



ART FRONTIER

An International Art Journal/Vol. 4 No. 1 Jan-Mar.2026 Published: 2026-03-30

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To cite this article: Jingwei Zeng "Institutions, Boundaries, and Life: Wang Huangsheng's Curatorial Thought, "New Art Museum Studies," and Artistic Innovation, Art Frontier 4, no.1: 71-89, DOI:<https://doi.org/10.64212/t3f6k639>.

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.64212/t3f6k639>

ISSN: 2835-5490

EISSN: 2836-841X

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This article has undergone double-blind peer review.

Website: <https://www.cafontierpress.org/>

Email: editorial2023@artfrontier.org

Publishing Frequency: Quarterly (March, June, September, December)



Institutions, Boundaries, and Life: Wang Huangsheng's Curatorial Thought, "New Art Museum Studies," and Artistic Innovation

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Abstract

Through the two closely intertwined dimensions of curatorial practice and artistic creation, this paper discusses Wang Huangsheng's great contributions to Chinese contemporary art, museum culture and its knowledge system. This paper first analyzes his institutional experiments, knowledge production and dedication to the public interest in the Guangzhou Triennale, CAFAM Biennale and a series of exhibitions, and discusses the concept of "New Art Museum Research" proposed by him. Subsequently, the article focuses on a series of exhibitions such as *Moving Vision*, *Metaphor Vision*, and *Breathe IN/OUT* and explores how Wang Huangsheng uses elements such as lines, gauze, metal wire, glass, light, sound, and oxygen cylinders to break through the existing formal boundaries of ink art and transform it into a contemporary art language that can respond to social crises, historical trauma, and bioethics. This paper argues that Wang Huangsheng integrates curatorial practice, museum operation, institutional criticism and artistic experiment into a practice of cultural progress, historical consciousness and public responsibility. He not only helped reshape the institutional system and knowledge structure of contemporary Chinese art, but also re-emphasized the vital power of art and museums in preserving historical memory, safeguarding human dignity, promoting public discussion and conceiving a better future.

Key Words

Wang Huangsheng; curatorial practice; New Art Museum Studies; contemporary ink art;

Introduction

As an artist, curator, museum curator and scholar of art history and museology, Wang Huangsheng occupies a unique position in the contemporary Chinese art world. His curatorial projects and institutional practices have played an important role in reshaping the exhibition culture and academic orientation of contemporary Chinese art museums. His artistic creation has innovated the ink language through continuous experiments in the fields of lines, materials, space, dynamic images and sounds. Behind these explorations, there is his

deep enthusiasm for art institutions, art boundaries, social reality and human living conditions. Therefore, this paper discusses Wang Huangsheng's contribution from two dimensions: the first part discusses his curatorial practice, institutional criticism and the construction of the theory of 'New Art Museology'; the second part examines the significance of his artistic innovation - especially his transformation of line language, as well as his thinking on crisis, tenacity and hope. In general, these two dimensions together reveal a coherent cultural achievement in which curation, museum research and artistic

creation mirror and inspire each other.

1. Curatorial Practice, Institutional Critique, and “New Art Museum Studies”: Wang Huangsheng’s Curatorial Thought and Scholarly Contributions

In the contemporary Chinese art world, Wang Huangsheng is not only an artist with important influence, but also a pioneer in promoting the theoretical development of Chinese contemporary curatorial practice and art museums. Since the 1990 s, he has held positions in Guangdong Art Museum, CAFA Art Museum and other institutions, and has led important exhibitions such as Guangzhou 3 Year Exhibition and CAFAM Biennale, thus constructing a curatorial philosophy that combines theory with practice. Based on these practices, Wang Huangsheng put forward the concept of "New Art Museum Research" and pointed out that curatorial work should not only be understood as the work of organizing exhibitions or displaying works of art ; it should be regarded as a comprehensive cultural practice, covering institutional criticism, knowledge sharing and the promotion of public culture.

1.1 Urban Culture and an International Perspective: The Curatorial Practice of the Guangzhou Triennial

A milestone event in Wang Huangsheng's curatorial practice is his curatorial work in Guangdong Provincial Art Museum. From the late 1990 s to the beginning of the 21 st century, Chinese contemporary art is gradually integrated into the international art system, while the museum institutional system and academic reform in China is still in its infancy. In this context, the three-yearly Guangzhou Art Expo held in 2002 has become an important event in the history of contemporary Chinese art (Fig.1). Guangzhou has been an important foreign trade port of China since modern times, with a complex and rich cultural history. In planning this three-year art fair, Wang Huangsheng hopes to promote the exchange between Chinese contemporary art and the global art discourse system through this international exhibition mechanism, and also



Figure 1. Installation view of the 2002 First Guangzhou Triennial, Reinterpretation: *A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art* (1990–2000). Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

aims to re-examine the positioning of Chinese urban culture in the context of globalization.

The First Guangzhou Triennial, Reinterpretation: *A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art* (1990–2000), the exhibition reviews the development of Chinese experimental art and is dedicated to the dialogue between Chinese art practice and international art theory. In addition to exhibiting works of art, the exhibition also creates a platform for promoting knowledge production and academic exchanges by holding forums, publications and public activities. The third Guangzhou Triennale - ' Farewell to Post-colonialism ' - then extended this discussion to the global cultural, political and artistic discourse system (Fig.2). This exhibition does not simply deny the post-colonial theory, but re-examines the significance of the theory to contemporary art. Wang explained that " farewell to post-colonialism " is not a simple negation of post-colonialism: the post-colonial era is far from over, but post-colonialism, as the dominant discourse in curatorial and artistic criticism, has become highly ideological and politicized, gradually losing its critical power and evolving into a new institutional force, hindering the emergence of new reality and new interface in the field of art. Therefore, saying goodbye to post-colonialism not only means breaking away from post-colonialism, but also means 'redefining 'and 'new departure ' ".¹

This exposition reveals the theoretical reflexivity contained in Wang 's curatorial practice : the exhibition itself becomes an



Figure 2. Opening of the 2008 Third Guangzhou Triennial, *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, at the Guangdong Museum of Art. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

opportunity to repeatedly examine the established cultural theory and artistic discourse system. 'Redefinition' and 'new starting point' do not mean simply replacing one theory with another. Rather, they describe an open and dialectical method of art-historical inquiry. While thinking the postcolonial theory, this method reconsiders its applicability to contemporary art and therefore opens a new vista for artistic experimentation and cultural experience. Thus, the exhibition serves not only as a platform for displaying art, but also as a mechanism through which art-historical discussion can be continuously extended.

