EXHIBITIONS

- THE ALLURE OF MATTER
- BHUTAN: A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

LEGEND

- RESTROOM
- WATER FOUNTAIN
- ELEVATOR
- COAT/BAG CHECK
- CATALOG PICK-UP
THE ALLURE OF MATTER
Material Art from China

ON VIEW:

at Wrightwood 659
February 7–May 2, 2020
and

at Smart Museum of Art
The University of Chicago
5550 S. Greenwood Avenue | Chicago, IL 60637
February 7–May 3, 2020

Everyday Materials, Radically Reinvented.

Gu Dexin, Untitled, 1989, Photo: © Museum Associates/LACMA.

**NATIONAL TOUR**

Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
June 2, 2019–January 5, 2020

Smart Museum of Art and Wrightwood 659  
February 7–May 3, 2020

Seattle Art Museum  
June 25–September 13, 2020

Peabody Essex Museum  
November 14, 2020–February 21, 2021

The national tour of this exhibition is supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

*The Allure of Matter* is co-organized by the Smart Museum of Art with Wrightwood 659 and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Peabody Essex Museum.

The exhibition is curated by Wu Hung, Smart Museum Adjunct Curator, Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor of Art History, and Director of the Center for the Art of East Asia at the University of Chicago, with Orianna Cacchione, Smart Museum Curator of Global Contemporary Art. This presentation of *The Allure of Matter* is made possible by support from Alphawood Foundation Chicago. Support for the exhibition and its catalogue has been provided by principal sponsors the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and by Lorna Ferguson and Terry Clark. Additional support has been provided by the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation and the Smart Museum’s SmartPartners.
Since the 1980s, artists working in China have experimented with various materials, transforming seemingly everyday objects into large-scale artworks. These artists have exploded fireworks into paintings, felted hair into gleaming flags, stretched pantyhose into monochromatic artworks, deconstructed old doors and windows to make sculptures, and even skillfully molded porcelain into gleaming black flames.

Artists continue to explore and develop this creative mode, with some devoting decades of their practice to experiments with a single material. For the first time, *The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China* brings together works in which conscious material choice has become a means of the artists’ expression, representing this trend throughout recent history.

In Chicago, the exhibition is divided into two unique halves, taking up the entire gallery footprints of the Smart Museum of Art on the South Side and Wrightwood 659 on the North Side. To fully experience the exhibition, guests are encouraged to visit both locations.

**THE ALLURE OF MATTER ARTISTS:**

- Ai Weiwei
- Cai Guo-Qiang
- Chen Zhen
- Gu Dexin
- gu wenda
- He Xiangyu
- Hu Xiaoyuan
- Huang Yong Ping
- Jin Shan
- Liang Shaoji
- Lin Tianmiao
- Liu Jianhua
- Liu Wei
- Ma Qiusha
- Peng Yu
- Shi Hui
- Song Dong
- Sui Jianguo
- Sun Yuan and Peng Yu
- Wang Jin
- Xu Bing
- Yin Xiuzhen
- Zhan Wang
- Zhang Huan
- Zhang Yu
- Zhu Jinshi
The fruit of a multiyear research project, this exhibition coins the concept “Material Art,” or caizhi yishu in Chinese[,] to define a crucial component of contemporary Chinese art that has remained largely unexamined. This type of art entails an artist’s consistent use of unconventional materials to produce works in which material, rather than image or style, is paramount in manifesting the artist’s aesthetic judgement or social critique. Whether intimate or generic, natural or artificial, special materials are selected and “adopted” by artists, given agency, and become their private means of making art over a significant period of time. Used in painting, sculpture, installation, and performance, such material substances transcend codified art forms to function as “super-agents” in their works.

