

中国  画报

A Window to the Nation A Welcome to the World

CHINA PICTORIAL

Vol. 865 July 2020

10-11

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44-49

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Cloud Canvas

国内零售价：10元

USA \$5.10 UK £3.20

Australia \$9.10 Europe €5.20

Canada \$7.80 Turkey TL10.00

ISSN 0009-4420



9 770009 442200

邮发代号2-903 CN11-1429/Z



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Administrative Agency: 主管: 中国外文出版发行事业局
China International Publishing Group (中国国际出版集团)

Publisher: China Pictorial Publications 主办: 人民画报社

Address: 社址:
33 Chegongzhuang Xilu 北京市海淀区车公庄西路33号
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Telephone: 86-10-88417354 电话: 010-88417354
or 88417419 88417419

Remittance to: 邮购收款人:
Publishing and Distribution Department, 人民画报社出版
China Pictorial 发行部

Legal Adviser: Yue Cheng 法律顾问: 岳成

Printing: Toppin Leefung Changcheng 印刷: 北京利丰雅高长城
Printing (Beijing) Co., Ltd. 印刷有限公司

Overseas Distribution:
China International Book Trading Corporation (Guoji Shudian),
35 Chegongzhuang Xilu,
P.O. Box 399, Beijing 100044, China
Telephone: 86-10-68413849
Fax: 86-10-68412166
China Book Trading (Canada) Inc.
Telephone: 1-416-497-8096

出版日期 每月1日
国内刊号: CN11-1429/Z
国际刊号: ISSN0009-4420
京海工商广字第0121号

In China, subscriptions are available at any post office.

Subscription and distribution agency in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan:
Hong Kong Peace Book Company, Ltd.
17/F, Paramount Building, 12 Ka Yip Street, Chai Wan, Hong Kong

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www.china-pictorial.com.cn

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Cover caption

June 3, 2020: The exhibition “Meditations in an Emergency” held by UCCA, by Wan Quan/China Pictorial





April 12, 2020: Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli performs a live concert titled “Music for Hope” from the Milan Cathedral in Italy as the country confronts Europe’s worst coronavirus outbreak. With no audience present, the concert featured only Bocelli and the cathedral’s organist Emanuele Vianelli. Livestreamed through social media, the concert was watched by 500,000 real-time viewers. By the end of the day, the concert had been viewed more than 21 million times. “Thanks to music, streamed live, bringing together millions of clasped hands everywhere in the world, we will hug this wounded Earth’s pulsing heart,” said Bocelli. VCG



June 13, 2020: On China's Cultural and Natural Heritage Day, a live show themed "Monkey King" highlighting Peking Opera and intangible cultural heritage is staged in Shanghai Jingju Theater. With unique cultural features, Shanghai-style Peking Opera is most famous for shows based on Journey to the West. Through a livestream, Yan Qinggu, the representative inheritor of the Shanghai intangible cultural heritage (Peking Opera) project, taught young opera fans how to paint facial makeup and perform common dance moves to shine light on the essence of Shanghai-style Monkey King opera. VCG



May 31, 2020: National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) Principal Second Violin Marissa Regni hosts NSO@Home LIVE. The U.S.-based symphony orchestra is influential around the world. Founded in 1930, NSO maintains a year-round season of about 175 concerts. Even amid the spreading coronavirus epidemic, NSO maintained its tradition by moving concerts online with @Home LIVE, a streamed performance presented and produced by NSO musicians. VCG



June 16, 2020: The “Echo” online music festival is held simultaneously in Fujian and Taiwan in southeastern China, with six young bands from both sides of the Taiwan Straits participating. Via the new mode of livestream performance and broadcast, the music festival solved the difficulty of music communication between the mainland and Taiwan due to the epidemic and triggered a cross-Straits music buzz. The photo shows mainland band Rolling Zoos performing in Fujian. VCG

May 31, 2020: Soccer players celebrate towards cardboard cutouts after scoring goals in the almost empty stadium of Borussia-Park in Monchengladbach, Germany. The Bundesliga has been strict with epidemic prevention and control since its return on May 16. The stadium with a capacity of tens of thousands became empty, so Borussia Monchengladbach, a Bundesliga team, placed 13,000 cardboard cutouts with photos of fans in the stands. For a May 31 match against Union Berlin, Borussia Monchengladbach also placed cardboard cutouts of fans behind their goal for the visiting team, demonstrating consideration for the opponent. VCG



Road to Mastery

Text by Wu Weishan



Over thousands of years, traditional Chinese sculpture has developed a freehand style and unique aesthetics different from Western realistic sculpture. In 2002, Wu Weishan first put forward the concept of freehand sculpture. courtesy of the author

I was born into a family of intellectuals in Shiyan Town of northern Jiangsu Province. Influenced by my father, I became obsessed with illustrations in old books and paintings on porcelain in my family's collection by the age of five. Elegant landscape and female figure paintings were especially seared into my brain. At 11, I started to sketch various seniors I saw on the street.

In 1979, I enrolled in Wuxi Institute of Arts and Technology to study clay sculpture. It was the first time I saw so many statues in my life: Venus, Busts of Michelangelo, Voltaire, the Head of Alexander the Great... Huishan clay, a raw material used to create figurines, was piled in a small courtyard outside the studio. This black clay is oily and soft. With a history of about 400 years, Huishan clay figurines made in Wuxi are one of the well-known folk crafts in China. The white plaster used to craft Western statues and black Huishan clay sharply contrast each other. I saw my destiny somewhere between the two sculpting materials.

My first class at the institute was a sketching course taught by Wu Kaicheng, a renowned Chinese painter. His concise but inspiring instructions as well as his proficient painting skills impressed me immediately. It was like bathing in the warm light of art. Mr. Wu stressed that an artist should depict real feelings about subjects rather than staying confined to any "certain patterns."

A research trip to Suzhou with my class in the spring of 1980 remains fresh in my memory. In Suzhou, we visited two ancient painted sculptures in the city's Dongshan Town to copy them. One was the painted



Wu Weishan working on a sculpture for the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders on a summer night of 2007. courtesy of the author

The clay statues in Baosheng Temple of Luzhi Town. Those statues are all lifelike and infinitely charming. However, to whom their creation should be credited remains debatable. Whoever it was, the ancient sculpted masterpieces demonstrate the superb skills and subtle designs of masters who achieved integration of form and spirit. courtesy of the author




statues of the Eighteen Arhats in Zijin Nunnery, which are said to be crafted by Lei Chao and his wife, both renowned folk sculptors of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The other was a screen wall and clay statues said to be created by Tang Dynasty (618-907) sculptor Yang Huizhi in Baosheng Temple of Luzhi Town. Those statues are all lifelike and infinitely charming. However, to whom their creation should be credited remains debatable. Whoever it was, the ancient sculpted masterpieces demonstrate the superb skills and subtle designs of masters who achieved integration of form and spirit. As precious cultural legacies left by ancient saints to later generations, they vitalized Chinese culture, helping it continue its inheritance and renewal from generation to generation. Ancient Chinese sculpture is an integral component of greater Chinese culture. It not only carries national spirit and collective wisdom, but also inspires creativity.

Also in 1980, celebrated artist Wu Guanzhong delivered a speech at our institute on the beauty of form, the relationship between craft and art, and how to find beauty in daily life. Renowned art scholar and educator Zhao Daoyi lectured on how young art students should maintain the right direction in life and explore the law of art. Famous sculptor and calligrapher Qian Shaowu expounded on the unique features of the works of Greek sculptor Phidias and Italian sculptor Michelangelo while tracking the aesthetic convergence between calligraphy and sculpture. All these experiences broadened our vision. Back then, my classmates and I knew

little about Monet and Cezanne and had no clue as to the distance between an eager student and an art master, the internal connections between abstract Chinese calligraphy and realistic Western sculpture, or the relationship between clay figurines and the creativity pulse of our national culture. Nevertheless, the instruction of such art masters through both words and deeds still influenced us insistently.

During the two years I studied at Wuxi Institute of Arts and Technology, I learned not only from many art masters and famous folk artists but also from unknown craftsmen. To a large extent, the beauty of arts is embedded in the beauty of crafts. The techniques constantly inherited and enriched by generations of folk artisans and craftsmen transmit the unconscious wisdom of our nation.

Later, I attended university and then studied in Europe and the United States. Now, I have been teaching in universities for about 20 years and was nominated as a corresponding member of the French Academy of Fine Arts and a member of the Italian Academy of Arts. Many of my works have been displayed at prestigious museums and public spaces around the world. Nevertheless, I still consider my experience in Wuxi the fundamental source of my art. Like the crystal, tranquil water of Wuxi's Huishan Spring, it constantly paves my road to pursuits of truth through art. 

The author is director of the National Art Museum of China, corresponding member of the French Academy of Fine Arts, and vice chairman of the China Artists Association.

Go with the Flow

Text by Ran Hongyin Illustrated by Liang Yu



When the body is confined, the mind wanders. When trapped in a small space, you may find interest in things you wouldn't have otherwise. This is how I began learning programming.

I enrolled in an online class, and when I logged in, the first thing out of the teacher's mouth was: "With the evolution of technology, simple and repetitive

tasks are gradually being replaced by machines. So how should we change our way of working and thinking? How can we become more competitive with the help of technology?"

I pressed the "Enter" key. Multiple choices, pictures, charts, comics, exercises in class... At each step, I never got bored at all. Instead, I joyously welcomed this new world. Interaction has always been a key

component of education, which is now practiced in an unprecedented way.


However, I was the only person participating in the class. The teacher, "Wu Feng," was just a program, and everything he said was predetermined. The person responsible for his wisdom was probably drinking coffee somewhere.

When I first heard online education over a decade ago, it mostly involved prerecorded video classes. I considered online education nothing more than a complement to face-to-face teaching. Many people can access it at once, but the depth of information is lacking. However, my opinion has turned around 180 degrees.

During the epidemic, I subscribed to several online courses including formal courses from higher education institutions, public lectures by research institutes, and promotional activities organized by publishers of cultural materials. The lecturers were all experts and professors, most of whom were new to working online. Their unfamiliarity with this new method

of teaching made them uncomfortable about talking to a machine at first. Moreover, none were very familiar with the software. However, students from across the country asked questions, expressed opinions, sent messages of gratitude, posted virtual flowers, and clicked "like." Assistants choose questions submitted by students, and the teacher won't be bothered by seeing distracted students.

