

The Art of Contemporary Chinese Woodcuts

中國當代木版藝術

a portfolio assembled by
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Chen Qi 陳琦

b. 1963, Nanjing, Jiangsu province

Chen Qi entered the NCA in 1982. He began teaching at his alma mater in 1987 and is today the dean of the NCA's Shanmei branch. He also holds positions as senior instructor at the Jiangsu Printmaking Institute and as the deputy secretary-general of the Jiangsu Printmaker's Association.

Chen's produces mostly monochrome prints enhanced by the subtle use of water-soluble ink. As Guang Jun noted, the sobriety of his palette is an indication of artistic purity and his unwillingness to compromise with the demands of buyers and collectors. Consequently, he has been able to fully explore the creation of line, colour and texture - all the integral elements which make up the art of printmaking. His works often depict a singular object at close quarters picking out all its organic qualities and inherent beauty. Objects which he has focused on have been chairs, traditional Chinese tables, Chinese musical instruments, ceramics and the lotus. This is an artistic journey which has produced works that are elegant, tranquil and striking in their simplicity. He has written at length on his unique aesthetic vision in articles like 'Recovering the Lost Quintessence of Tradition - A Ceaseless Search for Self-Perfection' (*Xunkui sheluo de chuantong jingsui: buduan jinxing de zhuo wanshan*), 'The Origins of my Pictorial Style' (*Wo de tushi beijing*), 'Feeling and Creativity' (*Jiqing yu cangzuo*) and 'Imparting the Knowledge of Printmaking' (*Banhua cangzuo jiaoxue*).

He has won many prizes at both the provincial and national exhibitions, this has included a gold medal at the 13th National Print Exhibition in 1996. In 1990, he participated in the Autumn salon in Paris and also won a special prize at the Premio Internazionale Biella Lincione show in Italy. Other works have also been exhibited in far-flung destinations like Geneva, Kuala Lumpur and New Delhi. As a rising young artist, Chen's works have been selected for several exhibitions which promoted the country's youthful talent.



Fang Limin 方利民

b. 1964, Quzhou, Zhejiang province

Fang graduated from the education department of ZAFU (now the CNAFA) in 1989. In the same year he was assigned to work in the Masses Art Centre at Quzhou. In 1996, he returned to the CNAFA for postgraduate study in the printmaking department.

Despite his relative youth, he has already gained considerable recognition for his work. In 1994 itself he won several prizes for his work. *Expressions of West Zhejiang* won a prize in the Tomihari Print Prize in Japan, *Sunrise Sunset* won a first prize at the Zhejiang Provincial Print Exhibition and a bronze medal at a provincial exhibition for youth art, *Days and Years* won the silver medal at the provincial National Day Exhibition.


There is a great sense of the past in his work. For example, *Eternity* is a touching homage to Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao. Created in sepia tones, it shows a montage of the couple through various stages of their lives together superimposed on a background of rolling waves. Fang has also tried to recapture a feeling of Zhejiang past in his work. As a child, he spent two years in a farming village where the industry and purity of the farmers left a lasting impression. He finds that they are now a constant inspiration in his works. Recent works have been an exploration of natural forms like rock formations. To Fang, they represent the farmers who have toiled on the land for time immemorial. The shapes and forms in his work not only resemble the fields but also remind him of the engraved stone tablets that bear silent testimony to China's long history. Fang's works have a heavy coloured background with layers of lighter coloured gouache added on. The overall impression is one of earthiness.

Feng Xumin 馮緒民

b. 1960, Fuxin, Liaoning province

Feng completed both his undergraduate and graduate studies at the printmaking department of ZAFU (now CNAFA). After obtaining his Master's degree in 1994, he remained at the Academy as an instructor. He is presently in charge of the woodblock printing studio and an associate professor in the printmaking department.

