



THE ARTS IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY

*Museums and Collectors in Today's Turbulent World:
A dialogue between East and West*

BEIJING, October 9 –11, 2009

CONFERENCE REPORT

INTRODUCTION

In a new departure for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) its annual 'Spencer House' Arts conference was held, not in London, but in Beijing on October 9-11, 2009. The meeting was organised in partnership with the Beijing Culture and Arts Foundation, and with Reignwood Group, which also acted as host to the conference and labelled it 'Global Collecting Forum'.

The conference format also differed from its predecessors. The first day was taken up with ISD's traditional closed meeting, divided into four sessions with keynote speakers and a carefully tailored agenda.

The second day was staged as an 'Open Forum' to which a large number of professionals from the Chinese art world, those engaged with contemporary art had been particularly invited. The morning session was held at the Art Museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, while the afternoon session was in the White Box Gallery located in Beijing's extensive art precinct, 798. Panel presentations were followed by lively question and answer sessions. The panels benefited from the surprise participation of the British sculptor, Antony Gormley, whose one-man show in Beijing had just opened.

ISD brought a group of 30 international experts from the art world, including museum and gallery directors, curators, administrators, collectors, academics and writers to the 'Global Collecting Forum' where they met with a group of prominent figures from the Chinese art world. Together they undertook an in-depth review of global art collecting both in the long term and in the immediate context of the economic crisis. The extraordinary advent of Chinese contemporary art in world markets and precipitate growth of China's contemporary art scene provided a striking backdrop for the debates.

Keynote speakers at the conference gala dinner were Lu Zangshen, Director of Beijing's National Museum of History and Baroness Helena Kennedy, an ISD Trustee.

The conference has led to a number of exciting new initiatives for cooperation between Chinese institutions and their counterparts, and to proposals for deeper ISD engagement in China.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS

East Asia and Europe are the only two of the world's cultural areas where art has traditionally been collected and style had been individually, albeit very differently, valued. The two-day meeting was remarkable for its exceptionally lively and productive discussions, not least because the varied cultural outlook of the participants threw a number of key issues into sharper relief than if considered within a single culture. The European and American participants offered their Chinese colleagues new perspectives on the art world in China – perspectives that should guide the interaction of China's artists, collectors, museums and public authorities. Several of the international participants, highly placed figures in the Western art world, had not previously been to China and felt that this first-hand exposure to China's contemporary art scene had increased their understanding exponentially. All agreed that the conference was a mutual learning process, and the beginning of a valuable dialogue that deserved to be kept alive.

The history of modern art in China is quite different to parallel developments in the West. This was reflected in convoluted and ultimately unsuccessful efforts to arrive at a common definition of contemporary art. But this was no obstacle to discussions about the impact of the economic downturn on the art market and on the quality of artistic output, or about the role of auction houses and galleries in setting market prices. Issues surrounding private and public collecting of contemporary art were also discussed in depth.

Traditionally the most highly valued forms of art were calligraphy and ink painting. These were the province of specialised masters and connoisseurs, and they, in turn, made up an 'enclosed' world with different values from Western art. When oil painting began to make serious inroads in China, first in the 1920s and 1930s but then again in the 1950s, it led to another area of specialisation, one that was classified in a quite different way from the equivalent category of Western painting. Finally, when experimental art in China began to arouse interest, a fourth type of Chinese art entered the market.

In the period beginning around the year 2000, the market in Chinese art changed dramatically, showing a strength that, as the conference demonstrated, persists even in today's ailing world economy. However, this vitality has come at a cost. Several speakers noted that art production in China began to tailor itself to market demand. Several of the European and American participants urged that Chinese artists should focus more on the quality and depth of their work than on immediate sales value.

The conference discussions on public and private collecting also facilitated important cross-cultural communication. Private collecting of modern and contemporary art is a relatively recent phenomenon in China. In Europe and the United States, where it has a long history, it has become one of the most important stimuli to the development of public museums. Speakers offered a catalogue of examples, tracing the origin of New York's great Metropolitan Museum, London's Courtauld Institute and Vienna's Liechtenstein Museum. Individual collectors or a small group with a passion for art almost invariably ally themselves with a museum, and their donations often constitute the core of a museum's collections. This phenomenon has yet to develop in China. Chinese collectors had to understand the significant role that they can play in the development of China's museums. Chinese speakers fully agreed

that this approach to collecting was in its infancy; but also pointed to the fact that unlike Western collectors and museums, the Chinese government does not provide tax incentives. Moreover public funding for the arts is very meagre.

