



Slide / Show: Light Images in Chinese Contemporary Art

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UCCA and Institut pour la photographie des Hauts-de-France, Lille, present “Slide / Show: Light Images in Chinese Contemporary Art,” an exhibition bringing together artworks and archival materials to propose a new genealogy of the slide and its legacy in the foundational years of Chinese contemporary art.

Location:

Central Gallery and New Gallery

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Beijing, CHINA — From April 29 to August 13, 2023, UCCA presents “Slide / Show: Light Images in Chinese Contemporary Art.” Featuring both artworks and archival materials, the exhibition explores how slides, and their activated state of light images, played an influential role in the emergence of Chinese contemporary art in the 1980s, shaping creative strategies that would form a sometimes underappreciated aspect of artists’ practices for decades to come. Participating artists include Geng Jianyi (1962-2017), Li Yongbin (b. 1963, Beijing), Liang Juhui (1959-2006), Lin Jiahua (b. 1953, Xiamen), Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961, Taiyuan), Song Dong (b. 1966, Beijing), Wang Gongxin (b. 1960, Beijing), Wang Wei (b. 1972, Beijing), Wang Youshen (b. 1964, Beijing), Zhang Peili (b. 1957, Hangzhou), and Zhu Jia (b. 1963, Beijing). Many of the archival materials on display in “Slide / Show” are graciously provided by critic and curator Fei Dawei and artist and educator Zheng Shengtian. The exhibition is organized thematically around concepts linked to key formal characteristics of the slide medium: “Transmission,” “Refraction,” and “Transparency.” These sections explore how slides and slideshows became central to an expanding landscape of international artistic exchange in China; how artists of the ’85 New Wave drew upon screenings and mechanisms of information transmission to create pioneering artworks; and how this artistic legacy of light images may provide an alternative perspective from which to approach later works more commonly viewed through other frameworks. Co-produced by UCCA Center for Contemporary Art and Institut pour la photographie des Hauts-de-France, Lille, “Slide / Show” is curated by UCCA Curator Holly Roussel. Following this presentation in Beijing, the exhibition will travel to Lille in 2025.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, students returned to the campuses of previously closed art academies. Just as economic reforms allowed goods and investment to move across China’s borders, new art historical texts and images also began to flow into the country. Slides had been featured in collective public screenings in China since the 1950s, providing precedent for their use as a didactic form. In the 1980s, the increased availability of 35mm color “slide” film made the medium more accessible than before. During this time of few technological alternatives, contemporary artists valued the



slide for its ability to project high-quality color reproductions of artworks; slides became a viable way for people to share art, provided they possessed the relative luxury of a camera.

The exhibition's first section is prefaced by *City* (2003), a monumental installation by Liang Juhui that uses video and backlit glass transparencies to embody both the materiality of the slide as object and its expressive potential. The first section, "Transmission," presents the context that made projection and slides comparatively accessible in the 1980s, and recounts how the burgeoning contemporary art community utilized the format to spread new ideas. Slides, publications, and ephemera related to the domestic production of projection equipment set the scene for the slide collection of Zheng Shengtian. One of the first art world figures of his generation to travel to the West, Zheng would return from trips abroad throughout the decade with slides of the art he had seen, which ranged from historical masterpieces to new works. Presented here both in a site-specific lightbox installation and as a reconstructed slideshow, these slides grant a glimpse of the content of that spread through Zheng and others' performance lecture-like presentations. Hungry for information, artists flocked to these screenings, and soon began to produce slides of their own work as a means of distribution. Towards the end of the decade, slideshows shifted from simply being exciting, illuminating events into instruments of power and influence. Materials related to official events such as the Huangshan Conference (1988) illustrate how attempts to organize the anarchic art scene were centered on slideshows. Further afield, selections from Fei Dawei's archive chronicle his 1986 trip to France, on which he brought with him slides of Chinese contemporary art, completing a cycle of exchange and paving the way for the inclusion of Chinese artists in major international exhibitions.

The second section, "Refraction," presents artworks created within this milieu, illustrating how artists such as Zhang Peili, Lin Jiahua, and Wang Youshen synthesized influences from visual culture introduced via slides and engaged in formal experiments to question how meaning is created, or to confront audiences with their practices of viewing. Lin Jiahua's 1988 performance *Enter into Art History Slideshow Event* features the artist with images from Chinese and Western art history projected onto his body. The work serves as a potent metaphor for how a cohort of artists absorbed a massive corpus of art historical knowledge, asserting the status of artist as palimpsest, and perhaps suggesting a hybrid mode of cultural development. Zhang's two works in this section are among China's first pieces of "video art," yet their presence here emphasizes that they are also the artist's first works engaging with time



and tension in the screening context. *30 x 30* (1988), for example, was first screened for attendees at the Huangshan Conference, the intentional banality of a mirror being smashed and rebuilt over 180 minutes subverting the expectations of an insider audience who, despite the artist's intentions, only watched only a few minutes of the piece before moving on.

