

我画《飞瀑图》

这篇《飞瀑图》是得于早年，在画院画山水的时候...

指画《疏影鸣幽》创作谈

为了达到预期的效果，我事先在生宣上把底稿作了一幅，使它在生宣上平展...



▲孙克明 《飞瀑图》



▲王之海 《疏影鸣幽》

发掘与攀登

黄自珍说：“虽然人器晚年，但革命热情不减，革命意志不减，革命干劲不减...”



▲黄自珍 《黄自珍六尺联》

《书画家简介》 孙克明是著名山水画家，生于1923年，天津人...

《书画家简介》 王之海，河北人，1942年生，毕业于天津美术学院...

景德镇陶瓷学院招收 1988年攻读硕士学位研究生

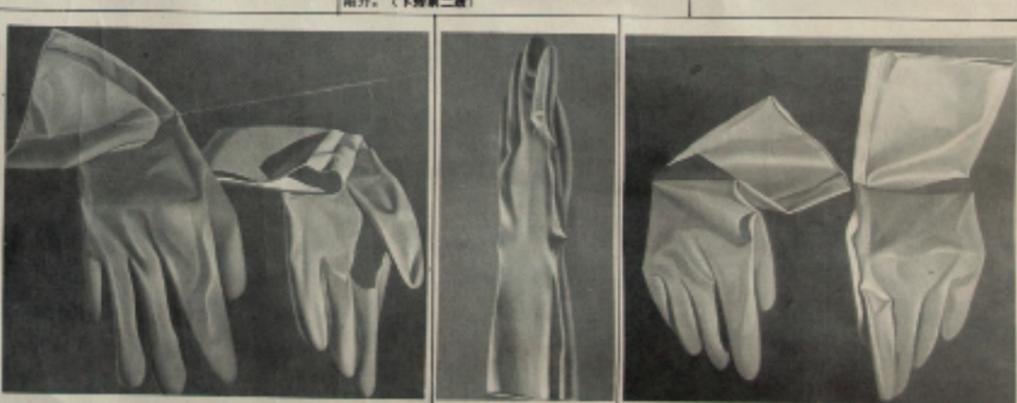
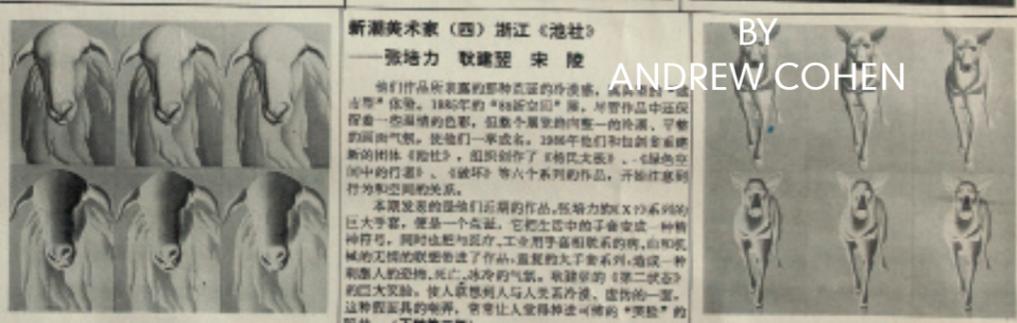
适应现代美术教学、科研、创作需要，中国美术报、日月斋美术服务社联合制作 西方现代美术名作系列幻灯片

本系列片以20世纪至80年代西方美术的发展脉络为基本依据，精选各种流派著名艺术家的代表作品...

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Persevering through seemingly endless cycles of repression and reform between the 1960s and 1980s, a writer-turned curator strives to support the emerging Chinese avant-garde.

Over a remarkable five decades China's avant-garde has looked to critic and curator Li Xianting for guidance and inspiration. From the Stars Group of the late 1970s and early 1980s to the Cynical Realism and the Political Pop movements of the 1990s, he has stood up for those who rejected the state-controlled canon of Revolutionary Realism to explore new forms of individual expression. As editor of *Meishu* ("Fine Art") magazine and *Zhongguo Meishubao* ("Fine Arts in China") newspaper 30 years ago, and more recently as a curator, Li has championed the work of young artists in the People's Republic, and continues to do so.