The tasks of online teachers have also changed. Alongside teaching, they are also orators in this new era, influencing the public with their expertise. They are salespeople for cultural industries, hawking cultural products with their wisdom. They are new online celebrities as well, enriching online culture with some scholarly charm.

What other changes can we expect? Who knows! However, due to the epidemic, new currents are surging. Everyone will probably feel it. 

The author is an associate professor at China Academy of Discipline Inspection and Supervision.

Embroidering Beautiful China



Chinese people have crafted countless exquisite and colorful works with needle and thread. The history of Chinese embroidery can be traced back at least 3,000 years. The oldest embroidery pattern on record in China is simple and rough chain embroidery found in relics from the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600-256 B.C.).

Tracing the origin and development path of Chinese embroidery provides a glimpse of the history of Chinese clothing, society, and culture. Through complex and varying patterns, stitches, and materials, it captured and interpreted the aesthetic concepts of Chinese style to present a splendid image of the country.

Chinese Heritage
June 2020

Stories of Amber



Amber is one of the most precious natural materials, and it preserves things from thousands of years ago, wrapping them in stories of the past.

Tracing the art from the earliest amber relics discovered in prehistoric Sanxingdui Ruins in Sichuan Province to the robust collection from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) shines intense light on the aesthetics and skills of ancient Chinese artists and craftsmen. Since China has never been a major amber producing country, amber relics also provide evidence of links between China and neighboring countries by preserving contact and exchange stories involving distant countries and regions in ancient times.

Forbidden City
May 2020

Dreams at Hengdian World Studios



Located in Dongyang, eastern China's Zhejiang Province, Hengdian World Studios, dubbed "China's Hollywood," is one of the country's biggest film and television production centers and a bellwether of the film industry.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, production was suspended, dealing a heavy blow to the entire film and television industry. Some film extras from Hengdian World Studios have to work in local factories or deliver food temporarily to keep their dreams alive. As the epidemic wanes, an increasing number of paused film and teleplay crews have resumed work in Hengdian. Many outside crews have moved into Hengdian as well. The remaining "dream chasers" are also returning to work and normal life.

Sanlian Life Week
June 15, 2020

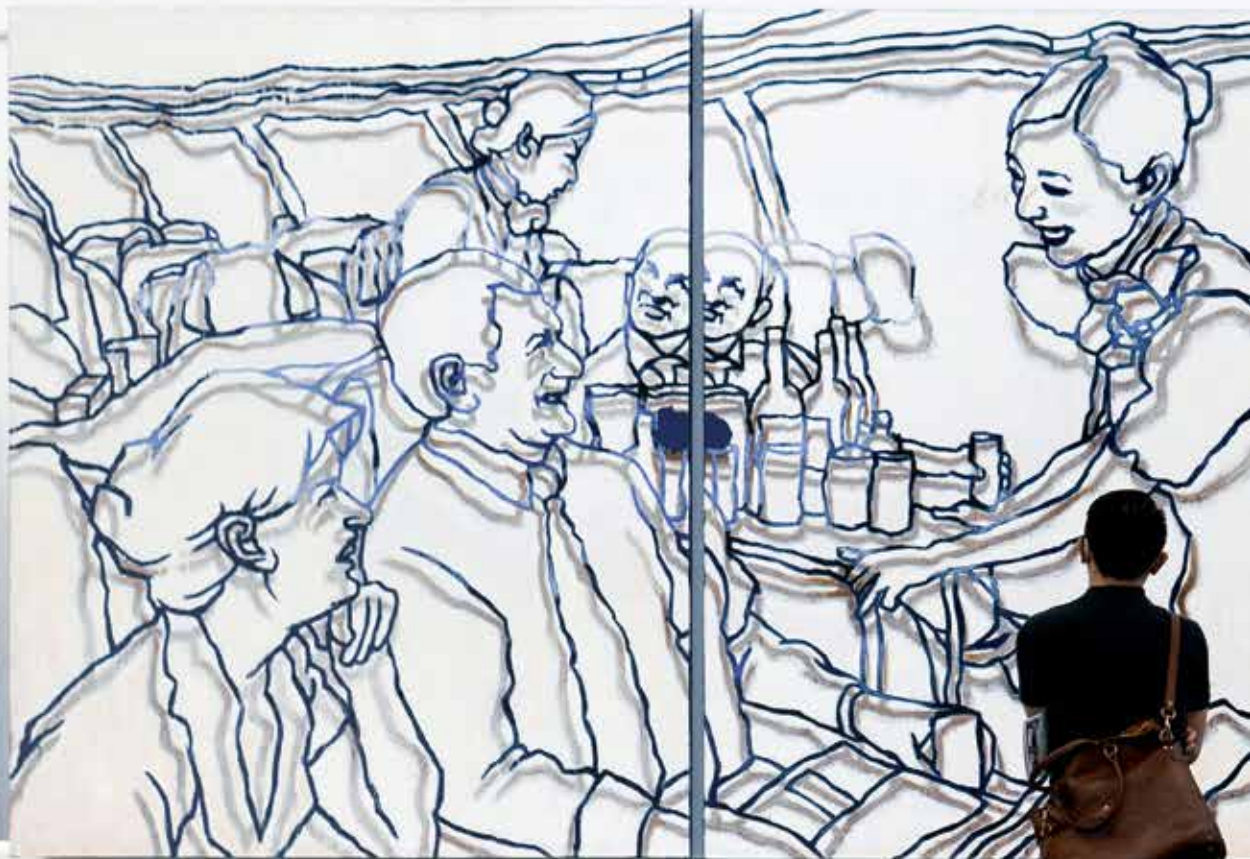
Consumption Boosts Vitality



In the post-epidemic era, retaliatory saving and restorative consumption emerged simultaneously. Thanks to joint promotion and stimulus of various consumption festivals, consumption vouchers, shopping subsidies, and livestreaming sales, offline consumption has rapidly resumed, and new online consumption has soared.

Boosting economic resumption by reinvigorating consumption power depends greatly on how much money consumers have in their pockets and their confidence in the future. However, the epidemic has dragged lifestyles into a new normal, and the concepts and trends of modern consumer society are being reconstructed by the epidemic situation.

New Weekly
June 1, 2020



Cloud Canvas

The internet is playing an increasingly important role in art, and the change of medium is “unavoidable.” The analysis of art displayed online may provide a glimpse into future trends in art.





The exhibition "Meditations in an Emergency." On May 21, the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art opened its first physical exhibition this year, "Meditations in an Emergency." The exhibition features 26 artists of different generations. It presents the thoughts of artists on the pandemic and the living condition of mankind.
by Wan Quan/*China Pictorial*

Philip Tinari, director of UCCA in Beijing, and his team have launched many online projects. Behind him is *The Square*, an installation by renowned contemporary artist Lu Lei. by Wan Quan/*China Pictorial*

UCCA Moving Art Online

Text by Gong Haiying

Exploration of online projects could produce more energy for the development of art institutions.



On May 21, the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art opened its first physical exhibition this year, “Meditations in an Emergency,” after over four months of closure. For the need of epidemic prevention and control, the opening ceremony of the exhibition was attended by only a limited number of people and kept simple and low profile in addition to being livestreamed on several online platforms.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, many museums and art institutions began to launch online projects and virtual

exhibitions. As a leading contemporary art institution in China, UCCA has presented a series of online projects since February of this year, including concerts, exhibitions, lectures, and movies. The center continues to display works and concepts of Chinese artists and maintain close connections with its patrons during the special period.

Founded by Belgian collector Guy Ullens and his wife in 2007, UCCA has become iconic for contemporary Chinese art. Philip Tinari from the United States has had the longest tenure as the center’s director. Since arriving in China in 2001, he has witnessed



the establishment and development of many modern art institutions in the country. During the epidemic, he and the UCCA team endeavored to organize many online projects. They also seized the opportunity to ponder over the future of art institutions like UCCA.

China Pictorial: How has the epidemic changed your life and work and how has it inspired you? How did “Meditations in an Emergency” come about?

Philip Tinari: The epidemic disturbed my life and work schedule. During the

Spring Festival holiday, I traveled to Europe, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa. I returned to Beijing on February 11 while China was still struggling with the epidemic. We rescheduled all the year’s work and postponed all major international exhibitions planned to be held at our center.

We began to design this new exhibition about the epidemic in March. The COVID-19 epidemic has been quite a tragedy for the 21st century as well as a rare experience shared by all human beings. We see it from different perspectives and put together interesting works to present the feelings of



The exhibition “Meditations in an Emergency.” *Whispering Pines ∞* is a six-channel video installation created by American artist Shana Moulton. In the work, the artist plays a person suffering agoraphobia but trying her utmost to live a healthy life. The work aims to discuss “self-realization.” by Wan Quan/*China Pictorial*



Just Like in the Mirror, a series of works created by Chinese artist Zhang Hui, tells how nurses are drawing new energy in their daily lives. courtesy of UCCA Center for Contemporary Art

contemporary Chinese artists.

Over the next few years or even longer, the biggest change will probably be less exchange in the realm of contemporary art. Maybe the term “New Intentionality” can describe some changes, which means that we will take advantage of resources at our disposal in a more comprehensive and smart way. This exhibition reflects what our young exhibition design team was forced to brainstorm to find interesting ideas. We hope to arrange more great exhibitions in the future and share our enthusiasm with more people. This is the core spirit of UCCA.

China Pictorial: During the epidemic, many art institutions launched online exhibitions. What do you think about online platforms for art institutions? Will virtual exhibitions become mainstream?

Tinari: We launched many online projects to stay connected with our patrons

while the center was closed. On February 29, the online concert “Voluntary Garden Online Concert: Sonic Cure” was welcomed by lots of people who hadn’t been outdoors in over a month, and they were happy about watching it online together.

Combining online and offline projects has been a struggle for art institutions since the emergence of the internet. And the current situation offers new possibilities to solve the problem. When online life is increasingly enriched, exhibitions finally become part of it. In the long run, we will try other online forms and prepare to open an exhibition center in Shanghai to reach people across the country and around the world.


