

Mette Holms tale ved åbningen af Wang Qingsong på KØS, 15. marts 2014:

Thank you for inviting me here today. Christine Buhl Andersen & Tereza de Aruda have already spoken about the exhibition and the artist, Wang Qingsong. I have been specifically asked not to talk about art in China, but the space in which artists express themselves.

王庆松。欢迎来到丹麦。欢迎来到Køge。请原谅我没讲中国话。对不起。

(Wang Qingsong, Welcome to Denmark, welcome to Køge. forgive me for not speaking Chinese)

At this point in history, a special art in China is to find or create a space in which to work and exist – outside the established spaces. Criticise, create, have fun, enjoy – beyond the censors' comprehension, beyond their restrictions, sanctions and punishment.

One such artist is Jia Zhangke: many of his films forbidden or forced underground – but not **The World** (*Shìjiè*), which describes working in this dreary and ridiculous Beijing amusement park with replicas of world monuments like the Eiffel Tower. The censors lauded the film to the skies. They never realised Jia Zhangke's heavy satire and cynicism surrounding the tale about people working at the happy park,

Another is Yue Minjun: he does retrospect exhibitions in the far future; he describes the present from the point of view of 1000 years or more from now, like in a rear-view mirror, and thus criticises the present from a comfortable distance in the future - which seems to go far beyond the censors' comprehension.

In the New China's first 30 years from 1949-79 the Chinese struggled to survive - mentally and physically - Mao Zedong's permanent experimental revolution with China his massive human laboratory, and the masses his guinea pigs.

In 1979 Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping introduced economic reforms which led to the dissolution of peasants' communes and a small, but growing degree of free enterprise, which quickly siphoned over into discreet diversity, curiosity about life, the arts, life's possibilities after some very difficult times.

At that time people started perming their hair, they started wearing colourful clothes, nail polish, they straightened their backs, looked each other in the eye and started to enjoy life – a hitherto unknown luxury for most Chinese.

The joyful 1980es became the backdrop of immense creativity, curiosity and experiments in the arts in China. The educational institutions had reopened after the Cultural Revolutions' devastating years.

The third generation of artists graduated from the arts academies in the mid-eighties. They boarded life and the arts with great inspiration, energy and engagement.

My friend Holger, here, studied at Beijing Arts Academy at the time – and even met Andy Warhol who came to Beijing to find the action, which he didn't find, but his visit is in itself proof of the fertile arts environment at that time ...

Surrealism flourished, Dadaism, pop-art; it was like a huge party with any number of inspiring partners to dance with ...

In February 1989, 25 years ago, the prominent China Art Gallery in Beijing introduced many of the underground artists in the spectacular exhibition called China/Avant-garde. This was the first time that the Chinese avant-garde artists of the eighties were on show in an established gallery, and China's finest at that.

At the opening two of the artists shot a hole through their installation, which was the end of this remarkable exhibition. The two were proving to be a bit too avant-garde, and the exhibition never opened to the Chinese public.

A few months later, Beijing became alive with youthful and optimistic demonstrators demanding an end to corruption and nepotism; they demanded democracy, freedom of expression and more. Millions of people joined the peaceful protest and flooded the streets of Beijing, the greatest challenge ever to China's communist rulers.

The Beijing Spring lasted less than two months and was brutally crushed by The Peoples' Liberation Army.

To this day, China's government refuses to recognise the students' uprising in Beijing in 1989. The crack-down represented a complete reversal of the new and flourishing energy in life, the arts, academia ...

Art wise, the crush of creativity and joie de vivre led to massive disillusion, a sort of self-imposed strait jacket of cynicism, which exposed itself in the so-called "scar-art" and cynical realism, which we have seen in recent years in many exhibitions of modern Chinese art in the major Danish museums.

As the only real freedom that the Chinese government dares grant her people today is material and economic, we see many Chinese artists directing their work towards the West where they have become commercially very successful.

So in order to work and express yourself – artistically or otherwise – in China, as Wang Qingsong does, takes courage and even more so creativity, of course – and resourcefulness. To go about the censors or to challenge them, in ways so subtle that often they won't even realise it.

I hate to say this, but this restrictive environment in which Chinese artists must work if they wish to remain on their own turf and to express themselves in their own environment, seems to foster an extra layer of ingenuity, imagination, irony and often humour – born of necessity, but also greatly contributing to the unique expressions of art we see from China, and which we can enjoy from Wang Qingsong's hand here to day.

Thank you ever so much. I look forward to returning on the 22nd of May to make a more comprehensive talk on China today.