Throughout the two days of intense discussions, there was the realisation that the international art market had a pioneering role in the globalisation of new art and in the development of a global language of art. Can and should contemporary Chinese art seek to maintain its own character and narrative, or should it be fused or absorbed into established narratives of Western art? This was a fundamental challenge that demanded a continuing dialogue.

The principal conclusions to emerge from the discussions were:

CHINA

- China was urged to define a strategy for public funding to enable its museums to acquire contemporary art
- China's legal ban on foundations was an obstacle to philanthropy in the arts and should be lifted
- China's private collectors, both individuals and businesses, should be offered tax incentives to encourage their role as patrons of the arts
- Art education in China should be improved, particularly with respect to the histories of Chinese and Western art; also to the education of art critics.
- The economic crisis by driving down prices for contemporary art, has given China's artists the opportunity to re-evaluate their work and to produce art that is less market-driven

GLOBAL

- Museum directors, curators, members of the international art world need to visit China and acquaint themselves directly with the Chinese art scene.
- Regulation of the art market is both possible and desirable
- Loan exhibitions are an essential tool for the understanding of world cultures and deserve more financial support from public authorities

THE DISCUSSIONS IN DETAIL

SESSION I The Market for Chinese contemporary art: Burst bubble or rising Power on the international Art Market?

CO-CHAIRS: Mrs Wang Yannan Managing Director, China Guardian Auctions
Co Ltd
Sir John Tusa Chairman University of the Arts, London

Contemporary Chinese art has the potential to become a rising power on the international art market – but only if the artists put quality before price and search for true cultural identity. This was a recurring theme during the exchanges in this session. There was also much concern over the lack of expertise in Chinese contemporary art among China's growing number of collectors and also over the shortcomings of public funding for the arts.

In the West the interest in Chinese art remained genuine, but was often immature.. But now that the novelty had worn off collectors were becoming much more discerning. **Volker Diehl** who has a prominent gallery in Berlin, and more recently opened one in Moscow, said that far from a burst bubble there was a steadily growing market for Chinese contemporary art. Prices had held up during the economic crisis – mainly thanks to Chinese buyers. But the volume of sales in Western markets had fallen drastically. Inevitably there was a great deal of mediocrity, but there was also an impressive array of creativity among Chinese artists. **Jonathan Watkins**, artistic director of the UK's Ikon Gallery was even more emphatic that Chinese artists, if they are to sustain interest in their work must stay true to their cultural values rather than be seduced by market values in the West .Other gallery owners who spoke reinforced the view that solo exhibitions would serve Chinese artists better than the group exhibitions which had become customary in the West

Chinese collectors had been much slower than Western buyers to become interested in Chinese contemporary art. The change came in the late 1990's when more and more Chinese returned from overseas studies and began to buy Chinese artists whose work they had seen abroad. **Chen Dongshen**, chairman of China's leading auction house described his company's extensive efforts, to stimulate interest in China's contemporary artists and to encourage and promote the work of young artists.

With the advent of great wealth, collecting in China was becoming fashionable. But much of it lacked direction and expertise and was untutored. Prof **Zhao Li** said that this explained why the new rich were turning more to traditional art than to contemporary art. Auction house records showed that over 80 percent of their sales were still in traditional art. There was a lack of public funding for purchases of contemporary art. Museums seeking to build up collections of new art faced enormous difficulties and depended on the generosity of the artists and of private donors. There was an urgent need for a strategic concept to foster contemporary art in China.

Chinese art is classified into traditional, oil painting and contemporary art. Chinese speakers referred to this classification in this and in subsequent sessions. It reflected the fundamental difference between China's prevalent view of art as work that is subject to periodic style change, and the West's interpretation of artistic evolution and progress built on the edifice of the Enlightenment. Several participants suggested that China's contemporary art should not be hamstrung by irrelevant boundaries, and that for example calligraphy should be seen as a method open to contemporary artists rather than being labelled as a style of old art. They was no justification for judging Chinese *avant garde* art painted in traditional style as traditional art rather than as an expression of contemporary times. However the problem may also lie in the translation of the terms.