Physical art galleries create intimacy between the audience and works of art, which not only makes for an experience that is irreplaceable, but also endows art with more value. As for the future of virtual exhibitions, I want to spend more time figuring out what we can do and pondering the situation. We are now preparing, for example, to create VR materials by taking photos of the exhibition. Although the experience of art cannot be duplicated

May 2020: Few tourists are seen outside the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art located at the core part of the 798 Art District when Beijing's epidemic prevention and control measures are still in place. As an art institution based in China but with a global vision, UCCA provides millions of viewers a wealth of art exhibits, public projects and research projects every year.
by Wan Quan/China Pictorial

online, knowledge related to art can be available online. We hope to achieve more in this regard.

China Pictorial: How do China's art institutions differ from their counterparts in Europe and America? When the epidemic is over, what will the future of art institutions and their roles look like?

Tinari: Governments in Europe are giving art institutions substantial support. Many institutions are mainly funded by local governments. In the United States, museums can facilitate nurturing better citizens.

Similarly, considering the country's booming economy, the Chinese government is expected to promote the development of art and creativity. Thanks to China's focus on economics as well as art creation, the number of art museums is increasing, and the 798 Art District is growing. In the future, excellent art institutions will find their own paths to survival, but they must keep an eye on their academic status and influence. Exploration of online projects could produce more energy for the development of art institutions. 





A screenshot of the online graduation works exhibition of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). The exhibition presented a 3D virtual CAFA Art Museum. It leveraged VR, AR, 3D, and other technologies to display graduates' works in creative ways, which achieved impressive exhibition effects in the post-epidemic era.

Virtual Graduation Show

Text by Anne Cao Photographs courtesy of Central Academy of Fine Arts

Exhibiting graduation works online presented new challenges but also inspired art schools and their graduates.



The graduate show is the most important graduation season event for art schools. This year, the coronavirus pandemic pushed many of those institutions, including the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), to move the shows online and display graduation works in the “cloud.”

On June 15, the 2020 CAFA undergraduate students’ graduation works exhibition, themed “Then and Now,” was officially launched. The exhibition showcased graduation works by 846 undergraduate students from 11 schools and departments of the CAFA in five virtual exhibition galleries. It also included draft works, and traced the creation process and growth of students’ skills. In total, nearly 20,000 drawings, paintings, prints, 3D works, and video works were presented.

It was the largest graduation works exhibition in the history of the CAFA. To some extent, the online show will continue forever.

Working Through the Epidemic

Art is born of life. In 2020, a sudden epidemic disrupted the normal graduation schedule but also offered new avenues for inspiration.

Wang Zihé from the School of Urban Design explained that his graduation work *Breathing Grass* is based on the epidemic outbreak in Wuhan and created to solve real problems.

“In January and February of this year, the extreme shortage of masks lured some illicit factories to reprocess used masks for resale, which posed a great infection risk to the public,” he recounted. “I designed a hidden pattern that appears

on the mask when the air temperature changes due to the wearer’s breathing so you can tell if someone else has worn it.”

Wang Jiaxing from the Sculpture Department shared his creation experience at home: “The biggest difficulty working at home was a lack of tools and materials. I had to improvise various ways to solve the problems. I even used my mother’s

kitchen ware in my work. The process was innovative and interesting.”

You Qinhuang from the Oil Painting Department held an exhibition at home, which attracted many local art enthusiasts. “I recorded the real lives of ordinary families during the epidemic,” he said. “My inspiration was this house,

so I held the exhibition here. I wanted to capture the state of life during the special period through paintings and leave a special mark to fuel memories.”

New Forms, New Ideas

Exhibiting works online brought new challenges as well as new inspiration for art schools and their graduates alike.

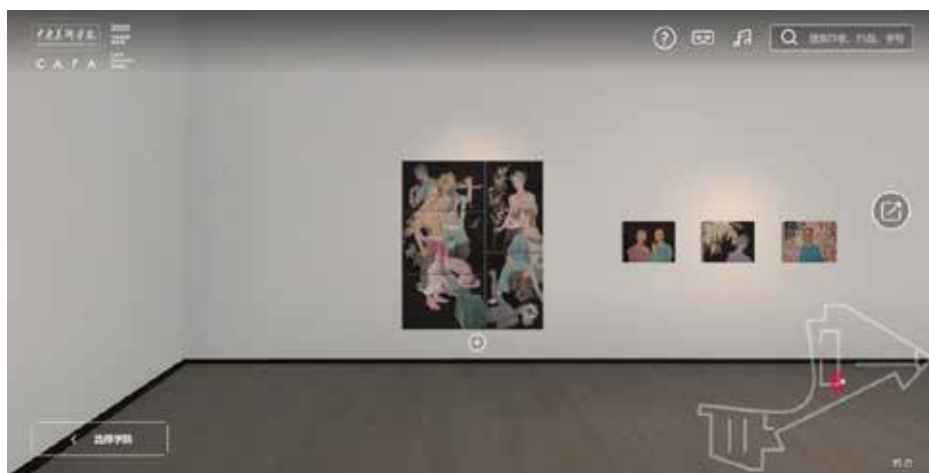
Zhang Zikang, head of the CAFA Art Museum, noted that due to space limitations in the museum’s exhibition halls, students could only show a few works in previous years. Some big series and installations suffered because only snippets could be displayed. “The virtual exhibition gives students more space to present their works, so the viewers can take in a more comprehensive understanding of the works, which is a great breakthrough.”

Wang Ming, a sculpting graduate, pointed to the impact of the online exhibition on his creating experience. “This online exhibition caused me to do a lot of new thinking. For example, I had to

The coronavirus pandemic pushed many art institutions to move shows online and display graduation works in the “cloud.”



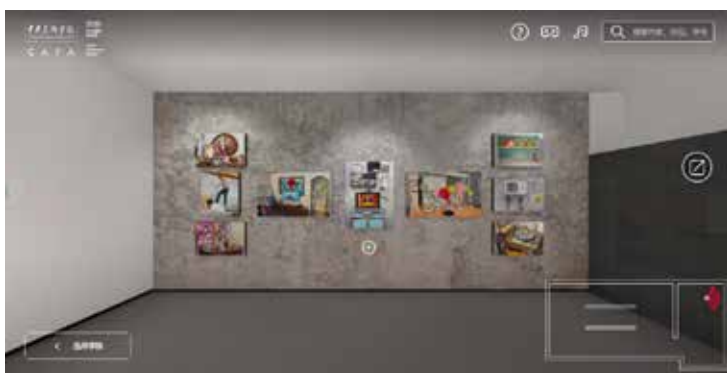
Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove by Zhan Ji'ang, 240x200cm, light color, silver and copper foil on silk.



A screenshot of the work *Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* displayed in the virtual gallery. Each graduate was provided a webpage on which to add new designs and works for the virtual gallery, so every graduate enjoyed sufficient exhibition space and diverse presentation forms.



Seven Fans by You
Qinhuang, 80x120cm,
oil on canvas.



A screenshot of the work
Seven Fans displayed in the
virtual gallery.

use 3D technology to transform a traditional sculpture into virtual form, which inspired many new ideas for future works. It's important to embrace digital thinking during the creation process, which can open new windows of possibilities.”


The online exhibition has been enjoying heavy viewing traffic. “It would be impossible for a physical exhibition to reach so many people,” said Zhang Zikang. “This is the big reason we see so much potential in the internet as a tool for promotion, and the advantages of online exhibitions will increase in the future.”

Crossover Arts

In the internet era, the deep interaction and integration of technology and art could exert a profound influence on

the presentation and development of art. The exhibition fully leveraged VR, AR, 3D, and other technologies to display graduates' works in creative ways, which achieved impressive effects.

The exhibition presented a 3D virtual CAFA Art Museum. Each graduate was provided a page on which to add new designs and works for the virtual gallery, so every graduate enjoyed sufficient exhibition space and diverse presentation forms.

Online exhibitions also free patrons from the constraints of physical exhibitions. Viewers can observe works from every angle, search for information about creators, and view the complete series and portfolios. The flexible, efficient, and interactive online exhibition delivered new experiences for art enthusiasts. 

Beijing People's Art Theatre New Scenes in an Old Theater

Text by Gong Haiying

“Amid the COVID-19 epidemic, it felt like the internet was the only place free of the deadly virus. It is where spectators and performers can reach each other without worry and a conduit for art to be spread widely to more people.”

June 12, 2020 marked the 68th birthday of Beijing People's Art Theatre. That day, 30 performers from the institution ranging from veterans to recent graduates returned to the stage for their first performance in the five months since the COVID-19 outbreak. Scenes from 16 Chinese and international plays were performed, including scenes from *Thunderstorm* and *Sunrise* by Chinese playwright Cao Yu, Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, and *Hamlet*. The performances either combined versions or featured the theatre's original cast. The event featuring actors and actresses of different generations working together was highly anticipated and drew massive attention.

Full house? Yes and no. There was no audience sitting in the theater. However, the performance was played for the largest real-time audience since the establishment of the institution. For the past 68 years, Beijing People's Art Theatre, one of the most revered theaters in China, has established close bonds with its audience. That night, the limited seats in the theater were unnecessary because the internet created millions of virtual seats for anyone with a connection. The performance was broadcast on dozens of China's online platforms. By the end of it, the count of total real-time viewers surpassed five million, thousands of times the seats (about 1,000) in the brick-and-mortar theater.



Lan Tianye (left), a veteran performer from Beijing People's Art Theatre, waits to get on the stage. The 93-year-old actor is the only one still active on stage among the theater's first-generation performers. This time, he worked with young actors and actresses to reproduce several scenes from the classic play *Cai Wenji* which tells the story of a female poet and musician of that name in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220). Their performance showed the heritage of Beijing People's Art Theatre across time. by Li Hongbo



During China's fight against COVID-19, Beijing People's Art Theatre carried out a series of online programs and activities such as cloud script reading, museum in the cloud, and performances and exhibitions through the cloud. One mastermind behind these online programs was veteran Chinese actor Feng Yuanzheng, head of the performers team of Beijing People's Art Theatre. "The epidemic definitely has been a disaster, but it also deepened our

Before the performance for the 68th anniversary of Beijing People's Art Theatre starts, the machine for live broadcast is already on standby. Quite different from previous online performances, this show made its spectators feel like they were on the scene, thanks to the actors and actresses working on the real stage of the theatre. by Li Hongbo

understanding of the world and forced us to learn new skills," said Feng. "Amid the COVID-19 epidemic, it felt like the internet was the only place free of the deadly virus. It is where spectators and performers can reach each other without worry and a conduit for art to be spread widely to more people."