The importance of the Guangzhou Triennial is not only in its contents but also in the scholarly structure it established. With scholastic research and interdisciplinary engagement, it formed an open platform which allows artistic creation, theoretical discussion, and public engagement. Most importantly, the platform placed Chinese contemporary art directly within the narrative of global cultural exchange and art-historical research. In *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, the critique of postcolonial theory allowed the Triennial to be the center of contemporary artistic discourse. Since then, Chinese contemporary art is no longer passively integrated into the existing western art creation methodology; it began to

respond to criticism, challenges and reshape this theoretical framework through its own unique perspective. From this perspective, 'redefinition' and 'new starting point' are not only a curatorial concept, but also an open and vibrant research method of art history. This method recognizes the importance of postcolonial theory in revealing the structure of global cultural power, while guarding against the risk that the theory may solidify into a certain discourse habit or restrictive theoretical framework; this opens up space for new artistic practice and cultural experience. In this regard, the Guangzhou 3-year exhibition is no longer just a large-scale exhibition project, but also a platform for active participation in cultural research. It helps Chinese contemporary art establish a new voice in the field of world art history and cultural theory. At that time, the practice of using exhibitions as a theoretical discussion medium was a pioneering move in the Chinese museum system, and it also provided an important paradigm for the academic organization structure of later large-scale contemporary art exhibitions.

1.2 Rethinking Curatorial Mechanisms: The Institutional Experiments of the CAFAM Biennale



Figure 3. "QR-code Jungle" outside the museum during the Third CAFAM Biennale. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

If the Guangzhou Triennial primarily embodied the interaction between urban culture and the international art world, the CAFAM Biennale, which Wang promoted at the CAFA Art Museum, focused more directly on the institutions of curating and the mechanisms of the art museum. The Second CAFAM Biennale in 2014, *The Invisible Hand: Curating as a Stance*, reconsidered the construction of curatorial knowledge from within the profession. Since then, Chinese contemporary art is no longer passively integrated into the existing western art creation methodology ; it began to respond to criticism, challenges and reshape this theoretical framework through its own unique perspective. From this perspective, ' redefinition ' and ' new starting point ' are not only a curatorial concept, but also an open and vibrant research method of art history. This method recognizes the importance of postcolonial theory in revealing the structure

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The artist's proposal and deliberation record are presented in the form of two-dimensional code, thus creating a display space called

"two-dimensional code jungle"; each two-dimensional code corresponds to a video recording of an art proposal and its negotiation process, enabling visitors to track the creative process through mobile devices.³ The format changed not only the exhibition's visual appearance but also the distribution of knowledge and discursive authority within it. For Wang, making the exhibition process itself part of public discussion gave concrete form to such curatorial ideals as negotiation and democratization.

In the international history of curating, integrating debate and knowledge production into the structure of an exhibition was not entirely unprecedented. Under Okwui Enwezor, Documenta 11 (2002) established a series of "Platforms" in different cities and incorporated global debates on postcoloniality, democracy, and globalization into the overall project, turning the exhibition into a transregional process of public knowledge production. Enwezor spoke of conceiving Documenta as "an expanded form of the public sphere" and emphasized that one of the project's principal aims was to produce knowledge rather than merely mount an art exhibition.⁴ The exhibition thereby became not simply a space for showing artworks but a platform on which different ideas, scholarly discourses, and social questions could meet.

At the same time, relational aesthetics and participatory art in Western curatorial practice since the 1990s emphasized the audience's participation and interaction in aesthetic experience. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud indicates relational art is based on human relations and therefore should be generated through interaction and exchange among audiences.⁵ Claire Bishop points out that relational aesthetics often proposes a harmonious model of social interaction and neglects the conflict and confrontation inherent in social relations.⁶ Within this theoretical context, exhibitions gradually shifted from displaying different objects to creating social relations and public experience, thereby amplifying public discussion and promoting cultural engagement.

Compared with these precedents, however, the "Negotiating Space" CAFAM Biennale possessed a more directly institutional and

experimental character. Through methods such as publicly soliciting proposals, holding multiple consultation meetings, and using QR codes to display the review process, this exhibition not only encourages visitors to view the exhibits or engage in interactive activities but also integrates discussion and consultation mechanisms into both the creative process of the artworks and the structural design of the exhibition. This review mechanism is no longer merely an auxiliary activity surrounding the exhibition; rather, it has become an indispensable part of the exhibition itself. Within the context of Chinese art museums, this curatorial experiment was significant because it challenged the curator-centered organization of the conventional biennial and continually admitted the positions of different participants into the exhibition-making process. It therefore exemplified the university museum's exploration of curatorial mechanisms while providing a Chinese case able to enter international debates on curatorial history. It offers new material for understanding how the mechanisms of contemporary exhibitions change and develop across cultural contexts.