SESSION II *Art Markets in Europe, US and Russia: The impact of Economic Recession*

CO-CHAIRS: *Sir John Tusa*

***Guo Jianchao* Chairman Beijing Culture and Art Foundation**

Participants focused on the market forces at play in determining the long-term valuation of contemporary art. Recessions provided a useful test to identify those among living artists who were considered to be a safe investment. Participants also questioned why the art market remained unregulated when almost every other market was subject to regulation.

As a general rule great art was less affected by economic recession than contemporary art, said **Daniella Luxembourg**, a prominent European art dealer. Recessions hardly attacked established art: Collectors who bought at the height of the market rarely sold during a recession, either because they recognised they had made a mistake or quite simply because they were attached to the work. Art should never be seen as an industry. But contemporary art tended to be a fashion, and in bad times owners unloaded rather than waited for better times. Prices rarely recovered and some segments of the art world might disappear altogether. When bubbles collapsed, investors turned to the safe works and art in the margins lost out. The segment of the art market – mainly contemporary art - that was most manipulated also suffered most. There was a case for regulating art markets to prevent manipulation.

Auction houses were not the best indicators of market value. **Frances Morris** head of Collections (International Art) at London's Tate Modern museum was amongst several speakers who stressed that dealers and galleries together with private collectors often played a more important role in determining value. **Gary Tinterow**, speaking from the vantage point of New York's Metropolitan Museum, was equally emphatic that auction houses were no better in assessing values than the rest of the art market. However he cautioned against the desire to attach 'eternal cultural' values, as distinct to price, to works of art. The cultural context changed and there was no safe way of predicting long-term value.

Ms Morris conceded that in China the internal art market was less developed and that for now, the auction houses remained the key to art values. But she implied that this was bound to change as the market gained in sophistication. Museums tended on the whole to hold off buying new art until they were certain of an artist's value. However there was a strong argument for museums to turn much more to galleries and artists' studios rather than relying on auctions for their acquisitions. She praised galleries and dealers for their often life-long commitment to artists – a virtue that auction houses did not possess. The Tate had set up a committee of China experts who had found impressive new art that had never shown up in the auction houses. Museums she noted had greatly benefited from the recession, because they had been able to buy more cheaply. To the evident envy of Chinese participants, she explained that Tate Modern derived 40 per cent of its income from government funding, and that the rest came from a mix of corporate private funding, commercial enterprises and admission charges.

The Russian market for contemporary art remained very small, explained **Aidan Salakhova**, founder of one of Moscow's few contemporary art galleries. Contemporary Russian art only accounted for about 2% of art sales in Russia. Her gallery opened in 1992. It was one of only about 30 contemporary art galleries in Russia. When they started up only a few foreign buyers entered the market. In the late 90's Russian collectors did not buy a single work of Russian contemporary art. Even now there were probably no more than 500 Russians in the market, and that included galleries as well as private collectors. Prices had not suffered much from the recession, because the market was so small and because those who bought were building up collections.

Chinese speakers, including **Prof Xu Bing**, Vice-President of CAFA reinforced the concern already expressed during the first working session, that wealthy Chinese individuals, eager to collect contemporary art lacked direction and understanding and were easily exploited by fakers. There were not enough galleries qualified to give informed advice. This led buyers to turn to auction houses and follow the herd instinct. The auction houses themselves were inexperienced in contemporary art and had no clear sense of what might survive the test of time.

But of course China was not alone in experiencing difficulty in assessing the long-term value of art and there was general agreement that understanding of art had to be improved through education. Art historians had a great responsibility to communicate with the general public. The role of the informed art critic also had to be strengthened.

SESSION III *China's Museums and Art Institutions: Engaging with the global art world*

**CO-CHAIRS: *Baroness Kennedy*, Trustee Institute for Strategic Dialogue
Prof Wang Huansheng Director, Museum of Central Academy of
Fine Arts**

Museums are an expression of cultural identity. Exhibitions are a tool for understanding the world's cultures. But nations had to be sensitive to the risk of shallowness and generalisation. Where China was concerned it was essential to demonstrate the cultural differences evident in different regions of country. These conclusions came out of the exchanges during this working session.