Li's personal and professional history is a testament to the challenges that progressive cultural figures of his generation faced. In an interview with *ArtAsiaPacific* in May, he recalled how his family was affected by every Communist campaign since the late 1950s. Art was always a part of his life; born in 1949, he was inspired by his father, a folk potter, and his elementary school teacher, an academic artist. However, during the first wave of antirightist attacks that followed the "Hundred Flowers Campaign" (1956–57), intellectuals such as Li's uncle and his elementary school teacher were labeled "reactionaries," along with half a million other people.

Soon after, during the second wave of the anti-rightist clampdowns in the early 1960s, Li suffered a similar fate. At school, he tried to encourage dialogue among his warring classmates. He openly challenged the popular decree, "Attack with reasoning, defend with force," but was unaware that it originated from Jiang Qing, Chairman Mao's fourth wife, who oversaw the censorship of arts during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Li's elders and peers deemed his behavior counterrevolutionary. Labeled a reactionary, Li was made to serve a two-year sentence in a detention camp. A large board with his name and his "crime" written on it was hung around his neck, and he was often forced to stand on a stage and endure verbal abuse, as well as engage in "self-criticism."

Li was subsequently "sent down" to the farmlands near Handan city for five years as part of Mao's "Down to the Countryside Movement" reeducation program. Because of his label as a reactionary, the guards treated him more harshly than other laborers, detaining him twice and criticizing him. However, it was there that he met faculty members from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) and impressed them with realist paintings he managed to create during his rare free moments.

In 1971, with the death of Mao's second-in-command, Lin Biao, who posthumously became the Party's scapegoat for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, many so-called rightists were reevaluated. Li's reactionary label was removed, and his dossier was burned before his eyes. After Mao's death in 1976, teachers and students were recruited back to the academies from the farmlands, and Li was chosen as one of ten artists to receive formal training at CAFA's Department of Traditional Chinese Ink Painting. Upon his graduation in 1978, the school nominated him to be editor of *Meishu*—at that time the only major art magazine in China—and his position there was approved by state officials. This marked a major turning point in Li's career. He decided to give up painting for editing and criticism in order to, as he says, "stand up for a lot of new artists."

That same year, with the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, Deng Xiaoping launched his "Open Door" policy of promoting foreign trade and investment. But reform came at a faltering pace. From 1978 onward, each meeting of the Central Committee that pushed forward a progressive agenda was followed by crackdowns by orthodox party elders who feared the encroachment of Western "bourgeois" values. Hope of political reform and artistic freedom would be stifled until the next meeting. Ironically, these two- to three-year cycles of repression and liberalization only energized artists and intellectuals further, and many of them risked persecution in their struggle for freedom of expression.

(Previous Spread) Front page of a 1987 edition of *Zhongguo Meishubao* ("Fine Arts in China" newspaper). Photographed at Li Xianting's studio in Beijing, 2010.

All images in this article are courtesy of Xing Danwen. 2010 images by Xing Danwen for *ArtAsiaPacific*.



Li Xianting giving an interview with members of the East Village artist community in Beijing, 1993.



Li Xianting with artist Chen Shaoping at a party in Beijing, 1995.



Li Xianting at his Beijing studio in September, in front of photographs of his 45th birthday party in 1994.

From the Stars Group of the late 1970s to the Cynical Realists and the Political Pop artists of the 1990s, Li has stood up for those who rejected the canon of Revolutionary Realism to explore new forms of individual expression.



A bound compilation of *Meishu* ("Fine Art"), of which **Li Xianting** was the editor from 1979 until its state-enforced closure in 1983.

Li wrote a seminal article, circulated informally, criticizing Mao's views on aesthetic theory. The piece was written in direct response to Mao's famous 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," in which the Chairman had laid the ideological foundation for Revolutionary Realism, the country's soon-to-be official artistic dogma. "After criticizing Mao," Li says, "I had to support personal art—art created by people who express themselves and not Mao's dictum that artists are expected to work for the whole of society."

In early 1979, *Meishu* published artist Wu Guanzhong's article "Painting and Form," which argued for form over content and set the course for Li's promotion of the breakthrough Stars Group, the first major art movement to appear after the Cultural Revolution. In late September 1979, the Stars Group, which included rebel artists such as Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, Wang Keping, Qu Leilei and Ai Weiwei, displayed sculpture outside Beijing's China Art Gallery (now known as the National Art Museum of China), and hung paintings and protest posters on "Democracy Wall" in the city center. The authorities shut down the exhibition after only two days, but reopened it following a protest that the artists staged on October 1.