1.3. Research-Based Curating: From the Future Exhibition to Regional Art Research

Alongside his critique of curatorial mechanisms, Wang has explored the exhibition as a research method. The CAFAM Future Exhibition emerged from this concern. Unlike traditional exhibitions centered on specific themes or styles, this project emphasizes continuous observation and long-term research into the young art ecosystem. Through methods such as curatorial nominations, fieldwork, and research reports, the project showcases the creative practices of artists while documenting the evolving trajectory of China's contemporary art ecosystem. The research findings are presented in the form of charts, data, and publications, making this exhibition an important vehicle for artistic research and knowledge production. Consequently, this exhibition is not merely a display platform but also an ongoing academic research process. Recently, the "Pan-ASEAN Triennial," curated by Wang, has expanded its research-based curatorial practice to the regional cultural level

(Figure 4). Unlike conventional exhibitions organized around a theme or style, it emphasized sustained observation and long-term research into the ecology of young art. Through curatorial nominations, fieldwork, and research reports, the project presented artists' practices while documenting changes in China's contemporary art ecology. Its findings were organized into charts, data, and publications, making the exhibition an important medium of art research and knowledge production. The exhibition thus became not merely a platform for display but an ongoing research process.

Taking "regional art research" as its methodology, the project uses exhibitions to reconsider the long-standing historical and cultural connections between southern China and Southeast Asia. "Pan-Southeast Asia" refers to the eleven Southeast Asian nations formed after the Second World War and the adjoining or maritime-connected parts of East and South Asia, including southern China. Historically and in the present, these tropical and subtropical peninsulas and archipelagos of southeastern Asia have maintained close ties. Less a rigid geographical division than an insistence on the openness of the boundaries of art and knowledge production, "Pan-Southeast Asia" uses exhibitions, research, and publications to turn curating into an evolving network of collaboration.

Guangzhou, with more than two millennia of history as an open port, has maintained frequent and complex cultural exchanges with Southeast Asia. On the basis of this historical and geopolitical context, the Art Museum of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts has sought to build "Pan-Southeast Asia" into a long-term research platform. Exhibitions, symposia, archives, publications, and public education programs promote cultural understanding and knowledge production across the region. Curatorial statements explain that the Triennial seeks, through an open curatorial perspective, to facilitate communication among art and ideas in Pan-Southeast Asia. Beginning with the experience of a region occupying multiple peripheral positions, it also attempts to rethink subject-centered narratives of contemporary art in non-Euro-American regions of Asia and the wider world.

The Second Pan-Southeast Asia Triennial, *Bali: Art and the World beyond the Rainforest*, further demonstrated this research-based approach. Taking Bali as a culturally symbolic site in modern art history, it juxtaposed historical documents, artworks, and contemporary practices in order to reconsider the complex exchanges between Southeast Asia and the global art world since the twentieth century. The narrative began in the 1930s, when Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias translated Bali's natural landscape and dance culture into modernist visual signs through painting and writing, bringing the island into international artistic view. In the 1940s, Chinese artists including Guan Shanyue and Wang Lanruo undertook "Nanyang sketching tours," using the visual language of Chinese ink painting to record local natural and social landscapes and inaugurating an important southward cultural practice in the history of modern Chinese art. In the 1950s, with the independence of Southeast Asian countries, Singapore artists, which including Chen Wen Hsi, Liu Kang, and Cheong Soo Pieng, traveled to Bali to sketch. Their creative work gradually gave rise to the "Nanyang Style," which has become an important visual manifestation of regional culture and identity. By bringing together diverse artistic practices and cultural backgrounds, this exhibition reveals that modernism did not simply spread from the West to the East, but rather evolved through complex networks of interaction among artists from around the world. The exhibition features thematic sections—including "The Construction of Visual Symbols," "The Transformation of Symbols," and "Contemporary Reconstruction"—which place historical documents and contemporary art within the same space, enabling artistic practices from different periods to engage in a dialogue transcending time, space, and geography. From a methodological standpoint, such exhibitions embody a research-oriented curatorial approach; they are not merely intended to interpret established conclusions in art history, but rather to raise new questions and reconstruct historical narratives by integrating documents, archives, and contemporary artistic practices. The practice of using exhibitions as research platforms is already



Figure 4. *Installation view of the Pan-Southeast Asia Triennial, no. 1.* Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

well-established on an international scale.

Founded in 1984, the Havana Biennial centered art from Latin America, Africa, and Asia and challenged the Euro-American dominance of contemporary-art narratives by constructing transregional cultural networks.⁷ As Rachel Weiss observes, the Third Havana Biennial of 1989 was among the earliest major projects to articulate the possibility of a “global exhibition” from outside the Euro-American art system. By reorganizing the geography of exhibition-making, it brought non-Western practices into the center of global contemporary-art debate.⁸ Similarly, the Pan-Southeast Asia Triennial uses regional research to transform the historical and cultural connections between southern China and Southeast Asia into a new perspective on contemporary art. The exhibition becomes an open research platform and offers a new methodological path for understanding cultural relationships among China, Southeast Asia, and the Global South.

1.4 The Proposition of “New Art Museum Studies”

Through long-term curatorial and museum practice, Wang Yiming has gradually constructed the theoretical system of “New Art Museum Research” in view of the specific problems faced by the development of Chinese art museums. In his view, this theory is not simply a theoretical discussion of museum institutions, but a research-oriented knowledge

field; its core issues include the re-examination of people, the multi-dimensional understanding of space, and the criticism of institutions and curatorial power. Space not only refers to the physical place of the museum, but also covers the physical space, spiritual space and public cultural space. The institutional dimension covers curatorial mechanism, cultural power and discourse structure. The theory aims to re-examine the role of art museums in contemporary society from multiple levels and promote their transformation from traditional exhibition institutions to public cultural institutions dedicated to research and knowledge production. Wang Yiming's discussion also draws on the theoretical background of new museology; he believes that new museology is not an independent discipline in the strict sense, but a knowledge position full of doubt and critical spirit. The core of this position is to re-examine the museum institution, spatial structure and cultural power relations. Inspired by this critical perspective, New Art Museum Studies also gained theoretical tension by questioning the existing institutions and discourse systems - this critical spirit is what is urgently needed in the current Chinese curatorial practice. In addition, Wang Yiming also regards New Art Museum Research as a practical research platform. The museum research not only covers the theoretical discussion, but also includes the publication of journals, the translation and publication of academic books, scientific research and teaching activities, and the collation of exhibition archives, so as to gradually build a research system that can continuously produce knowledge. Therefore, the art museum is no longer just a place for exhibitions, but an important intersection between art history research, curatorial practice and public cultural discussion.