He is a versatile printmaker who works with a variety of media. These range from traditional woodblocks, lithographs and copper plates to paper moulds and the silk screen. He has won many prizes at the national competitions. These have included the lithographs, *Spring and Autumn No. 2* and *Epitaph* which won him a bronze medal and an award for excellence at national print exhibitions in 1994 and 1997 respectively. *The Setting Sun*, a woodblock print, which won a silver medal at the 1998 national print exhibition, was also awarded the Tomihari Print Prize in Japan. Feng is also a sculptor. His first solo exhibition, held shortly after finishing his undergraduate studies in 1989, featured both his prints and his sculpture. A similar show followed when he completed his postgraduate studies, this time concentrating on lithographs and drawings. Feng's work has also been selected as being representative of contemporary Chinese printmaking for overseas exhibitions in Japan and the United Kingdom.



Hao Ping 郝平

b. 1952, Kunming, Yunnan province

Hao Ping graduated in Fine Arts from the Yunnan College of Arts in 1980. He continued his training at CAFA graduating from its printmaking department in 1986. He is a Grade 1, National Artist and deputy secretary of the Yunnan branch of the CAA. He is also a member of the CPA and the CAA.

Hao has been entering his works at the national and provincial exhibitions for more than a decade and has won many awards. These have included an award for excellence and two bronze awards at the national level. In 1996, he won the gold medal at the 1996 national print exhibition for *Antique Vase Series - Bronze Mirror*. More recently, another work from the same series, *Kickball*, won him an honourable citation award at the 1999 international print and drawing exhibition in Taipei. The *Antique Vase series* has attracted a lot of critical attention. Hao has used an innovative paper mould technique to recreate the texture of fine woven textile on each print. A large vase forms the central motif within each print, with superimposed images from classical Chinese painting and illustration creating interest and a sense of movement within the work. As the intention has been to give each print a feel of antiquity, the colours used are refined and subtle almost resembling faded pigment. He has also participated extensively in international shows. In 1994, he held a solo exhibition in Germany. His works have been widely collected by major museums in China and abroad.



Huang Qiming 黃啟明

b. 1961, Guilin, Guangxi province

Huang graduated from the printmaking department of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. He is presently an associate professor at the Academy. Guangdong is one of the regions where the traditions of printmaking are particularly strong. The practices of Lu Xun's Modern Woodcut Movement have remained influential and extra-curricular study of printmaking has thrived. As a young student, Huang was an active member of the Huadi Woodcut Study Society. He has been a tireless promoter of his art. Despite his relative youth, he has already been recognized for his contributions. In 1998 he was given an award for being an outstanding youth by the Guangdong Branch of FLAC. In the following year, he was awarded the Lu Xun prize by the CPA for being an outstanding printmaker of the 1980s and 1990s.

He specialises in both woodblock and silk screen prints. His prints from a series on the Silk Route have won him much recognition. *The Song of China* won him an award for excellence at the national art exhibition as well as a gold medal at an international exhibition showcasing world culture in Algeria in 1986. *The Beacon's Way* was awarded a second prize in the Lu Xun Cultural Awards competition organized by the provincial authorities in Guangdong. Works from another series, *Old Houses*, won the silver medal at the 1994 national print exhibition. Huang is also an oil painter whose preferred subject seems to be history painting. His depiction of the *Huangpu Military Academy* was shown at an exhibition commemorating the 130th anniversary of Sun Yat Sen's birth. More recently, Huang has experimented with combining oil painting and silk screen printing in a single mixed media work. This resulted in *Hong Kong: A Miracle*, which was shown at an exhibition in Beijing for works with a historical subject-matter ('Zhongguo Yishu Dazhan: Lishi hua ke zhutixing cangzuo zan') in 1997. He has received much recognition for his ex-libris designs, winning a silver medal at national exhibition in 1998. In 1999, he was invited to submit his designs for a special show organized by Beijing University to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement.