Material Art emerged in China in the 1980s and triumphed in the 1990s and early 2000s. At the beginning, young artists chose unconventional materials for themselves that simultaneously declared their
self-identity as alternative artists in the domestic context and as members of global contemporary art in the international sphere. Derived from the physical world, these materials also allowed them to bypass the East-West dichotomy to make works that were both culture-specific and globally relevant. It is no coincidence that several pioneers of Material Art, such as Huang Yong Ping (1954-2019), Cai Guo-Qiang (born 1957), and Gu Wenda (born 1955), also belonged to the first group of contemporary Chinese artists to gain international recognition in the 1980s and 1990s.

During the past thirty years, Material Art has produced several generations of artists whose works have appeared in major international exhibitions and impressed audiences with their visual ingenuity and semantic complexity. Gradually, the distinct languages and aesthetics of this art have become shared properties of contemporary Chinese artists and have continued to influence younger generations. Rejecting hard-and-fast categorization, artists making Material Art represent a thoroughly cosmopolitan approach within contemporary Chinese art and a culturally informed regional approach within global contemporary art. These artists have thus made an important contribution in opening up a space that overlaps and reconfigures local and global contemporary art. Conversely, the desire to expand this space has sustained these artists’ continuous engagement with special materials that speak to audiences in both local and global arenas.

The Allure of Matter presents the world’s first systematic introduction to the phenomenon. The works by the twenty-six artists in the exhibition encapsulate the entire course of this artistic trend, from its emergence in the late 1980s and early 1990s to its current manifestations. Many artists in the exhibition are familiar to observers of contemporary Chinese art. Some of them, such as Ai Weiwei (born 1957), Xu Bing (born 1955), Huang Yong Ping, and Cai Guo-Qiang, are among the best-known contemporary artists in the world. Although their use of unconventional materials has not gone unnoticed, their “material works” have been treated as isolated cases occasioned by their individual creativity, and have been vaguely—and often inaccurately—labeled as Conceptual Art, assemblage, readymades, or object-based art.
In examining these artists and their works through the lens of Material Art, this exhibition and the related catalogue aim to achieve three interrelated goals. The first is to establish the historical position of Material Art by reconstructing its origin, development, and context, and exploring its stimuli and essential characteristics. This investigation brings a vital but previously ignored aspect of contemporary Chinese art into scholarly focus, adding an important dimension to existing narratives of contemporary Chinese art. The second goal is to analyze individual artists and their works within this wide-ranging and multifaceted artistic phenomenon. The fundamental tactic of Material Art, that each artist claims ownership of one or more special materials as his or her own, emphasizes personal choices and makes this art a conglomerate of highly individualized projects. A study of Material Art thus cannot stop at the level of a macro narrative but must uncover the particular contexts and inspirations of specific projects as well as their interrelationships.

The third goal is to connect Material Art from China with the scholarship on materiality in contemporary art that has emerged mainly since 2000. This vibrant scholarship takes the material as both focus
and frame of historical and theoretical inquiries, and analyzes particular material categories and/or theorizes materiality in art. Simply put, in the words of art historian Petra Lange-Berndt, the general methodology of this type of research is “to follow the material and to act with the material.”[2]

The current exhibition and catalogue adopt this basic methodology, but at the same time embrace a contextual, art-historical approach through reconstructing the development of Material Art within a clearly delineated historical framework. The hope is to enrich the existing scholarship on materiality by discovering and interpreting an important non-Western artistic phenomenon.

Wu Hung is the Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor of Art History and the College, Director of the Center for the Art of East Asia, Adjunct Curator at the Smart Museum of Art, and Special Advisor to the Provost for the Arts in Asia at the University of Chicago. As a scholar, he has published widely on both traditional and contemporary Chinese art and has experimented with different ways to integrate these conventionally separate phases into new kinds of art historical narratives.