Feng admitted that at first it was merely an expedient measure to organize online activities after the closure of the physical theater. However, as time passed, the theater began to explore such activities more actively. Classical script reading through the cloud is a major online program organized by Beijing People's Art Theatre. Actors and actresses sit at home and read through a play as the audience listens in. The professionals have only their voices and their lines to portray different characters and emotions. As online script reading grew in popularity, Feng's faith in the potential of virtual art activities expanded. So far, Beijing People's Art Theatre has scheduled five script readings during its closure due to the epidemic, including the original play *Top Restaurant* and *Romulus the Great* by Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt. The number of listeners for each reading has reached hundreds of thousands.

For International Museum Day on

Actress Gong Lijun (right), who has been playing Fan Yi in *Thunderstorm* for 31 years, works with young actor Zhou Shuai to give a fresh take on the time-honored play. Although there were no audiences sitting in the theater, actors and actresses had no difficulty in finding the unique theatrical atmosphere.

by Li Chunguang


Prince Hamlet played by actor Wang Ban of Beijing People's Art Theatre has long received overwhelming popularity with audiences. His monologue helps build the noble character of the prince and touches the hearts of his audience.

by Li Chunguang



May 18, the Drama Museum of Beijing People's Art Theatre launched a live-streamed "tour" of the museum, which revealed many unknown stories happening throughout the history of the theater. In just over a month, the cumulative viewers exceeded 80,000.

Regarding future online innovations of Beijing People's Art Theatre and other drama institutions, Feng is already working on a pattern. "We can cooperate with

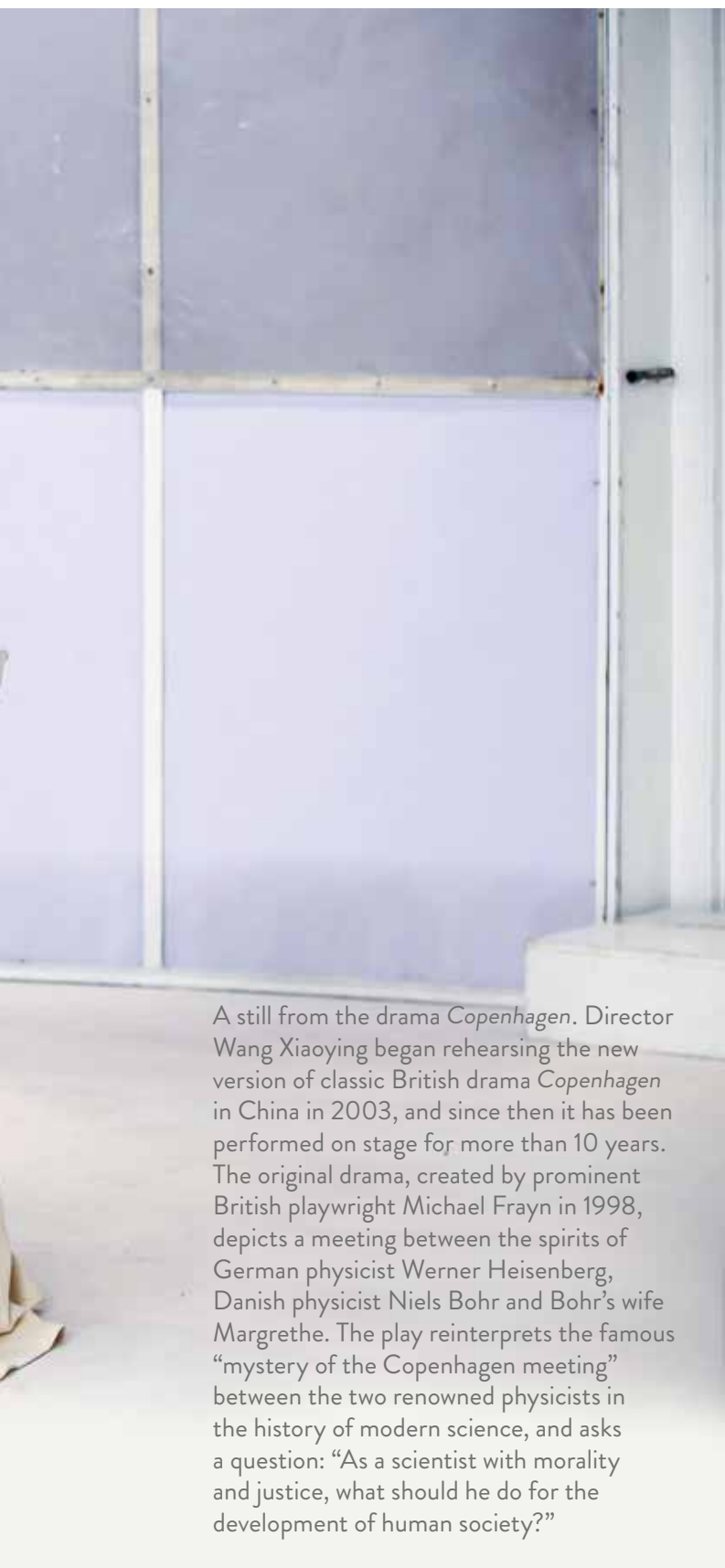
online platforms to shoot our own version of National Theatre Live (NT Live) like some European theaters did to spread our drama art to every corner of the world," he said. "We may also invite both domestic and international artists to rehearse the same play at the same time in their respective cities or countries. They perform the play together on the internet, and they could even use different languages. How thrilling and amazing would that be?" 



Taking Drama Online

Text by Heidi Gong Photographs courtesy of Ying Drama Studio

The magic of drama is not confined to the stage. We can harness the power of online platforms to transcend time and space to share plays and spread dramatic ideas.



A still from the drama *Copenhagen*. Director Wang Xiaoying began rehearsing the new version of classic British drama *Copenhagen* in China in 2003, and since then it has been performed on stage for more than 10 years. The original drama, created by prominent British playwright Michael Frayn in 1998, depicts a meeting between the spirits of German physicist Werner Heisenberg, Danish physicist Niels Bohr and Bohr's wife Margrethe. The play reinterprets the famous "mystery of the Copenhagen meeting" between the two renowned physicists in the history of modern science, and asks a question: "As a scientist with morality and justice, what should he do for the development of human society?"

On April 22, 2020, two days after Ying Drama Studio issued a recruitment announcement for its inaugural online drama class, the studio expanded the class size from 50 to 1,000. By the end of June, three series of streamed classes had drawn thousands of students.

Drama director Wang Xiaoying, a founder of Ying Drama Studio and lecturer of its first online drama class, has always sought ways to bring drama to more people. The class combined video and livestreaming to enhance interaction and encouraged participants to engage in deep discussions online.

Since the 1980s, Wang has directed dozens of dramatic classics in China and beyond, injecting them with his own singular interpretations. The theme of the early lessons was "A good drama is a lab for human nature," a philosophy Wang has promoted for years. He has prying into human nature through productions such as *Blind City*, adapted from Portuguese writer José Saramago's novel *Blindness*, and *The Orphan of Zhao*, a famous Chinese historical work. Through practice on the internet, Wang has updated his ideas about technology and hopes to use it to explore new possibilities for drama.

China Pictorial: As stage art, drama traditionally places great focus on face-to-face communication. How has "cloud teaching" worked for you?

Wang Xiaoying: When I first started looking into a camera instead of the faces of students and lecturing to empty seats, indeed, I had to overcome huge psychological discomfort. But this forced trial ending up with thousands of viewers was tremendously encouraging. I gradually recognized that the appeal of drama is not confined to the stage. We can employ online platforms to transcend time and

A still from the drama *Blind City*. Directed by Wang Xiaoying, the drama was premiered in 2007. It is an adaptation of the novel *Blindness* by Portuguese Nobel Literature Laureate José Saramago, which Wang Xiaoying read during the 2003 SARS outbreak in Beijing.



space to share plays and spread ideas.

China Pictorial: You have directed many Chinese and foreign classics. Why did you choose *Blind City* as the first topic to discuss in the online class?

Wang Xiaoying: History is always surprisingly familiar. The drama *Blind City* was inspired by *Blindness*, one of the most renowned novels by Portuguese author José Saramago, which I read during the 2003 outbreak of SARS in Beijing. The novel revolves around an unexplained mass epidemic of blindness afflicting nearly everyone in a city. The heroine in the play witnesses the distortion of human nature

and the collapse of social order caused by sudden blindness.

The novel coronavirus pandemic has caused a far greater impact than SARS did, but thankfully we are hearing more inner reflections and rational voices than we did during the SARS outbreak.

The epidemic is a special situation and an event worthy of in-depth study in dramatic laboratories. I hope to guide the audience to appreciate the most valuable things found in the drama. I want to show everyone that drama can be a human nature laboratory. In the theater, you can feel and think about emotions and ideas that may not ever be perceived in daily life. Exploring them can

As the play *Copenhagen* is staged at Ying Drama Studio's theater, audiences carefully read the playbill while waiting for the start of the performance.



Director Wang Xiaoying giving an online lecture on drama. Wang admitted that when looking into a camera instead of the faces of students and lecturing to empty seats for his first online class, he had to overcome huge psychological discomfort.




facilitate deeper thinking and understanding of human nature.

China Pictorial: You have summarized two of your methods for creation: injecting Chinese narratives into foreign dramas and digging into Chinese classics. What are the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western dramas? How do you envision the future development of Ying Drama Studio after the epidemic?

Wang Xiaoying: From a narrative point of view, Chinese and Western dramas take different paths to arrive at the same destination. The major difference is that Chinese dramas pay more attention to people's

reflection and contemplation on reality. Western dramas focus on human nature and soul searching when facing dilemmas and reflect on the power of human nature.