Kang Ning 康寧

b. 1950, Jiangan county, Sichuan province

Kang Ning graduated from SAFA in 1982 and is currently a professor at its printmaking department. Along with other positions of responsibility on the CAA and CPA, he was part of the selection committee for a 1990 national exhibition which showcased the talents of young printmakers and the 1994 National Print Exhibition.

He produces primarily monochrome woodcuts, many of which have been award-winning. These have included *Girl and Goats* which won a silver medal at the national art exhibition in 1989. When commenting about this work, Kang explained why he preferred to work in the black-and-white medium: 'We see black and white as polar opposites. However, when they collide, they produce a dramatic impact exceeding anything which may be seen in the realistic world of colour.' He sees the monochrome woodcut as the purest expression of the language of print as it allows him the freedom to exploit the power in beauty and to explore a world beyond realism. *The Land that Nurtured Me* (published in *Zhongguo banhuaqia xinguo xuan*), is an early work which shows Kang putting his aesthetic beliefs into practice. It is an inspirational work which encapsulates his hopes and celebrates the history and culture of his motherland. His later works have tended to be more abstract. They concentrate on silhouette and form and experiment with the creation of texture through hatched and etched lines. An influential printmaker, Kang's style has been emulated by a number of younger artists.

Kang has also won a bronze medal at the 1990 national print exhibition and another silver medal at the National Tri-tech Exhibition in 1993. Three of his works, *Cactus*, *Perplexed* and *Liaoning Landscapes* were shown in 1995 and 1997 at an international print exhibition in Hawaii.

Li Yanpeng 李彦鹏

b. 1958, Hebei province

Li graduated from the printmaking department of CAFA in 1981. He is a Grade 1 artist at the Hebei Institute of Arts. In addition to being a member of the CAA, Li also holds several positions of responsibility. He sits on the executive council of the CPA and is vice-chairman of the Hebei Artists' Association.

He has won many awards at national exhibitions. These have included silver and bronze medals at the national print exhibition as well as an award for excellence and a bronze medal at the National Tri-technique Exhibition. He was awarded a gold medal at 8th Galaxy Awards (Qunxing jiang) organized by Ministry of Culture. Li's works have also been widely published in publications like *Meishu* and the encyclopaedic compilation, *Zhongguo xiandai meishu quanji*. His works may be found in the collections of Shenzhen Art Gallery, Jiangsu Provincial Museum, Shenzhou Prints Museum as well as museums in America, Japan and Korea.

Known for his realistic depictions of mountain scenes in rural China, Li has a preference for working in the oil-based ink woodcut medium.

Song Yuanwen 宋源文

b. 1933, Liaoning province

Song first studied at the Liaonan Baishan Art School in 1948. He continued his art education in the printmaking department of CAFA in 1956. After his graduation in 1961, he remained with the Academy as an instructor. He was to remain there for 33 years eventually becoming a professor and head of the printmaking department. He is presently executive vice-chairman of the CPA and editor-in-chief of *Zhongguo banhua*.

He has participated in many national and international exhibitions. In 1986, he was awarded the Lund Humphries prize at the British International Biennial at Bradford in the United Kingdom. His works are shown regularly at the national print and art exhibitions. In addition, he has exhibited widely overseas, participating in shows in Japan, America, various parts of Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

As an educationist, Song has strong opinions on problems in the field of printmaking and its future direction. He believes that art has its natural course of development. He has expressed concern that this development may be disrupted when art is being used for political purposes, for in these circumstances, content often triumphs over technique and it is done at the expense of furthering an artist's creative skills. In 1987, when many young artists were caught up with the avant-garde movement and western ideas, he cautioned them not to forget the local traditions but to forge a distinctive style by absorbing the best from East and West. Song also believes that life experience and creative activity are inextricably linked: an artist's work must not merely be a realistic representation, it must also be a reflection of a society's attitudes and beliefs.