"I used the magazine to recommend all those new artists for the big Stars exhibition," Li explains. Artists such as Wang Keping, Li points out, dared to digress from the accepted figurative style, espousing an abstraction that was literally rooted in nature (Wang carved his forms from tree branches.)

In conversation with AAP, Wang recalls: "When I started sculpting, it was all very political. During the Stars demonstration, I was holding a banner that proclaimed 'Demand for Artistic Freedom.' Li Xianting was the first to report on young artists in China. He appreciated new art and dared to express his opinions. He is very humble, sincere, honest and analytical. Artists today call him Lao Li—'Grandfather Li.'"

Li was also a source of strength and inspiration to Ai Weiwei,

now arguably China's most influential artist, political activist and blogger. "Lao Li is a very important figure for Chinese contemporary artists," Ai tells AAP. "He was critical to shaping the history and theory of their work. Artists rely on him spiritually. His contributions have lasted since the Stars movement. His influence is perpetual."

This period of open stylistic experimentation and liberalization was to be short-lived, however. Between 1980 and 1982, *Meishu* published pictures of risqué artworks, including some that depicted nudity, and the magazine embarked on an essay series entitled "A Hundred Years of Modern Art," which sparked debate on the direction of art in China. But by late 1983 the government decreed a new nationwide campaign "to eliminate spiritual pollution." Though Li tried to hide *Meishu's* publication of prohibited abstract works by burying them deep within the magazine's pages and disguising the issue with a realist-style cover, the authorities nonetheless became aware of his promotion of experimental artists and his support of emancipation of the individual. "Because of that, I was forced out from the magazine," he says.

And yet, within less than a year, Politburo liberals reversed this clampdown at the 12th Central Committee meeting in 1984. The following year, Li began editing a new avant-garde publication, *Zhongguo Meishubao*, through which he supported the idealistic 1985 New Wave group, which experimented with everything from Dada and folk-inspired collage to painting, photography, video and installation.

After enduring one more cycle of repression—the three-month "Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign, ended by the 13th Central Committee meeting in late 1987—Li and curator Gao Minglu co-organized the "China/Avant-Garde" exhibition, the first state-sponsored "official" show of avant-garde artists at the China Art Gallery. Held for two weeks in February 1989 and featuring more than 200 artists from all over the country, "China/Avant-Garde" included now-renowned figures such as Zhang Xiaogang, Xu Bing, Wang