He is also a renowned international curator and has curated more than 50 exhibitions in the United States, China, and other countries. The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China is the latest in a series of contemporary Chinese projects he has organized as a consulting curator at the Smart Museum, including Transience (1999), ‘Canceled’ (2000), The Art of Mu Xin: Landscape Paintings and Prison Notes (2002), Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China (2004), Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam and Contemporary Chinese Art (2008), and Inspired by the Opera: Contemporary Chinese Photography and Video (2014). He received the College Art Association’s 2018 Distinguished Scholar award and, in spring 2019, he delivered the 68th Annual A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. He holds a PhD in art history and anthropology from Harvard University and an MA from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

Footnotes:

[1] While yishu means “art,” the two characters in the compound term caizhi (材质) means “material, stuff” (cai) and “quality” (zhi), respectively. The term thus pertains not only to a physical material but also the cultural and aesthetic qualities it provides.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

HU XIAOYUAN
Chinese, born 1977

Ant Bone IV | 2015
Chinese catalpa wood, ink, raw silk (xiao), paint, and iron nails
Courtesy of the artist and Beijing Commune

LIANG SHAOJI
Chinese, born 1945

Chains: The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Nature Series, No. 79
2002–7
Polyurethane, colophony, iron powder, silk, and cocoons
Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART Gallery

LIU WEI
Chinese, born 1972

Exotic Lands No. 15
2013
Wood and stainless steel
The Chu Collection

LIU JIANHUA
Chinese, born 1962

Black Flame
2017
Porcelain
Collection of the artist, courtesy of Pace Gallery

JIN SHAN
Chinese, born 1977

Mistaken | 2015
Wood and plastic
Collection of the artist, courtesy of Bank Gallery

Merely a Mistake II No. 7
2009–11
Doors and door frames, wooden beams, acrylic board, stainless steel, and iron
The Chu Collection
PENG YU  
Chinese, born 1974

Exile | 2000  
Betacam SP video, 3:12 minutes running time  
Collection M HKA / Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp

SHI HUI  
Chinese, born 1955

Float  
2001/2007/2013  
Wire mesh and xuan paper pulp  
Collection of the artist, Hangzhou

SUI JIANGUO  
Chinese, born 1956

Kill | 1996  
Rubber and iron nails  
Collection of the artist, courtesy of Pace Gallery

WANG JIN  
Chinese, born 1962

The Dream of China: Dragon Robe | 1997  
Polyvinyl chloride and vinyl filament  
The Farber Collection

WANG JIN  
(continued)

Chinese Dream  
2006  
Polyvinyl chloride, vinyl filament, iron chain, and hook  
Pizzuti Collection

YIN XIUZHEN

Transformation  
1997  
Black and white photographs mounted on tiles  
Collection of the artist, courtesy of Pace Gallery

ZHANG HUAN  
Chinese, born 1965

Ash Painting No. 5  
2006  
Incense ashes and adhesive  
Pearl Lam Private Collection

A Chinese Dream  
2006  
PVC with embroidered fishing thread  
Private collection, New York
ZHAN WANG
Chinese, born 1962

Ornamental Rock
1996
Stainless steel
Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Gift of Carl Rungius, by exchange

Beyond 12 Nautical Miles—Floating Rock Drifts on the Open Sea
2000
Single-channel video, 8:36 minutes running time
Collection of the artist

ZHU JINSHI
Chinese, born 1954

Wave of Materials
2007/2020
Xuan paper, cotton thread, bamboo, and stones
Gift of Zhu Jinshi and Pearl Lam Gallery in honor of Wu Hung, jointly acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago

ZHANG YU
Chinese, born 1959

Fingerprints | 2008
Longjing water on xuan paper
Collection of the artist, Beijing

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A limited number of exhibition catalogs are available for purchase. The 265-page hard cover catalog features essays, artist profiles, and an exhibition checklist.
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST
SMART MUSEUM OF ART

AI WEIWEI
Chinese, born 1957

Tables at Right Angles
1998
Tables from the Qing dynasty (1644–1911)
Stockamp Tsai Collection

CAI GUO-QIANG
Chinese, born 1957

Mountain Range | 2006
Gunpowder on paper, mounted on wood as a six-panel screen
Collection of the artist