In this context, Wang amplifies curation as a mechanism of museum knowledge production. In China, curating is both a means of organizing exhibitions and an instrument for constructing museum institutions and scholarly systems. That is to say, on one hand, exhibitions create knowledge by research, archival classification, digitization, and scholarly publication, forming art-historical

framework. On the other hand, curatorial practice will question museum space, cultural power, and discursive mechanisms, which will help institutions enjoy more flexibility and credibility. It is through this parallel advancements that museums get their own vitality. Under this context, Wang traces the contemporary Chinese exhibition system to changes in the artistic ecology since the 1980s, which is characterized by new forms of exhibition, new construction of curatorial institutions, and new approaches of the scholarly frameworks.⁹

In this sense, the exhibition is not simply a layout of artworks but an arena connecting humanistic critique, scholarly research, and public discussion. Exhibitions, public education, and participatory experiences are interrelated components of a museum. Through curating, museums can formulate new research questions related to the social issues, and encourage public engagement.

Wang further pointed out that the study of Art Nouveau Museum re-examined the proposition of "people, space and institution" by examining the relationship between the audience and the artist, the museum space, the public review and the organizational structure of the cultural institution, so as to rethink the role of the museum from a broader perspective. Therefore, the study of New Art Museum is not just a theoretical discussion of the museum system, but a cultural experiment based on the humanistic method. In this study, Wang opened up a new dialogue space for museum space, cultural power and public participation, transforming the museum from a traditional exhibition institution into an experimental field open to social and cultural debate. As a result, curation has not only become a means of displaying works of art, but also a way to promote cultural diversity and enhance public welfare. It is worth noting that this method is not limited to curatorial practice—Wang has long been engaged in artist creation at the same time. The spatial consciousness, social care and cultural reflection contained in his works of art have a profound interaction with his curatorial thought. In order to fully understand his curatorial philosophy and 'New Art Museum Research', we must examine his artistic creation and explore how his visual

practice responds to and expands these cultural issues; only in this way can we reveal the grander integrity of its cultural practice and artistic thought.

2. Line, Wound, and Breath: Wang Huangsheng's Contemporary Contribution through Artistic Innovation

In the curatorial and museum practices discussed above, Wang Huangsheng continually questions the relations among space, institution, power, and the public. In his own art, these concerns do not disappear; instead, they are compressed into concrete relationships among line, ink, paper, gauze, wire, oxygen cylinders, light, and sound. Institutional critique in his curatorial work influence his visual expressions, material experimentation, and brush liberation. Here, the artist integrates materials with vision, hearing, spatial perception, and reality with our daily experiences.

From *Moving Vision*, *Metaphor Vision to Boundary*, *Overflowing Light*, and the video installation *Breathe IN/OUT*, Wang has developed an unique artistic trajectory. Fine lines wandering across paper first register the entanglement of psyche and reality; they then acquire the body and blood-red color of gauze before leaving the two-dimensional surface and entering physical space as wire, fencing, and oxygen tubing with a dangerous tactile presence. Finally, the visual line becomes a temporal rhythm composed of breathing, heartbeat, and percussion. This is not a simple succession of media but a process in which the fundamental elements of Chinese ink painting are reactivated within contemporary social experience.

2.1 The Liberation of Line and Moving Vision: From Traditional Brushwork to a Contemporary Psychic Structure

Moving Vision began with Wang's observation of a tangled mass of electrical wires. Materials for the 2015 exhibition *Flux: Wang Huangsheng's Luminous World* note that around 2010 he turned toward the basic elements of ink painting and began the *Moving Vision* series in 2011. The tangled wires



Figure 5. *Moving Vision 190706*, ink on paper, 69 × 69 cm, 2019. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

prompted him to consider the multiple relations among Chinese ink painting, contemporary reality, and the forms of contemporary art.¹¹ This point of origin is important: the series' abstraction does not flee reality but is triggered by an object encountered within it. Electrical wires transmit energy and information, yet they may also short-circuit, knot, and dependence on complex networks.

In *Lines: A Brief History*, British anthropologist Tim Ingold distinguishes the line as a trace of movement from the line that

connects predetermined points, treating walking, writing, weaving, and storytelling as different linear practices.¹² Seen in these terms, Wang's lines are neither predetermined geometric divisions nor instruments for delineating objects. They are first of all traces left by the movement of hand and body. They drift, reverse direction, and circle across the paper, as if thought were repeatedly wandering around questions that have not yet found answers. They have no clear destination and refuse to direct vision toward a stable center.



Figure 6. *Moving Vision 190712*, ink on paper, 69 × 69 cm, 2019. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

Yet this “roaming” is not ipso facto the untrammelled cursiveness. The lines of his works are sensitive, intermingling to form a crucible of emotions and reflections.

The first of the two works from 2019 possesses an overwhelming force (Figure 5). Expanses of ink surge and churn, forming a kaleidoscopic space indicative of smoke, dark clouds, deep water, or shadow. Viewers cannot determine whether they see a neural network inside the body, a disorderly state of mind,

or the overpowering pressures of the society. Dense fine lines float in the air, and form loops and knots, compelling eyes to follow the lines, but without any orientations.