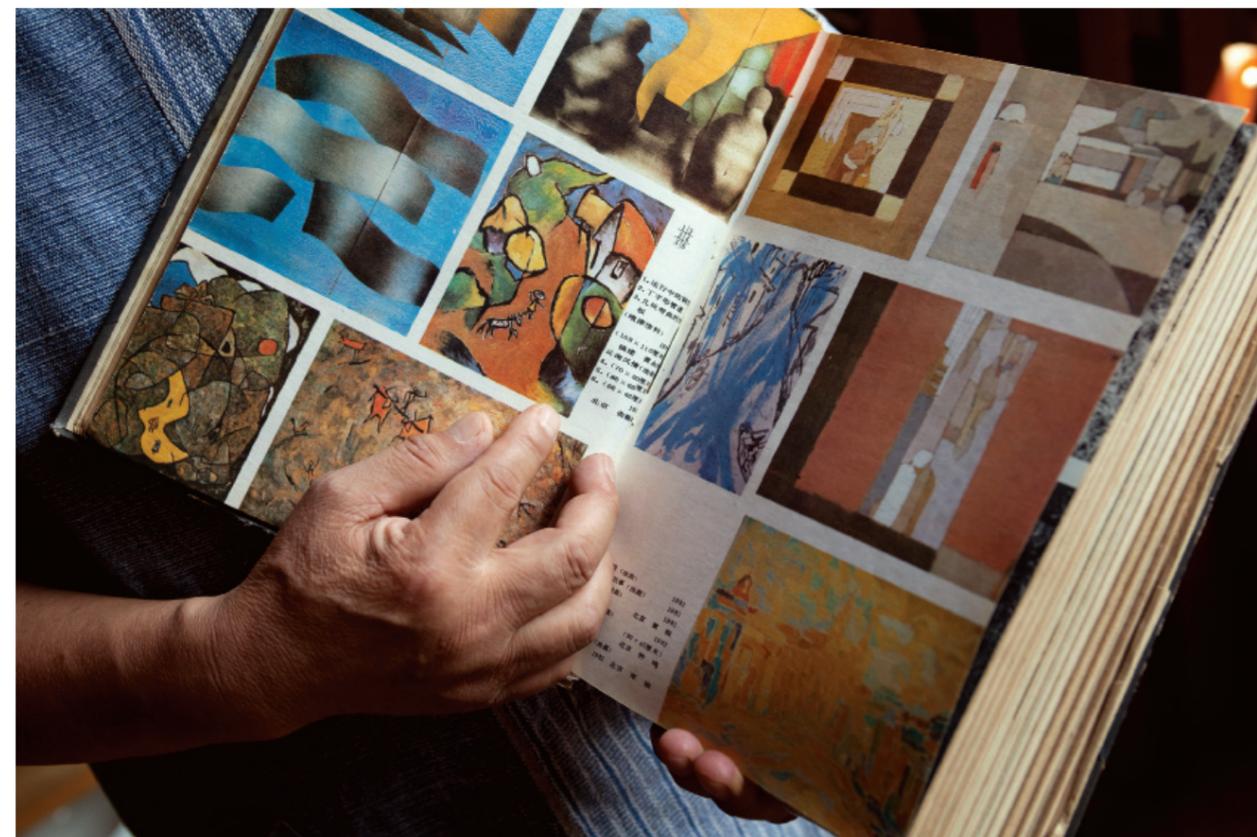
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Guangyi, Huang Yong Ping, Mao Xuhui, Fang Lijun and Li Shan. The logo for the show was a "No U-turn" sign, symbolizing the hope that reform would continue unabated.

Among the numerous works presented there, one in particular shook the art world. Artists Xiao Lu and Tang Song fired gunshots at their installation of a man and a woman in separate telephone booths, a piece entitled *Dialogue* (1989). The artists hailed from high-ranking military families, and Xiao's father was also director of a provincial art academy. To stage the performance, they had stolen the guns and bullets from their parents; part of the concept of the work was to criticize their own status as children of the privileged class. "They were arrested and beaten up by the police," Li recounts. "Then they were released a day or two later when high-positioned people went to see them. The artists exposed the inequality of Chinese law through an art event."

When asked if he had known in advance that Xiao and Tang would fire live ammunition, Li smiles. "I overheard a little bit. Most people didn't know. I kept it secret." He insists he had to support them in spite of the danger. "I have to take these risks," he says. "In China, things are always done this way. First the authority draws a circle, and you have to break through. Then you have a bigger circle. You have to break through that again and again, and gradually you get more freedom."

Xiao and Tang's *Dialogue* uncannily foreshadowed the violence to come. Four months after "China/Avant-Garde," Li participated in the student democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, where on June 4, 1989, the People's Liberation Army opened fire on the unarmed crowd. Li helped carry casualties in search of medical aid. This experience haunted him so much that at the age of 40 he started smoking. Sadness wells in his eyes as he recounts his experience. "After June 4,



Inside spread from a bound compilation of *Meishu* issues, featuring abstract paintings by artists Huang Yongping, Qu Lei, Zhong Ming, Huang Rui and Yuan Shi.



(Center) **YAK TSETEN AND TSEKAL**, *Arak Stupa*, 2010. Installation view “Scorching Sun of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Art Show,” curated by **Li Xianting** at the Songzhuang Art Museum, Beijing, 2010.

When asked if being a critic is still central to his work, Li replies, “It’s over.” What matters to him now is the Songzhuang Art Museum, a foundation and art community he founded in 2006.

I felt helpless and hopeless.” The authorities shut down *Zhongguo Meishubao* and banned Li from editing other publications. “A lot of young people came into my life then. That was my relief, talking with young artists and intellectuals. From then on I called this bunch of people *popis* [a colloquial term meaning ‘cynical and jaded,’ or ‘ennui’] and we started talking of Cynical Realism.”