Although physical theaters can never be completely replaced, the development of online activities is a necessary promotion and extension of offline works to some extent. Our online class will continue to invite more famous drama masters to teach and participate. In the future, I am sure we will find even more diverse and flexible ways to communicate with the audience. Ying Drama Studio will continue exploring creative practices to enrich avenues of drama exchange and development. 

From Screen to Mind: Origin and Inquiry of Online “Screen Art”

Text by Jonas Stampe and Xiao Ge

As cutting-edge art was broadcast directly into people’s homes, it seemed like the possibilities for exhibition could become endless.

These days, online exhibitions have become a survival mode for art galleries, museums, and art fairs. But more than 50 years ago, before the internet and other visual online media emerged, remote art shows were simply called television art.

Although television art was first introduced as a notion by Lucio Fontana and the Italian Spatialists in their “Manifest for Television” in 1952, it never materialized as a specific art form. In 1969, however, a young innovative German artist and filmmaker named Gerry Schum embarked on a short and intense journey that made history. With his wife Ursula Wevers, he conceived and created the first television gallery, Fernsehgalerie Berlin Gerry Schum. It broadcast its first television exhibition “Land Art” at 10:15 p.m. on April 15, 1969, showcasing works of eight legendary artists.

As cutting-edge art was broadcast directly into people’s homes, it seemed like the possibilities for exhibition could become endless. The idea was simple yet ingenious. He replaced a conventional recording from the exhibition space or studio with works made specifically for television. These works were not shown on small square-box screens in galleries to art aficionados. Quite the contrary, they were meant to be broadcast into every home from the initial artistic concept.

Imagine how contemporary art and the art world would look like today if this vision had succeeded. How would perceptions and philosophies about art have changed? What we can say with any certainty is that things would be different. Of course, some people would just switch channels, but many would have continued looking at their screens with wonder and a hunger for understanding.

The television gallery was unlike any





Filz TV, a video work created in 1969 by Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), a famous German artist, is screened at the exhibition "From Screen to Mind—A 50-Year History." In the video, the artist constantly knocks on the television screen to reflect on the current situation that television is firmly controlled by ideology and commercial interests. by Yi Zilei



On the first floor of the gallery, *The World Question Center*, a unique and historic work by American artist James Lee Byars, is presented for the first time in China. It was filmed by TV producer, art critic and film director Jef Cornelis, and broadcast on Belgium's National Television on November 28, 1969, seven months after Gerry Schum's first TV exhibition "Land Art." James Lee Byars' *The World Question Center* is also one of the first interactive works in the history of contemporary art. It was the first time in contemporary art history that a work of art used live broadcast as a medium and interacted with an audience through open phone calls. by Wan Quan/China Pictorial

other kinds of art galleries; its physical space was television sets in people's homes—it sought an immediate place and space in people's minds and lives. Furthermore, each show was only broadcast once, ensuring an extremely ephemeral flavor. You either saw it or you missed it. That was it. There were no reruns. Schum's visionary idea was driven by his desire to use the mass medium of television as an artistic medium and as a consequence, make art more accessible to a wider audience, an idea which also

carried a critique of the commercialism of contemporary art that aligned with ideologies of mid-century modern art movements that celebrated art's profoundly immaterial qualities.

This idea, which aimed to commission art created especially for television as an alternative to documentaries about artists, should be analyzed in the social context of Europe and the United States of the late 1960s. Influenced by the idea of bringing art and culture to all citizens, many sought

to make art accessible to everyone. But the concept was also highly influenced by new emerging and groundbreaking artistic movements of the period: performance art, process art, conceptual art, photography, arte povera, and a few artists using video. Such forms aspired to break through limits imposed by traditional art disciplines like sculpture and painting.

When looking at these screens and at these works of art, it is important to be aware you are practicing a mind-resilience, conceptual imagination—learning to understand other ideas and perspectives. These artists conceived the images while knowing that they would be presented on the television set’s square screen with rounded corners. Their contrasting usages of perspective, motion, and stillness are all deliberate and chosen for the format of a television set with flatness and illusionary depth in mind.


The show “From Screen to Mind” recounts a time 50 years ago when art and society witnessed profound changes. Female artists were excluded or not even considered even at a time when the notion of art as a tool for change was the norm—when cutting-edge innovation with only art as a concept was respected and market forces were less imposing on artistic creation. It was also a time when screen-based art started to take baby steps, a time when online television programming was limited to a few channels and when transmission was national rather than global.

The radical innovations of Fernsehgalerie Berlin Gerry Schum remain the key pillars of online screen-based art due to the attempts to find unity between works and media, but also because of the drive to redefine an art form aimed at a mass audience. This vigorous and highly influential yet short-lived experiment prompted artists who might otherwise not have considered screen-based art to engage in broadcast projects first using film and later



Untitled (1970) by Keith Sonnier, an American artist born in 1941. courtesy of Wind H Art Center

video. If Gerry Schum’s television gallery triggered the emergence of video art and its early development, it also raised questions—questions that “From Screen to Mind—A 50-Year History” may help to answer.

Furthermore, the exhibition raises questions about our current understanding and engagement with the screen, its mobile and omni-contextual potential, and the problems of reproduction of scale and space. 

The authors are a curating duo. Jonas Stampe is a Danish curator and art theorist. Xiao Ge is a Chinese artist, curator, and media professional. The Wind H Art Center is exploring the source and early beginning of online exhibitions with the show “From Screen to Mind—A 50-Year History” which highlights the early origins of online screen-based art. This article is an excerpt from the preface of the exhibition.

Static Travels

From Grand Tour to Online Art

Text by Miriam Mirolla

Switching from real to online exhibitions results in gains as well as losses.

To commemorate the 500th anniversary of Raphael's death, the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome organized an impressive exhibition that was shut down only a few hours after opening due to Italy's lockdown to fight COVID-19. The museum promptly uploaded a free video to its website to maintain interest in the event with hopes of a revival.

If art is an expanding group of cultural devices capable of transforming the audience's social wisdom and bringing them into the future, online art will become a key tool to launch a complex journey into the soul.

Grand Tour

Since ancient times, art has always been produced as a site installation in which the observer's point of view is crucial. Unique relations with art trigger imagination and

awake past experiences. A live approach to art can stimulate a wide range of mental processes that cannot be reached from screen-based exploration.

For example, many Italian cities offer visitors an opportunity to make intimate contact with different artistic theories developed through the centuries, which are often represented in the same area. For example, Florence is a perfect fusion of the Middle Ages and Renaissance styles. But what is the difference between visiting this stunning city in person and through a device? The real experience involves crossing the city center, walking through the Ponte Vecchio, turning left towards a small square, and entering Santa Felicita's church. Finally, visitors can appreciate one of the most gorgeous masterpieces of Mannerist painting—*Descent from the Cross* by Jacopo Pontormo, a large canvas set in the chapel. A true psychic



Many exhibitions to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Raphael's death have been suspended due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Thanks to the improved situation in China, the exhibition, "Raffaello: Opera Omnia," finally opened in Kunming, the capital city of southwestern China's Yunnan Province.

and emotional experience for the viewer, it is deeply integrated with the architecture and impossible to be fully reproduced on screen.

Travel is a method of learning. In the modern age, the Grand Tour was an important element of European cultural lifestyle that interested the well-off from Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Russia. Writers, artists, and musicians such as Goethe, Stendhal, Raphael Mengs, and Lord Byron took part in it. The Grand Tour was the first major form of cultural tourism to gain popularity. By the mid-18th century, about 40,000 travelers were traveling from Northern Europe to Italy. Their goal was to study the classics by living and learning in drawing academies.

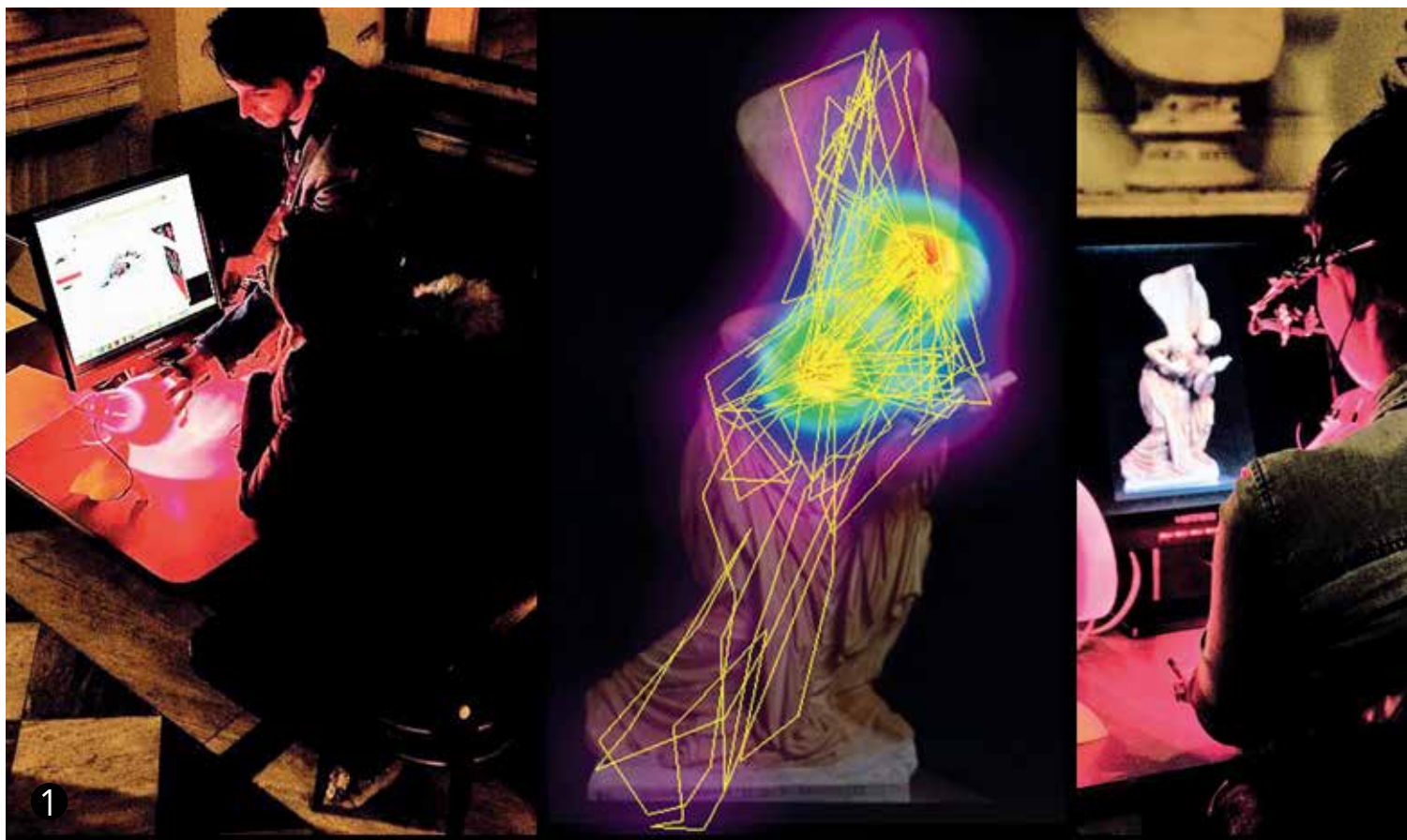
Through distance learning since the COVID-19 outbreak, the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, one of the oldest institutions

in the world, recently organized the First National Online Meeting along with all 20 Italian Academies. The aim is to share teaching experiences in this difficult time.