Wang Chao 王超

b. 1974, Heze, Shandong province

Wang Chao graduated from the printmaking department of CNAFA in 1998. He is presently a lecturer at the Academy and a researcher at its traditional water-based printing workshop. The delicate lines and subtlety of colour in his works not only resemble the finest examples of illustrative printing from the Ming and Qing periods, but parallels with Japanese *surimono* prints may also be observed. In keeping with the archaistic flavour of his work, he has adopted the studio name Jiulifang (Hall of Nine Ancient Vessels). He works primarily in the woodblock medium and is one of the few professional artists who practise the ancient technique of combining relief design with colour printing. A total of 23 blocks were used in his contribution for the Muban Foundation portfolio.

In 1998, he won the Fukuoka Art Museum prize for *Symbolic Images of the Weather*. Another of his representative works *Reproach to the Lost Years* won a silver medal at the provincial art exhibition and received an award for excellence at the national exhibition in 1999. *Foreign Images* is a representative example of his exquisite handmade books that are threadbound in the traditional manner. These have been widely collected by museums and libraries in the West, including the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Xu Bing 徐冰

b. 1955, Chongqing, Sichuan province

In 1972, when Xu was still in high school, he submitted his life drawings on industrial subject-matter for his first public exhibition. From 1974 to 1977, he was sent to work in a farming village in northern China. Whilst there he made many drawings of agricultural life and oil paintings of the rural scenery. As this body of work was judged to be in conformity with the correct 'Cultural Revolution' mode, he was selected for entry to the May 7th College of Art. The College was essentially CAFA reconstituted with a curriculum which combined manual labour with the teaching of art. Students were initially chosen on the basis of their 'correct' credentials rather than their talent. Although this experiment was a failure, Xu was one of the few success stories to emerge from the programme. In 1978, he began learning the art of woodblock printing from famous masters like Li Hua. Many of Xu's works during this period can now be seen as the beginning of a process in which the artist was formulating his own unique vision. Even as a student his works created a stir and in 1980, a monochrome print, *Girls Threshing Grain* was published in several compilations in China and exhibited at museums in France and the United Kingdom. The following year, the journal *Meishu* published his article entitled, 'I Will Draw the Things which I Like' (*Wo hua wo ziji xihuan de dongxi*). It explained his creative credo and became compulsory reading in the art academies for a time. In 1984, he entered the Masters' programme at CAFA and studied with Wu Biduan. In the same year, a multi-media print, *Still-life with Flowers and Pencils* won him the second prize at an exhibition commemorating the International Youth Year. As a graduate student, Xu began to study relationship between classical drawing and the way in which drawing was taught. This resulted in the book, *Explorations into the Teaching of Drawing* (*Sumiao jiaoxue de yanjiu*). When he graduated from CAFA in 1987, he became a member of its faculty.

