

Lecture by Chinese Artist Ying Sheng Yang

21st February 2013

Lord Hope Building Room 104
6.00-7.30PM



Where there is a compression, there will be a resistance

A brief history of Contemporary Chinese Art through an artist's eyes

During the Cultural Revolution, art in China had been used solely as propaganda tools. Instead of creating individual works of art, for almost thirty years, Chinese artists had been producing works that directly reflected the government and Communist Party spirits; whoever thought otherwise would be denounced and sent to a labour camp for reform. Individuality had been compressed to almost nonexistence.

But as China's previous leader Chairman Mao once said, 'where there is compression, there will be a resistance'. After the fall of the Gang of Four at the end of the 70s, the new leader Deng Xiao Ping opened China to the world for the first time since 1949. For the following five years, art in China changed rapidly. Overriding official's guide lines, artists started to show their works in parks or non governmental controlled show spaces, delivering art work directly to the people. The element of Chinese artists wanting to show their own style and the influence of Western art created a unprecedented art movement called the 85 New Arts Wave. By the end of 1980s, there were many different art groups active across the whole of China. In 1989, the seminal show 'China / Avant-Garde' at the National Art Museum and Gallery of China in Beijing, featured 186 artists from across China. This finally helped to push contemporary Chinese Art on to an international stage and art in China changed forever.

Ying Sheng Yang was born in 1961. He was selected for his school Art Group at the age of seven. He went through the Cultural Revolution as a 'Child Painter' and did what he called 'my fair share of spreading Chairman Mao's thoughts'. However, while studying in art college, his view about art changed and he became one of the 186 Avant-Garde' artists. In this lecture he emphasises that real art never dies, no matter how hostile the environment is. In the case of art in China, the hostile environment may have temporarily stopped art from growing, but at the same time it provided artists with a resource that made Chinese contemporary art stand out from the rest of the world.