CHEN ZHEN
Chinese, 1955–2000

Crystal Landscape of Inner Body | 2000
Crystal, glass, and metal
Private collection, Paris, courtesy Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana

GU DEXIN
Chinese, born 1962

Untitled | 1989
Melted and adjoined plastic
Musée d’art contemporain de Lyon

GU WENDA
Chinese, born 1955

united nations: american code | 2018–19
Human hair
Commissioned by the Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Seattle Art Museum; and Peabody Essex Museum for the exhibition The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China

HE XIANGYU
Chinese, born 1986

A Barrel of Dregs of Coca-Cola | 2009
Coca-Cola resin, metal, and glass
Rubell Family Collection, Miami
HE XIANGYU
(continued)

Cola, 9 Sketches
2010
Ink, watercolor, barcodes, printed invoices, and photographs on paper
Rubell Family Collection, Miami

HUANG YONG PING
Chinese, 1954–2019

Devons-nous encore construire une grande cathédrale?
(Should We Construct Another Cathedral?)
1991
Table, stools, black and white photograph, and papier-mâché
Collection Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris

LIN TIANMIAO
Chinese, born 1961

Day-Dreamer
2000
White cotton threads, white fabric, and digital photograph
Collection of the artist

LIU JIANHUA
Chinese, born 1962

Blank Paper | 2009–12
Porcelain
Collection of the artist, courtesy of Pace Gallery

MA QIUSHA
Chinese, born 1982

Wonderland: Black Square | 2016
Cement, nylon stockings, plywood, resin, and iron
Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions

SONG DONG
Chinese, born 1966

Water Records | 2010
Four-channel video projection, running times variable
Collection of the artist, courtesy of Pace Gallery

Traceless Stele | 2016
Stele, heating device, water, and Chinese brushes
Collection of the artist, courtesy of Pace Gallery

SUN YUAN AND PENG YU
Chinese, born 1972; born 1974

Civilization Pillar
2000/2019
Human fat and metal supports
Commissioned by the Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago
XU BING
Chinese, born 1955

Study for Tobacco Book
1999
Tobacco leaves, pencil, and ink on paper
Collection of the artist

Study for Tobacco Project
1999-2000
Pencil & collage on paper
Collection of the artist

XU BING
(continued)

1st Class | 2011
500,000 “1st Class” brand cigarettes, adhesive, and carpet
Collection of the artist

Study for Chinese Spirit I | 1999
Pencil & collage on paper
Collection of the artist

Study for Chinese Spirit II | 1999
Pencil & collage on paper
Collection of the artist

Study for Tobacco Book | 2011
Tobacco leaves, paper, and cardboard, rubber-stamped with passage from A True Discourse on the Present State of Virginia by Ralph Hamor (1615)
Collection of the artist

Traveling Down the River | 2011
Burned cigarette on a scroll in a glass case
Collection of the artist

ZHANG HUAN
Chinese, born 1965

Seeds | 2007
Incense ash, charcoal, and resin on canvas
Faurschou Collection

ZHAN WANG
Chinese, born 1962

Beyond 12 Nautical Miles—Floating Rock Drifts on the Open Sea | 2000
Single-channel video, 8:36 minutes running time
Collection of the artist

Gold Mountain | 2007
Stone and stainless steel
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery

ON VIEW @ SMART MUSEUM OF ART
In the years spanning 1988 to 2002, computer scientist and former MIT professor Michael Hawley led a team of photographers, publishers, and students through the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan to document daily life. The four expeditions they took resulted in an archive of photographs of the country’s people, landscapes, and cultural practices which the non-profit Friendly Planet later published in a large book entitled *Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Kingdom*. At Wrightwood 659, the book is displayed along a concrete wall on the fourth floor. Folded, it measures 5 x 7 feet but, at the gallery, displayed in its full unfolded length, visitors can walk along its span of 155 linear feet and see for themselves not only the visual but also the physical extent of the project. The pages, with their super-saturated colors and life-sized portraits, vibrantly represent the people and geography of Bhutan.
ABOUT WRIGHTWOOD 659

Wrightwood 659 is a new exhibition space conceived for the presentation of exhibitions of architecture and of socially engaged art. It is designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Tadao Ando, who has transformed a 1920s building with his signature concrete forms and poetic treatment of natural light.