Great public museums everywhere had to ask themselves whether they should provide a showcase for contemporary art. The challenge was particularly acute in China where there was so far only one museum dedicated to international art, let alone to contemporary art.. By way of contrast New York's Guggenheim Museum provided an example of a new-found determination to be all-inclusive in its displays of world art. **WANG LIMEI**, director of the World Art Museum at Millenium Monument said that China had more than 2000 museums scattered through its vast territory. Yet her young museum was the only one that regularly organised exhibitions of Western art. This meant that few Chinese have contact with non-Chinese art and explained why so little Western art was being bought. Determined to open windows to other cultures, the World Art Museum was collaborating with 14 foreign museums. The aim was to educate the public in depth and in width. Wang Lemei was proud that its exhibitions had already included such themes as: 'Mirroring the Age- the Italian Art of the Renaissance' (2006) and 'Qin-Han and Roman civilisations'(2009) The response from the public was enthusiastic and the exhibitions were well visited. However so far at least collectors had not been tempted to donate art to the museum. There was no tradition of donating art to museums.

During most of its existence, the Guggenheim Museum had based its collections and exhibitions on European and US art. **Dr Alexandra Munroe**, senior curator of Asian Art at the museum said that it was only in 2005 that the Guggenheim had committed itself to include Asian art in its collections. It recognised that it was inexcusable to present the Guggenheim as a world museum dedicated to contemporary art without adding Asian art. Her department now had responsibility for integrating Asian art as part of a vital international discourse. One of its guidelines was to ensure that its work on Asian art must be relevant to Asians as well as to Americans. The Museum had set up an Asian Council which included Asian members. S

London's Royal Academy is one of the world's premier venues for international exhibitions. But its director **Charles Saumarez-Smith** said that China was largely absent from the calendar of international loan exhibitions. The mechanisms were not in place and China, unlike Japan, appeared to be reluctant to provide public funding for such projections of Chinese culture. One exception had been the 'blockbuster' exhibition of Chinese warriors that had been brought to the British Museum. But that was a one-off event, and a more consistent policy on loan exhibitions had to be formulated.

The concept of private museums where collectors exhibited their acquisitions had not yet taken root in China. **Mr Guo Jie**, Executive Director of the Reignwood Group stressed that this was not for lack of interest but for lack of expertise and lack of official support. Businesses such as Reignwood accepted that they had a corporate responsibility to support cultural activity. His company also recognised that patronage of the arts was good for its public image, and its board had decided to treat investment in the arts as an integral part of its activities. But the company had learned that it could not do this on its own. Business sponsors had to take the initiative to work with museums and even with arts institutions abroad. Reignwood had already secured an agreement to consult with Beijing's National Museum. The decision to sponsor the Global Arts Forum was a further step in the quest for collaborative endeavour to promote Chinese business patronage of the arts. It was also important for the Chinese government to offer the kind of tax incentives that were available to collectors in other parts of the world.

Several participants argued that arts education in China had to be improved as part of public and private efforts to promote the arts and the country's cultural identity. The art historian **Prof Martin Kemp** believed that Oxford University offered a good example of what can be done. Oxford's art history department worked closely with up to 30 curators in charge of Oxford University's arts collections, and students were able to consult with these curators as part of their studies. This might provide a model for collaboration between Beijing University and the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA)

SESSION IV *Furthering the Interchange of Culture*

CO-CHAIRS: *Prof Gao Minglu, Harvard University*
Baroness Kennedy

Art speaks across boundaries. Museums, collectors and artists form a virtuous circle which could be strengthened through new types of dynamic alliances and collaborations to promote understanding of, and interchange between the world's dominant cultures. The discussions during this session illustrated the view that art had a unique ability to develop a language of global understanding.

The US Asia society has a well-regarded Museum of Asian Art in New York. **Dr Melissa Chiu**, director of the Museum insisted that China in its engagement with the outside world had to project a rounded image of its cultural identity. Her Museum had staged exhibitions of Chinese traditional art, but had also during the last decade developed cooperative ventures with other Asian museums to exhibit contemporary art. Museums had a responsibility to demonstrate historical context as part of the continuity of cultural development. Cooperation between museums in Asia was growing, and she hoped that this would lead to long-term loans of art works between museums. Dr Chiu was a passionate believer in the creation of 'world museums' and argued that the concept of 'national' museums was outdated.