With the advent of new technology and more affordable consumer electronics, the 1990s saw slides lose importance as a primary medium of transmission. Chinese artists experimented with new media and gradually grew further integrated into international networks. Yet as in the case of Zhang Peili, aspects of the legacy of screenings and projection continued to reverberate through artworks more commonly viewed as video or installation art. The final section, "Transparency," features work by artists born in the 1950s and early 1960s, such as Li Yongbin, Lin Tianmiao, Liang Juhui, Wang Gongxin, and Zhu Jia, along with pieces by slightly younger artists who came of age in the 1990s, including Song Dong and Wang Wei. Many works experiment with layering transparent images, referencing the relationship between viewer and screen or the intimacy of viewing a projection in a darkened room. In *Touching My Father Part 1* (1997) Song Dong uses a projected video of his hand to immaterially "touch" his father, while Lin's *Sewing* (1997), one of her earliest thread-winding artworks, presented here in archival form, combines video projection with a sewing machine bound in white thread to examine themes related to family and the ephemerality of manual skills in contemporary society.

Today, the significance of slides and slideshows within the history of Chinese contemporary art is obscured, and the scarcity of images that led to slides' proliferation in the 1980s is hard to imagine within the hyper-abundant visual culture of contemporary China. By returning to this medium, which educated and shaped the practices of some of China's leading experimental artists, "Slide / Show" offers a new perspective on the early years of Chinese contemporary art. Directly and indirectly, slides and projection continue to shape artistic discourses in the country, and the questions that light images first sparked in the minds of artists four decades ago—questions about how we see, learn, and communicate—remain bracingly relevant.

Support and Sponsorship

"Slide / Show: Light Images in Chinese Contemporary Art" is co-produced by UCCA Center for Contemporary Art and Institut pour la photographie des Hauts-de-France, Lille. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks for the generous support and the



collaboration of many private individuals and organizations, as well as the artists, collectors, and galleries who have generously lent their works. Many archival materials, exhibited for the first time, are provided by Zheng Shengtian, Fei Dawei, and Thomas Sauvin. The exhibition would not have been possible without the important contributions of the UCCA Research Department team, in particular Huang Jiehua and Li Xiaoyi, to the archival sections, or the expertise that Delphine Burtin and Etienne Malapert's thoughtful collaboration brought to the design and production. UCCA thanks Stey for its exclusive accommodation support. Exclusive wall solutions support is provided by Dulux, and Genelec contributed exclusive audio equipment and technical support. UCCA also thanks the members of UCCA Foundation Council, International Circle, and Young Associates, as well as Lead Partner Aranya, Lead Art Book Partner DIOR, Presenting Partners Bloomberg, Voyage Group, and Yinyi Biotech, and Supporting Partners Barco, Dulux, Genelec, and Stey.

Public Programs

On the occasion of the exhibition opening, UCCA's Public Practice department is hosting a special conversation between curator Holly Roussel and major figures from the '85 New Wave period, including Fei Dawei, Zheng Shengtian, and participating artist Wang Youshen. Titled "A Decade for Slides: Exchange and Transmission in the 1980s" the discussion will be held in UCCA's auditorium from 14:00 to 16:00 on Saturday, April 29. For more information on how to purchase tickets, as well as about other exhibition-related public programs, please visit UCCA's official WeChat account.

About Institut pour la photographie

The Institut pour la photographie des Hauts-de-France, located in Lille, is dedicated to photography in all its forms. Initiated in September 2017 by the Région Hauts-de-France in collaboration with the Rencontres d'Arles, the Institut pour la photographie aims to be a platform for research, exchange and experimentation. The Institut's core mission centers around exhibition programming, conservation and promotion of photographers' archives, education, publishing, and support for research and creation.

About UCCA

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art is China's leading contemporary art institution. Committed to bringing the best in art to a wider audience, UCCA shares a wide range of exhibitions, public programs, and research initiatives to a public of more than one



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million visitors each year across three locations. UCCA Beijing sits at the heart of the 798 Art District, occupying 10,000 square meters of factory chambers built in 1957 and regenerated in 2019 by OMA. UCCA Dune, designed by Open Architecture, lies beneath the sand in the seaside enclave of Aranya in Beidaihe. UCCA Edge, designed by New York-based architecture firm SO – IL, opened in Shanghai in May 2021.

Formally accredited as a museum by the Beijing Cultural Bureau in 2018, UCCA also operates non-profit foundations, licensed by the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Hong Kong government. UCCA's commercial ventures include the retail platform UCCA Store, the children's education initiative UCCA Kids, and collaborations and projects under the rubric UCCA Lab. Opened in 2007 and revived by a committed group of Chinese and international patrons in 2017, UCCA works to bring China into global dialogue through contemporary art.

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