

NEWS



from the Worcester Art Museum

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WORCESTER ART MUSEUM PRESENTS NEW CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITION TWO CHINAS: CHEN QIULIN AND YUN-FEI JI

(WORCESTER, Mass., March 2008) – The Worcester Art Museum is pleased to announce the opening of a new contemporary exhibition, *Two Chinas: Chen Qiulin and Yun-Fei Ji*, running through September 21, 2008.

Two Chinas considers the rapidly changing conditions in China through the lens of new acquisitions created by two young Chinese artists, Chen Qiulin (b. 1975) and Yun-Fei Ji (b. 1963). Both artists have responded to the altered landscapes and human displacement caused by flooding, which is a result of China's Three Gorges Dam project. Chen Qiulin uses video in *Bie Fu (Farewell Poem)*, from 2003, to revisit her childhood memories and China's past amidst the rubble of Wanzhou, her hometown and one of the cities flooded by the dam project. In Yun-Fei Ji's monumental scroll-like painting, *Below the 143 Meter Mark*, from 2006, allusions to classical landscape painting are transformed by grim contemporary details - houses and hillsides crumbling, a ghost town littered with abandoned bundles and bicycles.

BACKGROUND

The stretch of the Yangtze River defined as the Three Gorges region is an image of stark contrasts—the natural beauty of a mountainous terrain and the harsh living conditions of the inhabitants along the raging river's banks. China's leaders have long dreamed of taming the Yangtze whose waters have caused deadly floods for thousands of years. The idea of a dam, first proposed by Sun Yat-sen in 1919 and again in the mid-1950s by Mao Tse-tung, became a reality when construction on the world's largest hydroelectric dam began in 1994 at Sandouping, with completion expected in 2009. The Chinese government envisions that the dam, which will raise the river's level to 175 meters (574 feet) and create a reservoir that extends nearly 400 miles upstream to Chongqing, will provide much-needed electricity to fuel the booming economy, control the Yangtze's regular flooding, and increase commercial shipping access to China's interior. Not incidentally, this vast structure has become symbolic not only of China's engineering and construction expertise but also of the government's desire for economic "progress" regardless of human or environmental cost.

Controversy inside China and around the world is directed at the social and environmental implications of the dam including the forced resettlement of an estimated 1.5 million residents. As many as 13 cities, 140 towns, 1300 villages, and 100,000 acres of farmland will be submerged under the rising waters of the dam's reservoir. Ubiquitous markers—"143 meters" or "175 meters"—dot the landscape designating future heights of the water (we see them in the streets of Wanzhou early in Chen's video, and Ji locates the water level in the title of his painting). While many towns along the river are being dismantled and rebuilt higher up the

hillsides with the promise of new apartments and prosperity from increased shipping, rural dwellers—peasants, boatmen, fishermen, and farmers—must abandon homes, fields, and ways of life that were intertwined with the river, and are oftentimes relocated to distant urban areas where it is difficult to find jobs because of different languages, cultures, and economies. Although some important cultural sites have been moved and rebuilt, an estimated 1300 known archaeological sites including ancestral burial grounds, centuries-old temples, and ancient fossils will disappear underwater, along with miles of majestic, mountainous landscape that has been the subject of Chinese art and poetry for thousands of years.

Environmentalists charge that the dam will exacerbate the river's already declining health by changing the oxygen content, blocking fish migration, and increasing rubbish build-up in the reservoir. There is great concern that when the dam's reservoir submerges waste dumps and old factories, the water will become a toxic lake threatening the ecosystem and human health. Rising water also threatens to cause severe erosion and landslides along steep hillsides. What is certain is that even before the dam's completion, this one example of China's path to economic development and urbanization already has altered forever the special interrelation between humans and the landscape that defined life in the Three Gorges region.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Chen Qiulin

Born in 1975 in Hubei, China, Chen Qiulin lives and works in Chengdu. Since graduating in 2000 from the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, where she studied printmaking, she has worked in photography, video, installation, and performance. Chen has participated in several exhibitions in China, Europe, and the United States including *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art* at the China Millennium Art Museum, Beijing and the Albright Knox Art Museum, Buffalo (2005); *This is Not for You: Sculptural Discourses* at Thyssen Bornemisza Art, Vienna (2006); and *Red Hot: Asian Art Today from the Chaney Family Collection* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2007). Recent solo projects include *Migration* at Long March Space, Beijing (2006); *Garden* at Max Protetch, New York (2007); and *Chen Qiulin: Recent Work* at University Art Museum, Albany (2007). In 2006, Chen was awarded a grant from the Asian Cultural Council to work for 6 months in the United States. She is represented in New York by Max Protetch.