JAY LEVENSON, Director of the International Program of New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) described the alternatives to major loan exhibitions that he had developed to maintain relationships with foreign museums. When the Program was founded in 1952 the idea had been to share MoMA's collections with museums in other countries. But by the mid-1990's it had become clear that the costs had become too high except for a small number of well-funded museums, most of them in the UK and Western Europe. Soaring

insurance and transport were crippling such ventures elsewhere. MoMA was forced to make drastic cuts in its overseas program of sending loan exhibitions to museums in other parts of the world. It had to find other ways of promoting the interchange of culture without necessarily relying on exhibitions. One solution was to organise exchange schemes under which curators from countries, principally Latin America, Asia and Central and Eastern Europe, were invited to New York and in return curators from MoMA visited these countries. Other ways of intensifying international cultural discourse included a series of documentary publications that focused on these regions, and improved use of the internet.

China and the Middle East nations were pursuing very different paths in their initiatives to interact with other world cultures. To some extent this was due to the fact that China was far richer and older in its cultural heritage than modern Middle East states and was able to project its cultural identity in a far-reaching historical context, already well-known to the outside world. The Middle East's interest in the international art scene was comparatively recent and has manifested itself mainly in the couple of decades since oil had created great wealth in the Gulf States. Many of the Middle East's new rich had come to regard collecting as a status symbol. **Anna Somers-Cocks**, publisher of the Art Newspaper described the motives that led Abu Dhabi to establish branches of the Louvre, and the Guggenheim on its soil. The vision behind this policy was more to establish Abu Dhabi as a center for cultural tourism than to familiarize its citizens with world culture. In line with this, Abu Dhabi had organized (November 2009) a major Art Fair with no expense spared to attract visitors – especially art buyers – to Abu Dhabi. It was however also making a major effort to promote Middle East artists. **Derek Gillman**, Director of the Barnes Foundation commented that Abu Dhabi appeared to represent an attempt to use contemporary art to create the idea of universal culture. But in his view this was a misuse of the concept of globalisation in the arts: mutual understanding would best be served by using contemporary art as a means of explaining and showing the nature of different cultures.

DAY II OPEN FORUM

MORNING SESSION: *Public Collecting - Its present and its future*

CHAIRMAN: *David Barrie* former director of (UK) Art Fund

Pan Gonkai President of the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), welcoming the Forum to his museum, said that with China's increasing wealth, the country's art market was developing into an integral part of the Chinese economy. He was followed by **Prof Martin Kemp**, who summarized the previous day's discussions for the benefit of the invited guests who had not been at the 'Closed Conference'. The exchanges had illustrated that the arts crossed boundaries and were about fundamental human values. Yet China and Europe (and more recently US), each with a long tradition of art collecting, had fundamental differences in their interpretation of artistic progress. The same terms were used; but the meaning could often be very different.

Giving his interpretation of the discussions he enumerated many of the commonalities between Chinese and Western culture. Both cultures had a long-established sense of 'style' as a category for appreciating art. Both cultures, almost alone among world cultures, had developed long-standing literatures on connoisseurship and art history. Both had defined different modes of art, placing them in hierarchies and both had value systems for old art that were tolerably stable. However when it came to contemporary art their value systems, especially China's were far less stable than the West's. This was reflected in their chronically unstable markets for new art. Yet at the same time there were fundamental differences in the continuities and discontinuities in the recent histories of Chinese and Western art that had led to very different uses of key categories.. There was a fundamental difference between Western notions of continuous artistic progress and the Chinese approach with historic notions of style change. In the West museums and education had played a central role in defining both historic and modern canons of art. In China they were, at least for now, playing a more limited role in determining the values attached to new art. The art market and auction houses had a more important role in determining contemporary art values in China. Art criticism was also far less influential in China than it was in Europe and the US.

The marketing of contemporary art also reflected cultural differences between China and West. The Western market had rapidly seized on Chinese contemporary art as soon as it proved itself to be lucrative. Chinese buyers on the other hand had shown little interest in acquiring non-Chinese contemporary art. In the West, artists, dealers, collectors, critics, museums and the viewer all came together to determine short and long-term values of contemporary art. In China such a complex symbiosis had not yet developed.