This visual experience is analogous to the psychology of anxiety. Wang does not depict an anxious person. He transforms anxiety into the temporal structure of viewing. The more viewers attempt to identify an object, the more lines carry them away; the more they seek to see through the ink, the more they recognize

that it has no distinct boundary.

Darkness does not, however, cover this work completely. A luminous area remains at the upper right, toward which the ink is gradually reduced and from which the fine lines are emerged. The white space is not emptiness, instead, it is a force continually wrestling with ink. This space has strong capacity to generate meaning, as it symbolizes that oppression has not completed its encirclement, and a clear awareness can prevail over disorder.

The second work brings black and white into a broader and more layered structure (Figure 6). Numerous looping filaments occupy the painting, resembling clouds, currents, waves, neural impulses, or a vast net suspended between heaven and earth. Dense ink carries the weight of ground, ruin, or abyss. However, unlike the overall darkness of the first work, a huge white space appears at the center of this painting. It gives the image to breathe. The horizontal big ink washes in the lower register is especially suggestive: it might resemble light on water, sunshine within the thunderstorm, and hope of future.

Similar to the first painting, the second work's greatest force resides not in black but in white. Here, white is neither simply the opposite of darkness nor a cheap optimism. It survives between bulk of ink and density of line, so it is the signifier of hope. Ernst Bloch notes that hope is a consciousness directed toward the "not-yet," indicating human has capacity to discern potential within a chaotic reality.¹³ Seen in this light, Wang's unpainted field gives the audience a strong sense of openness, giving possibility of change.

The two works thus establish a nuanced progression. In the first, white remains at the edge. In the second, it enters the center, becoming a place to allow viewer to meditate. Similarly, Julie Mehretu likewise constructs meditative spaces in her artwork. The Museum of Modern Art describes her work as a visual reflection of the globalized field, demonstrating politics, and social and cultural economies. Her lines often carry the energies of urban speed, migration, conflict, and emotions. Compared with Mehretu, Wang's *Moving Vision* depends less on maps, architecture, or identifiable social data and remains closer to East Asian ink tradition. Yet both refuse to

treat line as pure form detached from reality. Their lines are intertwined with contemporary reality, projecting immense information on power, memory, and action.

2.2 From Paper to Physical Space: Boundaries, Wire, and Material Experiment

Wang has stated that the evolution of line in *Moving Vision* led him to think of barbed wire, whose first associations for him were "danger and violence"; this material corresponded to the entanglement and struggle concealed within the series.¹⁵ His account establishes the continuity of the change in medium. The wire installations are not a sudden departure from ink painting but the materialization in physical space. The eye may cross an ink line, whereas wire obstructs the body; the danger of ink remains psychological, while the sharp ends of wire make injury a tactile sensation.

The migration of line from the picture plane into space is not without precedent in modern art. The Museum of Modern Art's 2010 exhibition *On Line* described three broad directions: movement on the surface, line extended into a social space, and a condition in which line and ground merge.¹⁶ This framework is the precursor of Wang's practice. His line first records the motion of hand and mind in *Moving Vision*, then extends through wire into the physical space, and finally becomes engaged with light, sound, and bodily experience. Line stops to be a painting device but becomes a mechanism for organizing spatial relations.

Mona Hatoum's installation *Impenetrable* offers an interesting comparison. From a distance, it appears light, regular, and nearly Minimalist. The material is also associated with conflict and exclusion.¹⁷ By juxtaposing beautiful forms with dangerous substances, Hatoum makes the viewer realize that borders are not an abstract concept, but a political tool for hurting and expelling the body. Wang's "boundary · crossing space" and "overflowing light" also use the plasticity, ductility and sharpness of metal wire, but he adds bells, glass tubes and light elements to interweave danger with hope and future. There is no direct artistic influence between the two artists; on the contrary, their works have implications in the context of contemporary art: the social

memory carried by a certain material can transform the ethical tension contained in the form. The king 's personal experience of Jerusalem 's Western Wall deepens this complexity - at the border , bells are fastened to dangerous metal wire, and when the wire is swayed, the bells are clearly audible ; the artist describes this sound as a call from the heavens, and also a certain desire and hope (Fig.7). Therefore, the boundary not only means oppression, it also inspires a desire to cross, and contains a transcendental spirit. In the overflowing light, the metal wire passes through the crystal glass tube; the hope here is not a soft light that hides the trauma, but a spiritual glow that persists after the viewer 's consternation.

Chiharu Shiota, by contrast, expands entanglement into an inhabitable network of threads. She frequently use immense webs to surround everyday objects—shoes, keys, beds, chairs, and dresses—so as to explore life, death, memory, the body, and “existence in the absence.”¹⁸ Her lines give spatial density to invisible emotion, inviting viewers enter into the realm of memory and relationship. Both Shiota and Wang transform line from a tool of painting into a sense of relationship, but their emphases differ. Shiota’s webs often evoke memories of absent persons; Wang’s lines emphasize boundaries, danger, social pressure, and the impulse to get the freedom.

The meaning of these comparisons is to establish the cross-cultural reverberation of Wang’s questions. Globalization, migration, war, disease, and information have become a zeitgeist of twenty-first-century existence. Mehretu’s layered images convey the conflict of political space; Shiota’s webs render memory visible; Hatoum makes the violence of boundaries palpable. Beginning from the linear tradition of Chinese ink painting, Wang leads the calligraphic element through gauze, wire, and light. He does not abandon ink painting for installation. Rather, he makes ink painting as the most fundamental element. And the line, which bear pressures of reality, carries a strong historical responsibility to the future.