A temporary solution is clearly blended learning. But what about practical disciplines such as painting, sculpture, scenography, decoration, and engraving? And what about historical laboratories including the most recent and innovative one, the Laboratory of Art Psychology? They certainly cannot be replaced by remote lessons, virtual laboratories, or online exhibitions.

Online Art

A virtual show about Raphael's life and painting designed by the Italian company Magister Art is set to travel the world. The original paintings of Raphael were transformed in hypertext and LED walls into which the observer can inquire



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as intimately as a doctor explores the body. Technology enables the patron to enter the work of art and fathom it as a complex universe, and online exhibitions can deepen a hasty encounter with the masterpieces.

Though live experiences are essential in art, the digital acquisition of Italian artistic and monumental heritage promoted by Google Arts and Culture should be considered a valid activity to promote positive outcomes for academic training in art. Furthermore, Italian museums are rapidly adapting to social distancing, introducing online access to their collections and online exhibitions.

Epidemic waves may continue to




1. Students make an eye tracking experiment on *The Winged Psyche* in the Laboratory of Art Psychology.
2. A Laboratory of Art Psychology student wearing eye tracking glasses.
3. *Descent from the Cross* by Jacopo Pontormo (1494-1557). The oil painting on wood is one of the attractions in the Capponi Chapel, Santa Felicita Church of Florence, Italy. The work's grandeur is deeply integrated with the architecture and cannot be fully reproduced on screen.

limit the possibility of real experiences. Switching from real to online exhibitions results in gains as well as losses. Patrons save time and money by surfing rapidly while still at home. People can consume thousands of pieces of informational data daily while still avoiding gathering in museums in terms of psycho-physical experiences. Furthermore, people can avert the possibility of enduring the unpredictable and extraordinary cocktail that is aesthetic experience—the basic platform for every human interaction, for individual and social evolution, the encounter point among the Self, the Other, and reality.

But online art is already succeeding as a considerably important tool of cultural

survival, a pre and post learning moment. Digitalization is succeeding in “bringing the observer into the center of the painting,” as the Futurist painter Umberto Boccioni envisioned in the early 20th century. Online exhibitions make viewers the center of the work and their thoughts and emotions essential facets of the aesthetic experience.

Focus on the viewer has pushed a new paradigm shift: online exhibitions will become a new conceptual frontier combining the Grand Tour and Depth Psychology with real and virtual knowledge to ultimately transform the observer into a perfect motionless traveler. 

The author is an Italian art critic and theorist.



A poster for *Leap*, a film which chronicles the stories of China's national women's volleyball team. The movie release was previously scheduled for the Spring Festival holiday. After its withdrawal, the movie has yet to set a new release date. IC

Cinema Present and Prospects

Text by Duan Xiaosha and Wo Kexin

What will the future bring for the film industry?



A poster for the superhero film *Black Widow*. Previously set for release on May 1, 2020, the new release date for the movie has been set for November 6 this year. IC

About 13,000 film and television production companies in China have folded or dissolved since the beginning of 2020. Hollywood production shut down for three months from March to June. Next year's Oscars ceremony, scheduled for February 2021, will be postponed for two months due to the film shortage caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Facing such a grim reality, filmmakers are struggling to survive. Production

techniques and viewing habits are evolving rapidly as online videos reach viewers with unprecedented convenience after theaters shut down. Furthermore, previous pursuits for new frontiers of filmmaking and nagging problems hindering the development of film have been significantly magnified. What is film? What roles do movies play in our world? What will be possible for movies in the future? Those questions are worth rethinking.

The rapid development of science and



June 15, 2020: As the COVID-19 epidemic is basically controlled, an outdoor cinema reopens in Milan, Italy. The audience kept a safe distance from each other and enjoyed watching movies outdoors. by Carlo Cozzoli/Shutterstock/IC

technology has stimulated the creation of a variety of media outside of movies and profoundly rewritten the rules of production. Filmmakers are quickly learning how to adapt to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the global film industry and the reality of countless movie theaters screeching to a halt while online streaming surges.

The boundaries of film have been further broadened and even navigated to uncharted artistic territories as film merges with contemporary art practices such as artificial intelligence, games,

streaming media, video installations, and image behavior. For example, VR movies and movies at 120 fps represent innovative film production. Interactive movies create a fresh viewing experience. New video editing forms are emerging, such as vertical movies, desktop movies, and mobile apps like TikTok and Kwai that encourage users to incorporate complete narrative, montages, and special effects into short videos. Viewers can now watch movies through streaming media in homes, cars, galleries, and museums. Alternate viewing locations have really gained popularity

June 22, 2020: People entering a movie theater inside the Les Halles shopping mall in Paris, France after it reopens to the public. IC



during the pandemic.


The definition of film proposed by Thomas Elsaesser, an influential German-born film scholar, directly addresses the question “What is film?” and forecasts its future. Film is ubiquitous not only on the screen but also in any space.

The quest for the essence of film in the digital era has shifted from the simple question “What is film?” to “What can film be?” at a cognitive level. This shift in perception is regarded as a catastrophe by some with ontological understanding of cinema. They declare that “movies are dead.”

Are movies really dead?

Cinephiles have been attempting to recreate offline viewing procedures through group chats from ticket buying and checking to virtual seat-taking, real-time comments and review sharing to make the home viewing experience as ceremonious as the cinema atmosphere. Some online platforms build the illusion of group watching by allowing movie viewers to share real-time voice comments. However, at physical theaters, both hardcore movie aficionados and casual viewers hate distractions

from others. When moviegoers cannot be physically present in the cinemas, they have to regain the identity of a moviegoer by making their comments seen by all. This compromise speaks volumes for the irreplaceability of physical cinemas.

Though offline facilities like cinemas are irreplaceable, the profits reaped by the online film and television industry have been the silver lining of the epidemic plight. Data shows that compared to the period before the epidemic, China’s online video platforms iQiyi and Mango TV enjoyed a paid subscription increase of 1,079 percent and 708 percent, respectively. The U.S. video streaming platform Netflix reduced the default image quality in many countries and regions to ease pressure on bandwidth. Breaking through the limitations of the theater market may bring new vitality to the film and television industry and expand the definition of film as viewers embrace the new mode of “Internet Plus” film and television. 

The authors are both master’s students at the China Film Art Research Center.



A violin maker in Donggaocun adjusts the neck of a half-finished violin. Violin making has strict requirements for the neck. The margin of error must stay within a millimeter or the instrument will have poor intonation and inconvenient final assembly.

A photograph of a violin workshop. In the foreground, numerous violins are laid out on a workbench, their bodies and fiddles visible. Some are partially assembled, while others are more complete. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the workshop environment. A white text box is overlaid on the center of the image.

Crescendo in Violin Town

Text and photographs by Qin Bin

“Thirty years ago, many in Donggaocun could make violins but few could play the instrument. Today, many local children can play quite well. We are fully confident in our future.”



Sawdust is cleaned from a violin panel with a small knife. In recent years, Donggaocun has shifted from producing low-end violins to medium- and high-end products. For example, Beijing Huadong Musical Instrument Co., Ltd.'s annual violin output has dropped from 200,000 to 120,000 units in recent years, but its output value increased from 50 million yuan (US\$7.1 million) to 80 million yuan (US\$11.3 million).

A worker polishing a violin after it is varnished. Violin making involves a number of steps such as joining templates, scraping templates, chiseling, assembling, and varnishing. In terms of varnishing, environmentally-friendly new approaches such as using plant-based paints show the way for the development of violin making.



For many, attending an international concert can be a big deal. But such events are already common for residents of Donggaocun Town in Pinggu District, Beijing. In August 2019, musicians including violinist Jose Vicente and classical guitarist Miguel Perez from Spain's Orchestra of Valencia visited Donggaocun to participate in a week of musical and cultural exchange activities. Music lovers from around China joined locals to enjoy a high-end music feast. Known across China as the "Violin Town," Donggaocun has been gradually evolving from a musical instrument production base to a hub of cultural and art exchanges.

About 70 kilometers away from downtown Beijing, Donggaocun has been manufacturing violins

for more than 30 years. By 2009, the town's annual production of violins had already reached 200,000 pieces. The musical instruments were exported to more than 30 countries and regions on the globe, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the world's violin production. In recent years, operations have expanded to include more musical instruments such as the *erhu* (a two-stringed musical instrument), upright bass, and acoustic guitar.

In recent years, Donggaocun has been striving to explore the international market, reduce the product volume while improving quality, increase added value, and shift to medium- and high-end production, away from low-end. Located in the town, Beijing Huadong Musical Instrument Co., Ltd., established in 1988, is

the largest violin manufacturer in northern China. It produces violins, violas, cellos, basses, and *erhus*.

"There was a time when Donggaocun had produced one out of every three violins in the world," notes Liu Yundong, chairman of the company. "But in those days, most of the violins we produced were low-end and priced at about US\$14 to 28. Now, Pinggu-produced violins sell for as much as US\$11,300. A number of renowned violinists including Elmar Oliveira own violins from Pinggu as spares."

