity to handle challenges found in a multicultural setting. Such experiences will surely create an impression on my worldview as a Chinese and as a budding artist.