2.3 Wound and Redemption: The Corporeality and Religious Dimension of *Metaphor Vision*

Compared with the filaments of *Moving Vision*, the lines in *Metaphor Vision* suddenly broaden, become heavier, and acquire a body. Wang dips gauze in red pigment and takes impressions on paper, preserving traces of fibers, folds, tears, and loose threads. Materials for the Long Museum exhibition *Breathe IN/OUT* describe gauze as bearing the double meaning of injury and salvation and relate the series to contemporary contradictions including war, conflict, poverty, disease, and economic crisis.¹⁹ Gauze derives its meaning precisely from this contradiction. It is used to staunch blood, bind, and protect a wound, yet it appears only after a body has been injured. It anticipates healing after suffering has occurred.

The 2017 *Metaphor Vision* bears Matthew 16:24: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Figure 8).” Several red strips of gauze intersect glaringly, producing multiple crosses that tilt and overlap. These are not the upright and solemn crosses of ecclesiastical architecture but crosses Red signifies life and warmth, but also blood, trauma, and anxiety. The broken edges of the printed gauze implies that the cross is an emblem of the pain to the body.

The core meaning of the expression take up your own cross is to accept a certain burden. This work does not directly depict the suffering process of Christ, but aims to arouse a sense of responsibility. For Wang, this sense of responsibility can also be understood as the ethical position of modern intellectuals ; art cannot replace political action or medical treatment, but it can resist numbness and reveal scars in public consciousness. Another ' metaphorical vision ' created in 2018 echoes the Gospel of John 1 : 8-9 : “ He was not the light, but was sent as a witness to the light ; this is the true light that shines on everyone who comes into the world (Figure 9)”. Compared with the heavy and dignified structure of the previous work, the red gauze in this work extends in multiple directions, creating a more open space for “breathing”.

Barnett Newman’s *The Stations of the Cross / Lema Sabachthani* provides an important example of artistic comparison. Rather than depicting suffering directly, Newman expresses the sense of abandonment, silence and doubt

through black and white blocks and vertical 'zipper' lines. Wang also avoided the traditional Christian image, but the red gauze he used not only reminds people of the wounds of Christ's suffering, but also reminds people of the bandages that bind the wounds, thus giving this suffering a sense of existence that is difficult to be figurative. Newman transforms pain into abstract form, while Wang connects abstract techniques with the wounded body more closely. Their works together show that abstract art can not only express physical suffering, but also carry spiritual contemplation. However, Wang's works give this experience a more direct sense of physical existence.

2.4 Breathing, Voice and Biopolitics : The Ethics of Hope in Breathing / Exhaling

In the spring and summer of 2019, when Wang Yi returned to Shantou to visit a patient, the oxygen cylinder in the hospital caught his eye (Fig.10). This is not an exotic discovery of strange objects, but an artist's keen capture of an ordinary experience. Oxygen cylinders are designed to sustain life, but they are shaped like a projection ; it contains gravity-free and invisible oxygen, but because this oxygen is in a high-pressure state, the steel container must be treated as a dangerous cargo. Wang is particularly fond of materials with specific referential and sociological meanings - materials that can simultaneously trigger diametrically opposed associations.²⁰ Here, the oxygen cylinder is not just a medical device ; it reveals a paradox of modern life : technology can save lives, but it can also bring danger.

The artist first described the oxygen cylinder in detail with meticulous painting techniques, and then let its main body deform, drip and melt in ink, thus presenting a desolate and uneasy image. However, the real turning point appears in the video installation work *Breathe IN/OUT*. Wang cooperated with a musician friend, taking the sound generated by tapping a steel container as the starting point of creation, weaving the sound of metal impact, heartbeat and rapid breathing into an audio-visual work with a duration of three minutes and twenty-three seconds. Van Dean interprets this behavior as a kind of " ritual to dispel the plague, " and points out that the knock at the end of the work interweaves the death of life



Figure 8. *Metaphor Vision* 170211, 123 × 123 cm, 2017. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.



Figure 9. *Metaphor Vision* 180710, 123 × 123 cm, 2018. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

with the hope of survival. It is worth noting that Wang himself did not deliberately classify the work as behavioral art; he said that he appeared in this video to capture this sound or this feeling. This expression shifts the focus of the work from the artist's personal identity to the physical experience. The tapping behavior

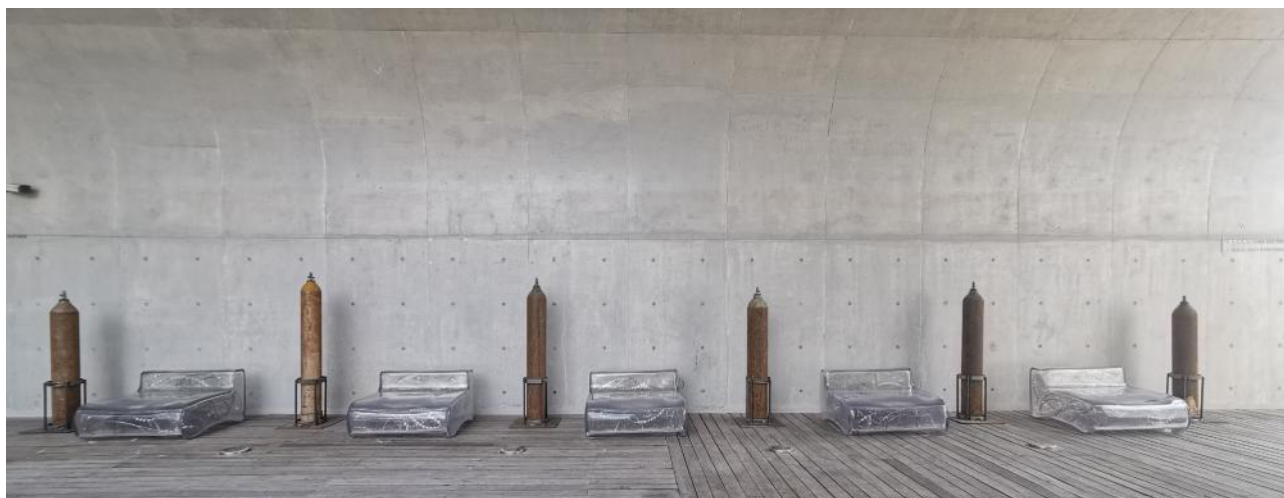


Figure 10. *Meeting*, mixed media, March 2020. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng



Figure 11. *Wang Huangsheng, Breathe IN/OUT I*, installation and video, 2,000 × 900 cm, 2019–2020. Collection of Guangzhou 33 Contemporary Art Center. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

is not to deduce a certain symbol, but to use the body force to promote a stationary object Voice . In *Mobile Vision* , repeated and circular lines convey anxiety; in metaphorical vision, gauze and red paint imply pain and physical trauma ; in breathing in / out, the crisis of life is expressed through voice and time. Unlike static images, breathing sounds suggest the continuation of life, while shortness of breath

indicates fear, hypoxia and danger. The sound of an artist tapping a steel container is reminiscent of medical equipment, bells, alarms, explosions, and funeral rituals. These different meanings are intertwined through sounds, so that hope and danger are closely linked in a coherent way²¹

In *Moving Vision*, repeated and circular lines convey anxiety ; in ' Metaphor Vision '

gauze and red pigment suggest pain and physical trauma ; in ' Breathe IN / OUT ', the crisis of life is presented through sound and time. Unlike images, breathing sounds imply the continuation of life, while rapid breathing indicates fear, hypoxia and danger. The sound of an artist tapping a steel cylinder is reminiscent of medical equipment, bells, alarms, explosions, and funeral rituals. These different meanings are intertwined through sounds, and hope and danger are closely linked in a coherent way.

Shen Sen sees the *Breathe IN/OUT* exhibition as a major turning point in Wang's artistic language. In the exhibition, found objects, painting, video, sound, and bodily action come together to create a unified experience. Images of crisis also encourage viewers to think about individual life and our shared human condition.²¹ his interpretation prevents us from seeing the project simply as "pandemic art." Wang created *Breathe IN/OUT* in 2019, before the outbreak of COVID-19 (Figure 11). The pandemic did not inspire the work, but it gave the work's earlier warning about life and its meaning. Instead of calling the work "prophetic," it is more accurate to say that Wang was highly sensitive to the hidden dangers of modern society. The pandemic suddenly brought these dangers into view.

Early in the pandemic, Achille Mbembe called for a "universal right to breathe." He understood breathing not only as a bodily function, but also as a political and environmental condition shared by people, societies, and the world.²³ From this perspective, breathing in *Breathe IN/OUT* means more than people's survival. It raises questions about who has access to air, medical care, safety, and a life free from violence. An oxygen cylinder may serve a single patient, but during the pandemic it also pointed to larger issues, including the distribution of medical resources, dependence on technology, and the unequal value placed on different lives. Wang Yiming said that the whole society needs breathing space, which can refer to the protection of life and the demand for social space and public freedom. Rafael Lozano-Hermer's Pulse Room provides an inspiring contrast : the sensor records the heartbeat of each participant, and hundreds of lights flash

at the same pace. This work transforms the invisible imprint of life into a shared public experience. Lozano-Hermer brings together the heartbeats of many individuals to create a shared life choir. Wang Yiming presents breathing and heartbeat differently—he combines them with the sound of knocking metal and the heavy form of oxygen cylinder. These elements together create a sense of crisis. The Pulse Room celebrates the coexistence of many lives, while ' *Breath : In / Out* reveals how fragile life is. Both of these works use the rhythm of the body to remind the viewer that life continues from one moment to the next moment, but it may also end abruptly in an instant. Wang Yiming compared the curved exhibition hall in the Long Art Gallery to the inside of oxygen cylinders : some steel oxygen cylinders were placed on the ground, while others were suspended in the air like missiles to be launched ; combining video and sound effects, these elements inject a sense of tension into the entire exhibition hall. At this time, the viewer is no longer just watching Wang Yiming tapping the oxygen cylinder on the screen, but surrounded by heavy oxygen cylinders and metal echoes, as if it had been integrated into the work. ' *Breathing : In/Out* also marks an important change in Wang Yiming's artistic creation : the original painting lines are transformed into oxygen pipes and sound waves ; the *Wound* is a body that struggles to breathe. The gap becomes the space needed for breathing ; hope is no longer presented only by light or white, but exists in the simple possibility of "one breath can be repeated after another ". The two works created by Moving Vision in 2019 already contain the sense of hope that later appeared in *Metaphor Vision*. In the first work, there is a white area in the upper right corner, like a window that has not been touched by darkness.

In the second, a much larger white area enters the center and creates a passage above the heavy ink below. The white is not simply an empty background. It is a space that survives within the darkness. It does not remove the black ink or bring the tangled lines into order. Because the darkness remains, the white becomes a stronger sign of hope.

This hope illuminates, and is illuminated by, the central image of the 2020 *Breathe IN/OUT*

exhibition. Originally scheduled to open in February 2020, the exhibition was postponed until August by COVID-19; oxygen cylinders and breathing suddenly changed from artistic concepts into real signs of a global crisis of life. Curator Gu Zheng argues that Wang uses material things rather than simple images to visualize everyday life and its crises.²⁴ If the oxygen cylinder preserves breath in a physiological sense, the white of *Moving Vision* preserves breath in a spiritual one. It allows the eye momentarily to leave the network of lines and consciousness to retain room for expansion under the weight of ink.