By this time, the realism of his earlier work had been superseded by conceptual art which emphasized serial images joined together to form installations. Xu had also become interested in Chinese philosophy and the theoretical aspects of art, and this was to prove instrumental in the conception of his future work. He began concentrating on *Tianshu* (*A Book from the Sky*), the work that was to make him world famous. From conception to installation, the work took a total of three years. Xu spent months carving over 2,000 nonsensical ideographs which he referred to as 'pseudo Chinese characters' (*wei Hanzi*). He made monumental scrolls with basic radicals of Chinese writing on them and then with print and overprints created new character structures. These were then hung up depending on design of the exhibition venue. It was first shown at the infamous 'China Avant-Garde' exhibition at the China National Gallery in 1988. Since then, *Tianshu* has been installed and exhibited all over the world. This is a work that has engendered much discussion on the semantic void created by his invented words, the intention behind Xu Bing's work and its social significance. His subsequent works have been equally controversial. In 1990, when Xu was an honorary fellow with the Department of Art at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, he began creating large installations using prints including parts of the *Book*. Recent works have also challenged the belief of Chinese calligraphy as a moral and cultural activity. In the 1996 work, *Long Picture Scroll Explaining the Brush*, he created characters which once again resembled Chinese characters but when strung out they spelt out in English 'holding the brush'. The following year he used the same character system to create an installation work, *Square Calligraphy*, in which he invited the audience to participate by learning to write his 'square calligraphy'. According to some critics, by the amusing and absurd results obtained from his project, Xu has provocatively addressed the traditional Chinese commitment to spread 'culture' to 'unlettered barbarians' (see Chang Tsong-zung, 'Word Game', *Square Calligraphy*, Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong, 14-28 November 1997). Probably the most famous Chinese printmaker, Xu is presently based in New York. In his own selected bibliography, he lists more than fifty articles about his work written in China, America, Japan, Finland, Spain, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, etc. He has not only held numerous solo exhibitions all over the world but his works are invariably selected for exhibitions showcasing 'new' or 'avant-garde' Chinese art. In 1999, he received the MacArthur Award, known as the 'genius grant' for originality and commitment. In 2001, 'Word Play: Contemporary Art by Xu Bing' was the first exhibition which the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution had ever organized for a living artist.

Zhang Minjie 張敏傑

b. 1959, Tangshan, Hebei province

Zhang graduated from CAFA's printmaking department in 1990. He founded the Masses Art Centre at Qinghuangdao and became its research associate. He not only makes woodblock prints and lithographs but is also an oil painter of note. He is currently head of the College of Visual Arts at CNAFA. Zhang is an executive member of the CPA and a member of the CAA.

Zhang's life has been one which has been touched by adversity. The disastrous Tangshan earthquake in 1976 not only left him severely injured but also took the life of a family member. In 1989, he had another close brush with death when he was on a sketching expedition in the Yunnan highlands. He found that a mud flow had blocked off the usual passage of descent, as a result he had to tramp alone through a solitary plateau and cross a 4,000 metre-high mountain in order to reach safety. Such life and death experiences have formed his artistic philosophy. He has been haunted by the experience of having been buried alive during the earthquake. The desperation to survive and that feeling of emerging from darkness into light have stayed with him. For him, art is also a way out of darkness, he sees the patterns, colours, lines and planes of his work as friends which lead him out of the restrictions of the physical world into a creative dimension which knows no bounds – yet many of his works appear to be an attempt to impose order on that which is spontaneous. This is evident in *Running Crowd No. 2*, a print which won the prestigious Grand Prize at the 5th Osaka Triennial in 1994. It depicts a large crowd dancing at a country festival. Even though the dancers are arranged within geometrical constructs, the feeling is one of perpetual motion and even freedom. His systematic construction of pictorial space is reminiscent of a stage set. This is not surprising because Zhang was sent to the countryside after graduating from middle school and spent time with the Fengnan Cultural Troupe as a painter of backdrops.

He has also won prizes at the national print exhibitions and at several other international shows in Japan and Poland. He has held solo exhibitions of his works in several Japanese cities, Hong Kong and Beijing. As one of the leading young artists in China today, he was awarded a prize for his vigorous promotion of culture by the Hebei provincial government. He has also written articles in influential journals like *Zhongguo banhua* and *Shijie yishu* (*World Art*). These have included an article on 'Feeling and Form' ('Ganjue yu xingcheng') and an account of his experiences at the Osaka Triennial.

Zhang Yuanfan 張遠帆

b. 1952, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province

Zhang graduated from ZAFU (now CNAFA) in 1982. He was then sent by the Ministry of Education to Japan to pursue postgraduate studies in printmaking. He is now a member of the CNAFA faculty and is the head of its printmaking department. He is also a member of the selection panel for several national exhibitions and writes on printmaking for journals like *Xin meishu*, the journal produced by CNAFA.

He works in a variety of media producing traditional monochrome and coloured woodblock prints as well as lithographs and etchings in an abstract style.