Using the figurative style they had learned at the academy, Cynical Realists such as Fang Lijun, Yue Minjun, Liu Xiadong, Liu Wei and Yang Shaobin painted their friends, family and themselves, often as yawning or smirking antiheroes involved in mundane, everyday matters: family outings, hanging out with friends, swimming, laughing and loafing around. Contrasting with their nonheroic actions, their smiles parodied those of Social Realist propaganda. “Before June 4, everyone was very serious about their beliefs. Afterward, there was no need because you were being killed. It was better not to be serious—to fake laughter instead, to pretend you are a fool. After June 4, contemporary artists realized they couldn’t fight the authorities in reality. They started mocking themselves, thereby mocking the system. That’s how this art of painting themselves began—by painting their friends, their family, and ridiculing them.”

Fang Lijun, whom Li describes as the movement’s first practitioner, started painting those close to him, but with bald heads, during the 1990s. Li explains that in China baldness was traditionally associated with homeless, convicts and monks. Furthermore, the bald, laughing Buddha gained popularity during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). “Before then there were thousands of gods and none were depicted as laughing,” Li says. “Why did the laughing Buddha come to China? Too much pressure—you have to put things in your belly, you cannot show what’s inside. It’s a good image for Cynical Realism.”

Like the characters in his paintings, Fang Lijun sports a shaved head and has a constant wry smile. Recalling Li’s influence on the young generation of artists, he tells *AAP*: “In Chinese culture, we have deep respect for our teachers. I’ve known Lao Li since I was in my twenties. Back then he was the only one who supported contemporary Chinese art. He was like the sun in the sky, shining down on all of us.”

Li also coined the term “Political Pop,” first used in his 1991 article “Apathy and Deconstructive Consciousness in Post-1989 Art.” Heavily influenced by Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, Political Pop grew in tandem with Cynical Realism during the early 1990s. According to Li, the “China/Avant-Garde” show ushered in the birth of Political Pop with its display of Wang Guangyi’s *Mao AO* (1988), a large, grayscale triptych depicting the Chairman behind a grid of black bars. As Mao was the sacred symbol of Chinese Communism, critiquing him undermined the party’s efforts to control his portrayal on their own terms. The party newspaper, *The People’s Daily*, ran a review of the work in February 1989: “Maybe this grid is a kind of railing . . . Maybe this railing is to separate us from him . . . Why paint three paintings? This makes one feel that the traces of this formerly noble personality can now be found everywhere.” Of the work, Li says, “Art is ahead of everything. Mao used to be a god and this was the starting point for bringing him down. After 1990, his image started being used on souvenirs, lighters and memorabilia. But before that it was not possible to portray Mao as an ordinary man.”

Banned from editing since the 1989 crackdown, Li reinvented himself as a curator. Alongside the Cynical Realists, he supported Yu Youhan, Geng Jianyi, Li Shan and Liu Dahong of the burgeoning Political Pop movement, which, he says, reached full stride when Wang Guangyi juxtaposed the Coca-Cola brand with images of revolutionary realist workers. Li showcased their work with exhibitions such as “China’s New Art, Post-1989,” which opened in 1993 at the Hong Kong Arts Centre before traveling to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (where it was retitled “Mao Goes Pop”) and the 1995 Venice Biennale, as well as several venues in Canada and the United States.



PENPA, *The Door*, 2010. Installation view at the “Scorching Sun of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Art Show” at the Songzhuang Art Museum, Beijing, 2010.

In the mid-to-late 1990s, Li coined and promoted Gaudy Art, an offshoot of Political Pop whose practitioners included Qi Zhilong, Wang Qingsong, Feng Zhengjie, the Luo brothers and Xu Yihui. Influenced particularly by the work of Jeff Koons, these artists utilized garish colors and materials, including traditional silks, lacquer, flower motifs and poster-girl images, to comment on what Li describes as the “get-rich-quick” attitude of Chinese peasants as China rapidly modernized. “You can see gaudy expression everywhere in the street,” Li says. “Gaudy Art mocks this. Mainstream art was always intellectual, always gray and dark. Now against that background we have the peasant taste all over the place. All communists were peasants from the countryside. They are like the new rich, and, like Chinatowns in the West, their aesthetic is tacky.”