Wang Yiming often interweaves opposite images : gauze symbolizes both trauma and healing ; the metal wire not only delimits the boundary, but also invites the viewer to cross the boundary ; glass and light are eye-catching, but they also reveal danger ; black gives people a sense of heaviness and suffocation, while white creates a space for breathing. Hope does not appear after the crisis, it always exists in the crisis ; color also carries profound meaning-the white in *Moving Vision* is not a simple blank in traditional literati painting, but a space for the unknown future ; the red in metaphorical vision prompts the viewer to face the unhealed wounds. In addition, his creative materials show multiple changes in different works : lines follow the rhythm of the mind, and ink gives weight to reality ; the gauze visualizes the trauma, while the metal wire introduces the boundary into the public space. Although these materials are common, Wang Yiming makes the social significance contained in them visible. Therefore, his artistic creation is the same as his curatorial practice : both question the solidified authority and build an open relationship between people, objects and space. Observers also need to establish their position - do we accept this boundary, or do we cross it ? Do we pay attention to trauma or choose to avoid it ? The phrase " to be the witness of the light " in the Gospel of John helps us understand this technique of creation. Wang Yiming did not claim that art can save the world ; while recording suffering and danger, he always maintains the possibility of bright existence. In the second work *Moving Vision* created in 2019, the huge white area is preserved in thick ink and intricate lines ;



Figure 12. *The Distance and the River: A Poem by Shi Zhi*, inkjet print on film, 112 × 498 cm, 2021. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.



Figure 13. *Still from Traces of the Wind*, video, 3 min. 23 sec., 2020. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

darkness still exists, but it does not dominate the whole picture - this is the core of Wang Yiming's artistic creation. He transforms lines, colors and blanks into ways of thinking about real life; his works call on us to be sensitive to suffering and to reserve space for breathing, hope and change (Figure 12).

Conclusion: Between Institutions and Life

Wang Huangsheng's curatorial practice, museum research and artistic creation are intertwined. These fields jointly discuss several core issues: how does art respond to reality? How do museums generate knowledge and serve the public? How do individuals continue to observe, judge and act in the ever-changing social and institutional environment? Wang Huangsheng conducted in-depth exploration of these issues through the Guangzhou 3-year exhibition, the CAFAM Biennale, the Pan-Southeast Asia 3-year exhibition series, his concept of "New Art Museum Research," and experiments on materials such as ink, gauze, metal wire, glass, light and oxygen cylinders.

For Wang Huangsheng, the form of works of art or exhibition is merely the beginning; what is really important is how it integrates into public life, challenges the existing system, and creates new space for thought (Figure 13).

The core idea of Wang's curation is to regard the exhibition as a place for research, discussion and knowledge construction, rather than a simple art exhibition space. With its unique historical and cultural background, Guangzhou 3-year exhibition helps Chinese contemporary art integrate into the global art dialogue. The CAFAM Biennale uses the concepts of 'curation as a position' and 'spatial negotiation' to challenge the exhibition rights, the biennial system and the museum's control over knowledge. The Pan-Southeast Asia 3-year exhibition series explores the cultural links between southern China and Southeast Asia through regional research. These projects shaped the concept of "New Art Museum Research" proposed by Wang. He called on Chinese art museums to establish a stronger institutional system, higher academic standards and a better knowledge system, but also warned people to be alert to the rigid institutional structure, power concentration



Figure 14. *The Age of Consumption and Waste 250305*, color rubbing on paper, 400 × 180 cm, 2025. Courtesy of Wang Huangsheng.

and fixed discourse mode. For Wang, the museum is not only a place to collect and display art, but also a public space that can question itself and constantly renew itself. Wang explores similar propositions in his own artistic practice through images, materials, sounds and physical experiences. In the 'moving vision', the interlaced lines express social pressure, anxiety and inner conflict; in 'metaphorical vision', gauze, red paint and biblical texts link trauma and burden, witness and healing. His installation art works use metal wire, bells, glass tubes and light to show both the power of boundaries and the desire to cross them. In the work "Breathing: Inhalation / Exhalation," oxygen cylinders, breathing, heartbeats and metal sounds make the audience feel the fragility of life and the danger brought by technology. Wang Yiming did not simply abandon ink painting techniques to installation art and video creation; he introduced lines, ink and blankness into new materials and scenes. In this way, tradition is not a fixed style that needs to be adhered to, but a living resource that can be used to respond to the current situation. Wang Yiming's curatorial practice and artistic creation also follow a similar concept: in the exhibition, he emphasizes 'negotiation'; in his works of art, lines, materials, space and the audience also

constitute an open and dynamic relationship. His criticism of the authority of the exhibition is closely related to his artistic interest in boundaries, constraints and the desire to break free. His concern for public culture is also reflected in his works on trauma, crisis and human dignity. In Wang Yiming's two artistic practices, he did not put a certain fixed authority at the core - the exhibition should not only present the concept of the curator, and the works of art should not provide the audience with the only answer; on the contrary, both should create an open space where different experiences, different forms of knowledge and different subjects can meet, collide and form new relationships (Figure 14).

Wang Huangsheng's contribution cannot be measured only by the exhibition he organized or the new materials he introduced into ink painting art; his importance lies in the integration of museum work, critical thinking, art experiments and care for life. He helped build the academic system of the Chinese Museum of Contemporary Art, and also questioned the institutional power and institutional rigidity. At the same time, he introduced the lines and blanks in traditional Chinese painting into works shaped by wars, diseases, social conflicts and the fragility of life. For Wang Huangsheng, neither art nor

museum should be separated from society ; both of them can help us observe, make judgments and participate in public discussions more clearly. The gap between dark ink and intricate lines is a vivid portrayal of Wang Huangsheng's artistic creation - not an escape from reality, but an open space sustained by crisis and uncertainty. His exhibition provides a stage for diverse voices. His museum practice connects knowledge with the public, and his art presents danger, trauma and hope. His work puts forward an ultimate question : when the answer is still full of uncertainty, can we still

protect a space where people can breathe, speak and promote change ?

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