Liu Zunfei, a graduate of the Central Conservatory of Music, one of China's top institutions for music education, now works for Beijing Huadong Musical Instrument Co., Ltd. The millennial considers violin making an



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1. In his studio, Liu Zunfei cuts wood for a new violin. During the 4th China International Violin & Bow Making Competition in 2019, the violins that took Liu and his coworkers more than seven months to make stood out. Of all 437 violins made by 200-plus contestants from all over the world, two of the four violins submitted by Liu and his coworkers entered the Top 50 list.
2. A six-year-old boy learns to play the violin in the exhibition hall of Beijing Huadong Musical Instrument Co., Ltd. At present, music educators from renowned Chinese institutions of higher education including the Central Conservatory of Music, China Conservatory of Music, Minzu University of China, and Tianjin Conservatory of Music have been invited to lecture in the town.



art that should focus more on quality than quantity. It usually takes more than 60 days to make a decent violin.


“Nowadays, violin making is more environmentally-friendly,” says Liu. His company uses plant extracts and Chinese medicinal herbs such as shellac, jasmine, and lavender in its alcohol-based and oil-based paints to stay benzene-free. This enabled them to eliminate the chemical paint that was previously used on the surface. “The process takes a bit longer, but paints made of natural plants aren’t

harmful to either the environment or the violin makers.”

In addition to actively carrying out international and domestic music exchange activities, the violin cultural industry in Donggaocun has been expanding in recent years from violin production to a wider array of musical sectors including education and training, performance, and offering violin making experiences. The traditional violin making industry in the town has been quick to integrate with tourism, performance, and leisure, among

other cultural industries.

All elementary schools in Donggaocun feature a dedicated violin room stocked with donated violins. The town has invited more than 50 music educators and artistic consultants from renowned Chinese institutions of higher education to lecture.

“Thirty years ago, many in Donggaocun could make violins but few could play the instrument,” Liu says. “Today, many local children can play quite well. We are fully confident in our future.” 



On Site: Interview with Contemporary Artists published by SDX Joint Publishing Company in June 2020.

On Site: Interview with Contemporary Artists

Edited by Qiao Zhenqi

Humans have explored the connotations of art for many years, and they have found relatively satisfying answers. However, today, the question “What is art?” no longer has a clear answer. In fact, it captures the truth that people are not quite clear about what is really happening in this era or why things have become like this.

This book compiles interviews with 27 world-class artists with a broad vision of art history, including British painter David Hockney, Japanese artist and musician Yoko Ono, Japanese photographer Daido Moriyama, Chinese artists Xu Bing, Cai Guoqiang, Zeng Fanzhi, Sui Jianguo, and Zhang Xiaogang, Colombian painter and sculptor Fernando Botero, British sculptor Antony Gormley, and others.

The book captures some of the deepest reflections on art by renowned contemporary

artists to complement 120 pictures collected by art institutions, museums, and artist studios.

Author Zeng Yan joined *Sanlian Life Week* in 2003. After consecutively working as a cultural reporter, managing editor, and senior managing editor, Zeng now serves as deputy editor-in-chief of the magazine.

Zeng Yan: Do you have a clear answer as to what contemporary art is?

Xu Bing: Even now, I don't know. In fact, I think that the characteristics of contemporary art and its accompanying connotations are as

unclear and uncertain as they have ever been. Contemporary art is like the fast-changing world. Most people do not have the preparation, experience or appropriate thinking to see the world clearly, and the same goes for art.

But we all have our own judgment. One judgment is that art supplements the deficiencies of human beings in promoting the development of civilization through rationality, logic, and critical thinking. Therefore, artists should seek to create beyond existing concepts and knowledge and produce the unprecedented.



Book from the Sky, 1999, exhibited in New York. courtesy of Xu Bing Studio



Phoenix, 2015, exhibited in Venice Biennale. courtesy of Xu Bing Studio

Artists propose something through creation and inspire philosophers and critics to analyze and sort clues in the context of their work. They raise questions like “Why was it created?” and “What is the connection between the work and the real world?”

This is how a new concept is created to complement and enrich human civilization. This is my requirement for my own art, and many of my recent works such as

Art for the People and *The Story Behind* reflect this very idea.

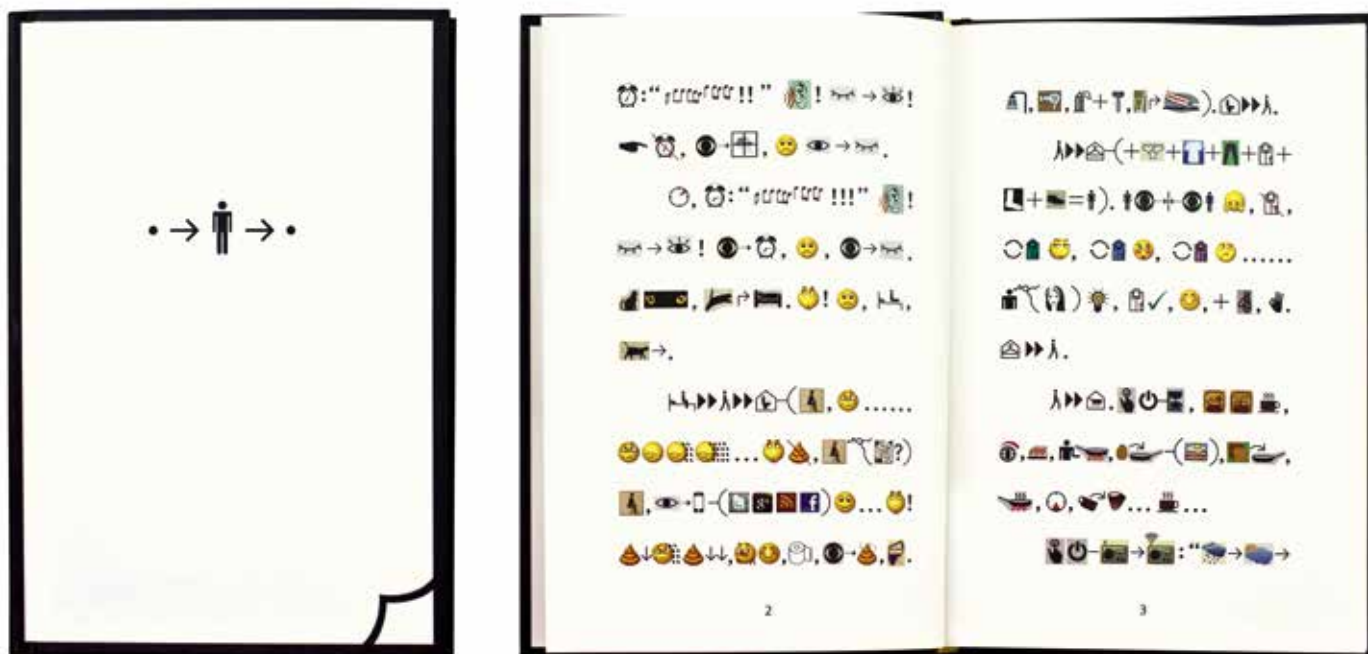
Zeng Yan: Do you think producing new concepts is the most important mission of art?

Xu Bing: It is important to me. However, the types and purposes of art are different. Some people paint realistic portraits, which is also purposeful and meaningful—nothing is wrong with that.

Zeng Yan: How do you think about the

future of art, considering you mentioned the current art system is outdated?

Xu Bing: In this era, art has undergone unprecedented changes and evolved to a new stage. Humans have explored the connotations of art for many years, and they have found relatively satisfying answers. However, today, the question “What is art?” no longer has a clear answer. In fact, it captures the truth that people are not quite clear about what is really happening in this



Book from the Earth, 2012, exhibited in its Shanghai version. Xu Bing made this book that anyone speaking any language can understand by collecting emojis and signs from various fields around the world.

era or why things have become like this.


In my opinion, art is a traditional and classical system. No matter how contemporary and futuristic the creations we make, they will transform into very old expressions once they enter this system.

To put it simply, we have built a lot of “open spaces” in museums and placed so-called “art collections” from all over the world in such spaces to be exhibited, and then people from all over the world come to see them.

I think this system or method itself is classical rather than futuristic. Futuristic concepts are divergent while museum spaces are limited and centralized, making it difficult to predict the future of art.

Xu Bing, born in 1955, is widely recognized as one of the leading conceptual artists of language and semiotics in contemporary China. He created a series of works fusing Chinese characters and English letters.

His most famous work, *Tianshu*, also known

as *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991), earned him international acclaim in the 1980s. His works have been exhibited in many famous art institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, and he has participated in many important international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale. 

The text is an excerpt from the book *On Site: Interview with Contemporary Artists*.

Art Innovates Life in the Digital Era

Text by Gao Peng

Change is inevitable as science and technology create new methods to display and distribute art.



Gao Peng

The author is a researcher with Beijing Normal University and honorary curator of Today Art Museum.

Since the 20th century, abundant technologies du jour have endowed artists with a wealth of inspiration and creativity. The proliferation of digital language, a wider spread of information, and new media art have fundamentally changed traditional lifestyles as well as the ways to consume art. Driven by science and technology, methods of displaying and distributing art

have been constantly changing.

Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, has never attracted much international attention. However, by digitalizing its art museums, the little-known city earned a solid reputation globally. Before the turn of the 21st century, when the internet was yet to become popular, Ljubljana was already working to digitalize its local museums through the program “Ljubljana:

Open-Air Museum.”

The “Open-Air Museum” project in Ljubljana was launched in 1993 and went online in 1996. In contrast with many other virtual art galleries, the Ljubljana project focused on the whole picture of art museums across the city rather than any single art gallery. The exhibition “Napoleon Says: Illyria Arise!” presented by the City Museum of Ljubljana in 2009 provided one

Part of the Permanent Collection of Period Furniture (1937-2000). The collection was set up in 1937 as the founding collection of the Ljubljana City Museum, which was digitalized through the program “Ljubljana: Open-Air Museum.”



Launched on February 1, 2011, the Google Art Project provides the public with access to high-resolution images of art housed in partner museums, marking the maturity of virtual museums.



example. An ancient Mediterranean region occupied by Illyrian tribes became known as Illyria, and the locale became so mysterious in history that the word was often borrowed for fictional countries in literature. It was even the setting for the Shakespearean play *Twelfth Night*.