Li curated solo exhibitions of Gaudy Art for artists including Feng Zhengjie and the Luo Brothers, and group shows entitled “Model for the Masses” and “Gaudy Life” with Liao Wen at the Beijing Art Museum and Wan Fung Art Gallery in 1996, as well as “Oh La La Kitsch,” also with Liao Wen, at the Teda Contemporary Art Museum in Tianjin in 1999. Shortly thereafter, Li organized the radical “Infatuated with Injury” exhibition at Beijing’s Research Institute of Sculpture in 2000, featuring artists, such as Zhu Yu, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, who self-mutilate and use cadavers in their work.

When asked if being a critic is still central to his work, Li replies, “It’s over. It’s not important for me anymore.” What matters to him now is the Songzhuang Art Museum, a foundation and art community he started on the outskirts of Beijing in 2006. “There are so many art graduates in China, about one million per year, and they have to get

a job. In Songzhuang there are 5,000 artists. There are many communities like this. I want to help solve this social problem.” He pauses to light a cigarette. “I am now a country gentleman.” He laughs, pointing out the window at the foundation’s idyllic setting next to a lake surrounded by weeping willows and fruit groves.

Discussing whether China’s economic boom and open door policy has softened young artists’ desire to rebel, Li counters, “It’s not as if there’s nothing left to rebel against.” An eternal activist, this February he marched down Beijing’s Chang’an Avenue with Ai Weiwei and others to protest the forced relocation of artists from the Zhengyang Creative Art Zone and the 008 Art Zone. In February, Zhengyang and 008 residents were attacked by a gang of more than 100 thugs wielding knives and clubs. Though the artists called the police, they arrived one hour later and remained in their cars, waiting until the mob had left.

Li is addressing issues such as these in his latest role as producer of young filmmakers’ documentaries, which means he has to speak with the police on an almost daily basis. His current work on a film about the politically sensitive Sichuan Earthquake of May 2008—in which thousands of elementary school children were killed by the collapse of poorly constructed school buildings—incited the police to search his files and question his intent. “I made a diplomatic mistake,” he says. “I invited a Western filmmaker to shoot in Sichuan and as a result he was denied a visa, and is now blacklisted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”

Asked how he funds his documentaries, Li says that, being an independent filmmaker, “I fundraise and get money from the rich artists. My film foundation [named Li Xianting’s Film Fund] will give RMB 300,000 (USD 44,600) to filmmakers who need the money the most. I donate money to this foundation as well—about RMB 100,000, as I don’t earn much.”

In September, Li curated “Scorching Sun of Tibet,” a show of 50 contemporary Tibetan artists, held at the Songzhuang Art Museum. Many of the paintings, videos, sculptures, readymades, installations and performances in the show comment on the erosion of Tibetan tradition, religion and language, as well as the pollution and urbanization of its environment, due not only to the influx of Han migrants, but also Westernization and mass consumerism. Gade’s *Iced Buddha* (2010) photos show the artist’s ice sculpture of a Buddha in a river in Lhasa, where it gradually melted away. Meanwhile, one of the largest installations in the show, Yak Tseten and Tsekal’s *Arak Stupa* (2010), replicates the form of a Buddhist reliquary from thousands of empty bottles of Lhasa Beer—the artists describe how many cultural changes begin with food and drink.

Funding for this immense initiative in Songzhuang also comes from the first generation of contemporary artists—those whom Li supported—whose careers prospered with the art-market boom of the 2000s. That they are supporting the next generation, as well as their long-time advocate, shows a willingness to make up for the lack of public funding. On the other hand, their newfound position as patrons of contemporary art in China casts a new light on the relevance of their recent work. Some of China’s successful artists are at times accused by critics and collectors both in China and elsewhere of repeating themselves and commercializing their work to profit and sustain their luxurious lifestyles. Ironically, the threat to their artistic innovation may now be the trappings of the market economy.

In response to this criticism, Li says, “I once hosted a conference online and was asked: ‘What do you think of Fang Lijun now?’ I responded: ‘All those artists have a name already. You don’t need me to talk about them anymore.’ But they kept asking what I meant by that. So I told them that I focus on where art is budding and growing. I want to talk about those works. Art is like a tree: when a tree is mature, I don’t want to look at it anymore. I must now pay attention to the young saplings.”