In a city rich with art institutions and internationally known for its architecture, Wrightwood 659 is designed as a site for contemplative experiences of art and architecture, and as a place to engage with the pressing social issues of our time. Located in Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood, it is a private, non-commercial initiative envisioned as an integral part of the cultural and civic fabric of Chicago, as well as a new kind of arts space and cultural resource.

Get early access to Wrightwood 659 events, receptions, and exhibition previews. Subscribe at wrightwood659.org
Wrightwood 659’s Visitor Services Associates (VSAs) are located throughout the building to answer your questions. Their backgrounds in art, architecture, and social movements provide unique insights into Wrightwood 659’s exhibitions and gallery space. VSAs are available to answer your questions about The Allure of Matter artists and artworks, or Wrightwood 659. Please let us know how we can help you.

Admission to Wrightwood 659 is only available during the public showing of exhibitions. Reservations are required and are available at wrightwood659.org.

Wrightwood 659 is committed to providing inclusive experiences for all audiences. Please call 773.437.6601 or email info@wrightwood659.org for access services. Service animals specially trained to assist a person with a disability are welcome at Wrightwood 659.

Enjoy FREE wireless Internet access at Wrightwood 659. Look for “Wrightwood 659 Guest” in your settings on your Wi-Fi-enabled device.
Please help us protect the artworks by respecting the following:

- Children of all ages are welcome, however, those under 16 years of age must be accompanied by an adult.
- Do not touch the art.
- Do not eat or drink in the galleries.
- Smoking is not permitted.
- Carry bags on your front or side.
- Check all personal items that are larger than 12 x 12 inches. Complimentary bag and coat check is available on the first floor.
- Talking on the phone is limited to non-gallery spaces throughout the building.
- Strollers are not permitted in the galleries but may be parked in the coat check room.

Wrightwood 659 reserves the right to not allow any bag, parcel, or other item to be brought into the building, and to deal with unattended objects in such a way as we consider appropriate. Wrightwood 659 also reserves the right to deny admission to or remove any person wearing attire that we consider inappropriate or that could detract from the experience of other visitors.
COMING EXHIBITIONS:

**SHAHIDUL ALAM: TRUTH TO POWER**
June, 2020

*Shahidul Alam: Truth to Power* presents the first comprehensive U.S. museum survey of Shahidul Alam, the renowned Bangladeshi photographer, writer, activist, and institution-builder and a *Time* magazine Person of the Year in 2018. Coming to Wrightwood 659 from The Rubin Museum of Art.

**A SPECIAL PRIDE EXHIBITION**
June, 2020

In celebration of the first Gay Pride parade 50 years ago in June 1970, this summer Alphawood Exhibitions opens a special, queer-themed exhibition.

Stay tuned for more information!

**BALKRISHNA DOSHI: ARCHITECTURE FOR THE PEOPLE**
Sept 9 – Dec 12, 2020

In collaboration with the Vitra Design Museum of Weil am Rhein, Germany, Alphawood Exhibitions presents Balkrishna Doshi: Architecture for the People, the first and only US retrospective of the 2018 Pritzker Prize laureate Balkrishna Doshi (born 1927, Pune, India). The renowned architect and urban planner is one of the few pioneers of modern architecture in his home country and the first Indian architect to receive the prestigious award. The exhibition will present numerous significant projects realized between 1958 and 2014, ranging in scale from entire cities and town planning projects to academic campuses, cultural institutions, public administrative offices, private residences, and interiors.


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