Prof Wang Huangsheng, director of CAFA, illustrated why China's museums could only play a minor role on China's contemporary art scene. Referring to points made at the Closed Conference, he stressed how museums such as his were handicapped by shortage of funding and by the failure, so far, to define a long-term strategy for the purchase of new art. Public funding was wholly inadequate, and private donations to museum few and far between. This was echoed by subsequent Chinese speakers who all argued that private collecting was handicapped by the absence of tax incentives. The Chinese authorities had to be more constructive and more generous in their encouragement of the arts

Public funding had little to do with the formation of some of the world's great museums. Several speakers illustrated the importance of links between the private collector and the

establishment of major museums by citing the history of several Western museums.. In almost every case the private passion of one collector or of a small group of collectors had been at the origin of the great Western collections. **Derek Gillman**, director of the Barnes Foundation explained how Albert Barnes, a physician,, had developed a passion for Impressionists, post-Impressionists and early modernists and especially for Renoir. By 1922 his collection was so large that he had bought a large property next to his house in the suburbs of Philadelphia and built a new residence with a gallery attached. He continued to buy art and a few years later retired from his pharmaceutical business to devote himself to collecting. Barnes had made it his aim to show young US artists what was happening on the European art scene. It was also important to understand that Dr Barnes was always well informed about the art market and its major dealers.

The Courtauld Institute in London was an example of a small group of businessmen who had the vision to create a teaching museum – an institution where the collections of its founders would be used to give art students access to art works and to maintain a forum for discussing different approaches to art. The Courtauld's Director, **Dr Deborah Swallow** explained how, thanks to the vision of the original benefactors, it had become an independent college within London University. It now combined degree courses in art history with a large collection of art housed in its galleries at Somerset House in London which are also open to the public. Nowadays the Institute depended for one third of its income on public funding; one third on private gifts and the rest came from admission charges and student fees.

Vienna's Liechtenstein Museum offered yet another version of private philanthropy leading to the establishment of a public museum. **Dr Johannes Kraeftner**, director of the museum spoke of the remarkable record of the Liechtenstein family who had continuously supported the build-up of a collection that began in the 17th century. Every successive Prince of Liechtenstein had made generous funds available to improve the collection, Since 1805 the collection has been on public view in Vienna. The museum did not have a policy of buying contemporary art, and its purchases nowadays were directed towards completing aspects of its existing collections. The museum bought through dealers, auctions and from private sources, and took pride in periodic exhibitions abroad of the best of its collection.

Anyone familiar with the behemoth of New York's Metropolitan Museum could be surprised to learn that it owed its origins to a private corporation set up by a group of wealthy New Yorkers. Its mission was to build art collections 'for the benefit of the people'. Less than 10 per cent of its funds came from public sources, and the museum had always depended on donations in money and in kind. **Gary Tinterow** explained that the Met had aimed from the outset to become a world museum. Asian art had long been part of its remit. The Met had always had a policy of acquiring modern art. After MOMA was founded in 1929, the Met had an arrangement to buy some of its older modern art. That agreement lapsed. Now most of the Met's contemporary art came by way of donations from private collectors. But the Met had also set aside funds to buy modern art. But there were important policy issues that a great museum had to consider: Was it its role to support living artists? Was the museum buying contemporary art to attract museum visitors? Was the prime purpose to create a representative collection of an era or to collect masterpieces? A museum would not be wholly comfortable with any of these options. The private buyer was probably better at judging modern art and more comfortable with risk-taking. Museums might find it preferable to wait until the market had given a considered verdict on contemporary artists.

Philanthropy did not have to be left to the seriously rich. Britain's Art Fund was an example of how art could also be supported with small donations. **David Barrie**, former director of

the Art Fund described how it had raised substantial sums from small private 'membership fees' and small scale donations. With the money it had been able to save important paintings, furniture and artifacts for public display and prevented their sale into private hands. This too was an institution founded by a private group concerned to ensure that museums could acquire great art when it came on to the market. The Art Fund however benefited from government tax concessions. Whether the Chinese public was yet ready for a similar institution was open to question. But its time might well come.