As the administrative center of the Illyrian Provinces, Ljubljana preserved a considerable wealth of art, precious manuscripts, and maps from Napoleon's French Empire. The 2009 exhibition "Napoleon Says: Illyria Arise!" which commemorated the 200th anniversary of the Illyrian Provinces highlighted the longing of the people of the Balkans to escape foreign control and provided evidence on the spread of Pan-Slavism. Such an exhibition


breaks down national boundaries and enables important academic materials to serve the cultural development of the whole world.

If Ljubljana is a representative of early digitalization of art galleries, the Google Art Project marked the maturity of virtual museums. Launched on February 1, 2011, the Google Art Project provides an online platform through which the public can access high-resolution images of art housed in partner museums. It now includes many prestigious art museums and galleries from around the world. It presents global users a modern and digital avenue to enjoy art and brings a treasure trove of art to the screens of anyone with an internet connection. The program, which enables works to be viewed at incredibly

high levels of detail, also offers a "Museum View" function to experience the indoor environment through virtual tours of renowned museums. The company's "street view" technology, which serves the program, even captures landscapes near the museums to maximize viewers' experience.

Advances in science and technology have shifted online museums from sharing classic works to creating their own offerings thanks to the increased maturity of communication technologies. Today's online museums transcend brick and mortar to create new exhibitions. In 2015, the Beijing-based Today Art Museum, China's first private museum for contemporary art, launched a Future Gallery project. Future Gallery is a new

conceptual art museum located in the cloud. This project took a giant leap forward in terms of both technology and artistic concepts through 360-degree panorama exhibitions and online display of digitalized art. Everything in the gallery was retooled by artists for the virtual project rather than simply moving physical pieces from offline to online.

As early as 1974, the International Council of Museums defined museums as non-profit, permanent institutions in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. Digitalization makes it easier to "store" physical works on the internet while enabling more people around the world to view works in a larger "space" with more viewing time permitted. However, the blossoming technology surely has much more to offer. Innovation in digitalizing museums around the globe continues unabated around the clock. 

The homepage of Future Gallery, a new conceptual art museum in the cloud launched by the Beijing-based Today Art Museum.



Publishing Possibilities in the Post-Epidemic Era

Text by Zhang Feng

The publishing industry's passive exploration during the epidemic may steer its development in the recovery era.



Zhang Feng

The author is a senior media professional and columnist.

Authors using the mobile internet to promote their works through livestreaming became a common phenomenon in China during the COVID-19 epidemic. Many authors are academics and have teaching posts in schools. In the very beginning, perhaps online courses were a matter of expediency for the need of epidemic prevention and control, but technology creates avenues for sharing knowledge on a larger scale. An online class may involve only dozens of students, but open live broadcasts can draw tens of thousands of viewers.

Another emerging phenomenon is writers selling products via livestream. In contrast with established livestream

sales that amass tens of millions of U.S. dollars, the economic benefits for writers may not be high, but the value of livestream content plays an important role in national education and popularization of knowledge. More importantly, such endeavors establish new connections between writers and readers. Readers can see the author and interact through various online activities to acquire new understanding of his or her works, and the author conversely learns more about readers' needs by receiving feedback.

It should be noted that in contrast to the paid-for-knowledge trend that emerged in China in the past two years, most writers' live broadcasts are free. Offering free content not only

attracts new readers, but also greatly promotes the circulation of knowledge.

E-commerce platforms are gradually gaining a larger share of book sales, which is considered the biggest change in China's publishing industry over the past decade. Online promotional activities have greatly increased sales and driven development of the book industry. But because the prices are kept low, profits reaped by publishers have been dwindling.

At the end of February, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, China's leading comprehensive translation publishing company, launched a Tmall flagship store after more than a year of preparation. That day, so many shoppers visited the site that it



December 2019: Xu Zhiyuan (right), co-founder of Owspace Bookstore, becomes a guest in Weiya's livestreaming studio. During the outbreak of the epidemic, Xu spoke in another livestream in Weiya's studio about protecting independent bookstores. The single broadcast raised more than 700,000 yuan (around US\$98,980). courtesy of Owspace Bookstore



June 1, 2020: Children reading books in Zhongsuge bookstore in Xidan, Beijing. Zhongshuge has been known as the "most beautiful bookstore" and a benchmark for the transformation of physical bookstores in China. by Zhao Jun/VCG



June 5, 2020: Readers are seen at "late night desks" in a Sinan Books store in Shanghai. Through reservations on the internet, Sinan Books started to provide seats and refreshments to create a comfortable space and reading experience for readers as part of the "late night desks" activity. by Liu Ying/Xinhua

temporarily crashed. Foreign literature, social science classics, and other genres popular with Chinese readers sold out in minutes. During the epidemic, sales of *The Hot Zone*, a Western non-fiction title tracking the origin of the Ebola virus, reached 100,000 copies. Using an existing e-commerce platform to build a publishing house's flagship store not only guarantees heavy web traffic, but also helps form the publishing house's brand value. Over the past decade, the prices of books in China have risen significantly, but the paper, printing, and binding have all


improved drastically, and some branded publishing organizations have also emerged. In the post-epidemic era, competition in the publishing industry in terms of brands will be more intense, and it is particularly important that the dominant brands establish their own online flagship stores.

Across the entire publishing industry, physical bookstores may suffer the greatest impact of the epidemic. At the turn of the century, e-commerce started pushing Chinese bookstores into large commercial complexes in metropolises. The large stores

with beautiful decoration drew customers by offering backdrops for taking photos and socializing. They were also ideal places to hold cultural salons. But such new "landscape bookstores" rely on a relatively simple profiting model involving reduced rent in shopping malls, beverage sales, and cultural and creative products. However, during the epidemic, such revenue streams dropped to nearly zero.

During the shutdown, many bookstores launched "self-rescue" activities. In cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu, bookstores promoted "cultural

takeaways" in which they urged customers to buy books, drinks, cultural and creative products and other products online. Although earnings from such online sales were relatively meager, "passive" explorations made during the epidemic could play a greater role in the post-epidemic era.

The good news is that cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu have successively introduced policies to support physical bookstores to endure the epidemic, and the bookstores that survive are expected to embrace higher-quality development. 



Zooming In on COVID-19

Unforgettable Moments in the Global Fight
Against the Pandemic

Edited by Xu Shuyuan



February 16, 2020: Medical workers rush to transfer a COVID-19 patient in severe condition in Jingzhou, Hubei Province. VCG

The spread of the virus respects neither borders nor race. Solidarity and cooperation are the most powerful weapons to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 outbreak caught everyone by surprise by striking over 210 countries and regions this year, affecting more than seven billion people and claiming more than 400,000 lives (as of June 21, 2020).

On June 29, 2020, an online photo exhibition titled “Zooming In on COVID-19: Unforgettable

Moments in the Global Fight Against the Pandemic” was launched in Beijing, China. Scheduled to run for six months, the exhibition is part of a series of international online exchange activities organized by China International Publishing Group amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The online photo exhibition transcends the



June 29, 2020: Chinese and foreign guests jointly unveil the online exhibition “Zooming In on COVID-19: Unforgettable Moments in the Global Fight Against the Pandemic.” by Chen Jian/*China Pictorial*

limits of time and space to show various aspects of how life has been impacted by the pandemic. Photographers around the world have recorded with their cameras the disordered life and unusual moments during the pandemic.

“Photos are fragments of time,” said Chinese photographer Liu Yu. “When these fragments are spliced together, they become a relatively complete picture. In another time, people will recall what happened in Wuhan during this special period. What I endeavored to do is to provide a fragment.”

These photographic masterpieces were gathered from media outlets and photographers based in

“I have seen the glorious side of human nature. In the face of difficulties, people made major sacrifices for the benefit of others. I have seen the courage of humankind. When we encounter danger, we fight together and refuse to yield.”

severely hit countries including China, South Korea, Egypt, France, Italy, Russia, Spain, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and the United States.

“I was honored for the chance to capture the stories of different groups during the COVID-19 outbreak,” said Mexican photogra-

pher Marco Peláez. “The disease caught the world by surprise, but we are slowly learning how to deal with it. This exhibition is part of our drive to deliver global anti-epidemic action with cameras.”

The spread of the virus respects neither borders nor race. Solidarity and cooperation are the most powerful weapons to fight the COVID-19 pandemic that spreads worldwide and causes an enormous



April 2, 2020: Very few tourists are seen in Singapore's popular Merlion Park due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Xinhua



March 31, 2020: A pedestrian walks across Red Square in Moscow, Russia. by Sergei Kuksin



March 10, 2020: Two members of a medical team rest by leaning on each other while waiting for recovered COVID-19 patients to be discharged from the Wuchang temporary treatment center in Wuhan, Hubei Province. by Fei Maohua

threat to life. As Chinese photographer Cao Xu noted, “Few may have the opportunity to stand together with an entire city through thick and thin in their lives.”


These photos shine light on the heavy price paid by humans in the fight against the raging coronavirus. They document heartwarming acts of mutual assistance, monumental courage on the front lines, and the tremendous strength of human society to overcome the pandemic. “When our homes became shelters, looking outside became a gaze into an uncertain future,” said Italian photographer Max Intrisano. “Finding appreciation for so many things we took for granted has been true happiness. Through a camera I can feel the silence of the street and the absence of people—a sort of temporal suspension.”

The images also shed light on some of the most striking expressions of joy, anger, sorrow, and support in difficult times, demonstrating that mankind is a community of common health that

shares weal and woe.

“In this special period, I seek not just a picture with perfect composition of harmonious light and shade,” said Chinese photographer Chen Liming. “Even images may not be able to describe sorrow and strength during the disaster, but I always hope that when I click the shutter, I am preserving a memory of the battle against the pandemic.”

“I have seen the glorious side of human nature,” said *China Pictorial* photographer Duan Wei, recalling his time in Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak in China. “In the face of difficulties, people made major sacrifices for the benefit of others. I have seen the courage of humankind. When we encounter danger, we fight together and refuse to yield.”

No winter lasts forever, and no spring skips its turn. The shadows of the coronavirus will surely disperse one day, but some faces will be remembered, some moments will be treasured, and some questions will be answered. 

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