



For Immediate Release

Inspired by Dunhuang:
Re-creation in Contemporary Chinese Art
December 14, 2013 – June 8, 2014
China Institute Gallery



Yu Hong (b. 1966, Beijing), *Questions for Heaven*, 2010
Acrylic on canvas, 196 7/8 x 236 1/4 inches

New York City – A new exhibition of contemporary art, ***Inspired by Dunhuang: Re-creation in Contemporary Chinese Art***, will be shown at China Institute Gallery from December 14, 2013 – June 8, 2014. On view will be paintings and sculpture by 15 modern and contemporary artists whose work has been inspired by the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Dunhuang. Home to the world’s most magnificent ancient Buddhist cave shrines, the site has had a profound influence on generations of artists beginning with master painter Zhang Daqian. Other artists to be featured in the exhibition include contemporary art luminaries such as Zhang Hongtu, Liu Jude, Liu Dan, and Yu Hong. Most of the work is on view in the U.S. for the first time. A fully illustrated bilingual catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

Dunhuang, the western gateway to China, was founded by monks in the late fourth century. The site boasts more than 800 caves, including the celebrated Mogao Caves, carved into the cliffs, which offer, in the words of Dunhuang Academy director Fan Jinshi, “an unparalleled overview of one thousand years of Chinese painting.” The rich cultural history of Dunhuang is due in part to its location between Mongolia and Tibet on China’s fabled Silk Road. A crucial

hub for East-West trade, it was where, as Fan puts it, “traditions of China and Western countries met, collided and merged.”

“The powerful impact of visiting Dunhuang provokes a vast array of responses,” states Willow Weilan Hai, Director, China Institute Gallery. “I was amazed that every contemporary artist whose work is represented in ***Inspired by Dunhuang: Re-creation in Contemporary Chinese Art*** approached the caves at Dunhuang with a completely different point of view. I think all the artists would agree that their study of ancient Chinese art and culture, standing, in effect, on the shoulders of these enormously talented ancient forbears, can only fortify contemporary Chinese art.”

Highlights

The exhibition opens with work from one of the first modern artists to find inspiration in the cave murals at Dunhuang. Considered one of China’s best-known and most prodigious Chinese artists of the 20th century, Zhang Daqian (1899–1983) studied and copied murals at Dunhuang in the 1940s. His 1944 painting *The Beauty*, depicting a courtly young woman, uses the brightly colored washes that he admired at Dunhuang, with meticulously smooth, scarcely modulated brushstrokes and highly saturated red, blue, and green pigments.

Among the earliest of contemporary artists to travel to Dunhuang in the 1980s, Yuan Yunsheng is famous throughout China for his revival of the mural as a public art form. A rare work of public art at the time it was unveiled in 1979, his mural of nude women, designed for the Beijing Airport Terminal 2, is considered a milestone in Chinese contemporary art, even though it has spent much time under wraps. After visiting Dunhuang, he was inspired to paint bodhisattvas, his work rooted in the belief that inspiration from traditional art and culture ensures the future of Chinese contemporary art.

Zhou Xiaolu wrote 40 poems about Dunhuang after his first visit to the site in 2007. His scroll of poetry in ancient calligraphy stretches over 300 feet and took a year to complete – and was made especially for this exhibition. Adhering to tradition, even his seals are hand-carved.

Lu Mei and Li Quhu are known for their monumental bronze sculpture entitled *Starting Point of the Silk Road*, (2004), made for the Tang West Market cultural area in Xi’an. The winding shape of the sculpture represents cultural exchange and lists the names of 24 cities along the Silk Road. For ***Inspired by Dunhuang: Re-creation in Contemporary Chinese Art***, they have made a smaller version.

Liu Jude’s Dunhuang-inspired drawings for *Jaizi Saves the Deer* won China’s National Book Award for outstanding illustrations from the Press and Publication Administration of the Ministry of Culture in 1989. His cartoon film of the same name won the Indian International Film Festival Award in 1987. Three of his drawings from his award-winning work are included in the exhibition and depict charming figures and animals.

One of China's best-known woman artists, Yu Hong, will place her painting *Questions for Heaven*, 2010, on the ceiling of the gallery, in homage to the murals found on the ceilings of the Dunhuang caves. She has noted that looking up is a forgotten way of viewing artwork. Her work has been included in gallery and museum exhibitions in the U.S., Europe, and Asia.

Inspired by Dunhuang: Re-creation in Contemporary Chinese Art is organized by China Institute Gallery and co-curated by Willow Weilan Hai, Director, China Institute Gallery, and Jerome Silbergeld, the P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Professor of Chinese Art History at Princeton University and Director of Princeton's Tang Center for East Asian Art. The exhibition is part of *The Year of Dunhuang*, a yearlong program at China Institute Gallery celebrating Dunhuang, identified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1987.

Inspired by Dunhuang: Re-creation in Contemporary Chinese Art is made possible, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and by the generous support of the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation, and China Institute Friends of the Gallery.

Special Events

Curator's Lecture

Friday, December 13, 2013, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

\$10 members / \$15 non-members

Willow Weilan Hai, Director of China Institute Gallery, and Jerome Silbergeld, the P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Professor of Chinese Art History at Princeton University and Director of Princeton's Tang Center for East Asian Art, will offer insights into the role of Dunhuang as a source of inspiration for contemporary Chinese artists. Dr. Silbergeld will also give a talk entitled, *Inspiration, Influence, Imagination: The Role of the Past in Chinese Art*.

Symposium

Saturday, December 14, 2013, 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Reception, 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.

\$30 members / \$35 non-members

Renowned scholars will speak on art, history, literature, and religious studies to contextualize this year's Dunhuang exhibitions. Several artists featured in the exhibition will participate on an artist panel, moderated by Jerome Silbergeld, the P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Professor of Chinese Art History at Princeton University and Director of Princeton's Tang Center for East Asian Art.

For more information and registration, please visit:

<http://www.chinainstitute.org/gallery/exhibition-related-programs>, or contact Eva Wen at 212.744.8181 ext. 121 or ewen@chinainstitute.org.

Additional Information

China Institute Gallery is located at 125 East 65th Street (between Park and Lexington Avenues). Gallery hours are daily Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Admission is \$7, \$4 for students and seniors, and free for children under 12. Admission is free on Tuesday and Thursday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Group tours can also be arranged. For more information, the public can call 212-744-8181 x121, email gallery@chinainstitute.org, or visit www.chinainstitute.org/gallery/.

About China Institute

China Institute advances a deeper understanding of China through programs in education, culture, business, and art in the belief that cross-cultural understanding strengthens our global community.

Founded in 1926 by a group of American and Chinese educators, China Institute in America is the oldest bicultural non-profit organization in the U.S. to focus exclusively on China. The organization promotes the appreciation of Chinese heritage and provides the historical context for understanding contemporary China. Programs, activities, courses, and seminars are offered on the visual and performing arts, culture, history, music, philosophy, language, and literature for the general public, children, and teachers, as well as for business.

China Institute Gallery, established in 1966, is distinct among the museums of New York City. It was the first in the United States to showcase Chinese art exclusively on a regular basis. Today, China Institute Gallery is New York's only non-commercial exhibition space solely dedicated to Chinese art and is known for its innovative thematic and scholarly exhibitions, publications, and related art education programs.

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