During the question and answer session that followed, points made included

- Contemporary art challenges boundaries set by the past
- Arts appreciation had to be embedded in the educational system
- Museums, large and small, required a caucus of very committed people engaged in art collecting or art education, and in fund-raising
- In the West most museums and art institutions had legal status as Trusts. (or Foundations) This status gave them tax advantages and protected their independence. The Chinese government had to be convinced to legalise such institutions in China.
- Given the short history of Chinese contemporary art, the West had been remarkably quick to appreciate its emergence
- Objective norms did not exist to judge contemporary art. Assessment of the work of living artists varied greatly.
- Institutions buying art, whether old or contemporary should always aspire for the best

AFTERNOON SESSION: *Private Collecting and the Art Market – confronting the current adverse economic climate*

CHAIRMAN: *Daniella Luxembourg* Art dealer, London and Geneva

Western art was based almost entirely on a foundation of private commissioning and above all of private collecting. During the morning, speakers had provided plenty of evidence about the evolution of museums, and more came during the afternoon. But during this session, two Chinese collectors showed that the linkage concept – private collecting as part of the chain that led to public museums and greater mass involvement in the arts – might be taking a tentative hold in China. However **Nick Simunovic**, an art dealer with clients in China cautioned that the notion of private collecting for future public display was still in its infancy. The idea of building a museum to house a personal collection or donating it to an existing museum had yet to be grasped seriously.

Daniella Luxembourg as chairman said that art collecting was often triggered by a sudden recognition of the power of art. Once the passion takes over collectors normally wanted their families and friends to enjoy their possessions, and eventually to open it up to the public. The opening of the Chinese art scene to the outside world had become an important steppingstone in the development of a new vocabulary of communication between cultures.

Antony Gormley, a British artist who had won global recognition was a surprise addition to the Open Forum's panel of speakers. An important show of his work had just opened in a near-by gallery. He echoed Daniella Luxembourg's sentiments. The opening of Chinese galleries to foreign artists had to be understood as a critical factor in promoting East-West dialogue. But the main thrust of Antony Gormley's remarks was to argue that everyone

involved in art is part of the process of creating art. There was a vital link between the creative action of making an art work and the creative act of looking at it. The intrinsic value of a work of art had to be confirmed by the emotional response of the viewer. This was an exciting process. Collectors recognized the experience and as they built up their collections they had to be opened to the public and love of art spread like an 'infection.' He had no doubt that private patronage was an important element in the creation of new art.

Zhang Haoming had his moment of revelation when he was invited to the home of the chairman of a French luxury firm, whose brands he had been selling in China. Originally he had been a teacher. But when the Chinese economy was opened to the world, he set up the sales network for the French luxury brand and entered the ranks of China's new rich. Conspicuous consumption was one way of enjoying newfound wealth. But when Mr Zhang came to Paris, and saw how the French businessman had surrounded himself with works of art, he understood that there was more to life than material luxuries. From that moment he had resolved to become a collector. He immersed himself in the Beijing art scene; made friends with many artists; began to buy mainly Chinese but also some foreign contemporary art; enlarged and adapted his home to create spaces for his acquisitions. In the process he came to understand the pleasure and rewards of living with art. He was happy to show his collection to friends and was open to the idea of opening it to the public.

One friend, who was invited to view the collection had been so impressed, and struck as if by lightning, decided that he too had to immerse himself in art. **Sun Yongzeng** said that collecting had been for him a life-changing experience. He had no doubt that private collecting had to lead to public display. As a newcomer to the art scene he also wanted to discover new talent. He was the owner of the White Box Museum where the afternoon meeting of the Open Forum was being held. In answer to a question, Mr Yuxing explained that he had bought the building as a platform for dialogue, as a place of entertainment and as a showcase for young artists. Art had changed every aspect of his life. He wanted others to have the same experience.

Martjin Sanders, a prominent Dutch collector also had a very clear memory of the experience that triggered in him a passion for collecting. Even though his father had been a passionate collector, Martjin only took up collecting when he came across a painting which he immediately knew he simply had to possess. That moment changed his life. His tastes, his travels, his friends changed. For many years, he kept his collection entirely private, likening it to a personal diary. However after he retired from his main business interests, his attitude changed and an exhibition of his collection had now been scheduled for 2012. In reply to a question about the role of ego in a collector's mind, Martjin Saunders suggested that collectors were undoubtedly driven by a desire to keep something for themselves.

Another European panelist, **Volker Diehl** directed the discussion to the quality of Chinese art. Artists should see the economic crisis as an opportunity to reflect on the nature of their work. Too many Chinese artists had tailored their work to the demands of the market and to the calculations of the auction houses. Now was the time for Chinese artists to rediscover true inspiration and artistic worth.

Hella Pick

London, November 2009