Yun-Fei Ji

Born in 1963 in Beijing, China, Yun-Fei Ji grew up in Hangzhou in southern China, and in 1982 he completed studies at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Ji first came to the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship in 1986 to study at the University of Arkansas where he received an MFA in 1989. Since then, he has lived and worked in Brooklyn, New York. He was included in the 2002 *Whitney Biennial* in New York and since then has participated regularly in exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe including *A Brush with Tradition: Chinese Tradition and Contemporary Art* at the Newark Museum (2003); *Regeneration: Contemporary Art from China and the US* at Bucknell University and toured nationally (2004-6); and *An Atlas of Events* at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. Recent solo projects include *The Old One Hundred Names* at the Pratt Manhattan Gallery (2003); *Yun-Fei Ji: The East Wind* at the ICA, Philadelphia (2004); *The Empty City* at the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis and toured nationally (2004-5); and *Yun-Fei Ji* at James Cohan Gallery, New York (2006). He was an Artist-in-Residence at Yale University (2004-5) and at Parasol Unit in London (2006-7) and received the Prix de Rome from the American Academy in Rome (2005-6). Ji is represented in New York by James Cohan Gallery.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Yun-Fei Ji, *Below the 143 Meter Watermark* (detail), 2006, mineral pigments and ink on mulberry paper, 118 ½ x 56 1/8 inches. Stoddard Acquisition Fund, 2007.17. Courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York

Chen Qiulin, *Bei Fu (Farewell Poem)*, 2003, still from color video, 9 minutes, Stoddard Acquisition Fund, 2007.81. Courtesy Max Protetch, New York

RELATED EVENTS

Film & Discussion with the Filmmaker: *The Rising Tide*

Saturday, August 23, 6:30pm

Conference Room

Admission is free, but space is limited. Film is 92 minutes.

The Rising Tide investigates China's meteoric march toward the future through the work of some of the nation's most talented emerging artists, whose work captures the social and aesthetic confusion created in a rapidly changing society. Produced within the dual context of globalization and urbanization (and including an interview with Chen Qiulin, who is featured in WAM's *Two Chinas* exhibition), the film examines the confusion and ambiguity that characterize the new China. *The Rising Tide* captures this momentous time in China's history while exploring the work of artists, who comment with intelligence, wit, foreboding and nostalgia.

The Rising Tide is the directorial debut for independent documentary filmmaker Robert Adanto, who earned his MFA in Acting at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. *The Rising Tide* was shot in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen in the summer of 2006 and completed in October of 2007. Mr. Adanto will be present at the screening, and will be available for a brief question and answer session after the film's conclusion. For more information on the film and to view a trailer, visit <http://www.therisingtidefilm.com/>.

April Third Thursday: George Munoz & Tour of *Two Chinas: Chen Qiulin and Yun-Fei Ji*

Thursday, April 17, 5:30-8pm

The Museum is open late the third Thursday of every month until 8pm. In April, enjoy the sounds of latin guitar with George Munoz. Also enjoy a tour of the exhibition *Two Chinas: Chen Qiulin and Yun-Fei Ji* given by Susan Stoops, Curator of Contemporary Art. Always great company. Wine tasting and a cash bar. Free with Museum admission.

A Conversation with Yun-Fei Ji

Thursday, September 4, 6:30pm

Join artists Yun-Fei Ji for a discussion of his artistic process and inspirations.

Free with Museum admission.

About the Worcester Art Museum

The Worcester Art Museum, which opened to the public in 1898, is world-renowned for its 35,000-piece collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings and new media. The works span 5,000 years of art and culture. View paintings by Cassatt, Gauguin, Goya, Monet, Sargent and Whistler; admire floor mosaics from the ancient city of Antioch; see cutting-edge contemporary art; and discover the Museum's many other treasures. Special exhibitions showcase the masterworks, seldom-seen gems, and important works on loan. Enjoy a delectable lunch in the Museum Café, and browse the Shop for unique gifts and mementos.

Dedicated to the promotion of art and art education, the Museum offers a year-round studio art and art appreciation program that enrolls over 7,000 adult and youth students each year. Public tours are offered Saturdays at 11 a.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m., September through May. Audio tours are also available in English and Spanish.

Museum hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11am-5pm, Third Thursdays of every month, 11am-8pm, and Saturday, 10am-5pm. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and full-time college students with current ID, and FREE for Members and all youth 17 and under. Admission is also FREE for everyone on Saturday mornings, 10am-noon (sponsored by Fidelity Investments, The TJX Companies, Inc. and National Grid).

The Museum is located at 55 Salisbury St., Worcester, Mass., easily accessible from the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90), Route 290 and Route 9. Free parking is available near entrances on Salisbury, Lancaster and Tuckerman streets. For more information, call (508) 799-4406 or visit the Museum web site at www.worcesterart.org.

Electronic images available.

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