INTERVIEW WITH CAI GUO-QIANG: THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ART AND THE POSITION OF THE ARTIST (1996)

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Takeda Masaaki (TM): You have mainly chosen outdoor performance as your mode of artistic expression. For your work at the 1995 Venice Biennale, you recreated the voyages of Marco Polo's time, and you are also particularly known for your performances using gunpowder. You do not create works to be exhibited in museums, nor do you assume that your performances are to be attentively appreciated. So, if I may start with a naive question, do you feel any discomfort with the fact that your performances are distributed as "art"?

Cai Guo-Qiang (CGQ): Not at all. Some people often say that "it doesn't have to be art," but in fact, if you don't start from the position that it is art, it won't be engaging. I am now thinking of doing a project on *wakō* [the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese pirates who raided the coastlines of China and Korea from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century], but it will be boring unless this issue is reexamined from the position of art.

TM: If that's the case, can we say that your performances, which at first glance appear to be independent of each other, maintain a certain consistency from the position of art?

CGQ: Yes. I also call them "projects" rather than "performances," because the latter term only refers to acts.

TM: Could you please explain the consistency that runs through each project, or as you call it, "the position of art"?

CGQ: Personally, I would like to try to see art in a broader framework, rather than denying it, in order to resolve some of my questions regarding art. In spatial terms, I am more interested in exploring the

expanse of the universe than the space of a museum. I am also keen to connect with the past, that is, the time it has taken for the universe to have expanded to this point, rather than the perspective that there is only the present moment. By connecting with the past, we are actually connecting with the future—though that might be a rather abstract way to put it. I value the act of connecting with the past. Various events and people in the past have taught me many things, and given me a source of profound strength as an artist.

TM: In terms of connecting with the past, your projects take on a sense of universality as works of art. Is this stance what you described as the position of art?

CGQ: Yes, I believe it is.

Doi Nobuaki (DN): Isn't the past not only a matter of history (time), but also place (space)? In terms of the project about *wakō* pirates that is being announced here (Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum), there was a *wakō* stronghold in Naoshima, wasn't there?

CGQ: Of course, the past I am referring to is not about knowledge in the narrow sense. Even for the *wakō* project, I start by living on this land, this island, looking for stones to use in the project, and I find out that the stones on this island are still young and brittle. We plan to roll the stones with inscriptions on them down from the top of the mountain, but if we do that, the stones will break. In terms of my work, however, the fact that they will break is actually meaningful. In this way, we can learn more about the nature of this island where pirates lived once upon a time. We have been influenced by nature, whether we are aware of it or not, and by knowing nature, we can connect with the people who lived on this island, just as we can connect with memories of the past that have been etched into nature.

TM: So you value the character of the land, including the time that has been etched into it. One question I have, however, has to do with the possibility that the character of this land may become diluted when the project is introduced in the media. Do you do anything to avoid this—or are you perhaps seeking more to turn this risk to your advantage?

CGQ: Regarding this issue, I would say that there would be no end to it if artists began to think about how to avoid misunderstandings regarding their works. For my own part, I tend to believe that a project is essentially a sort of intrepid venture—and with this venture comes

danger. Also, the work we embark on will eventually become part of history. We are also making history. When we discuss the *wakō* pirates or Marco Polo today, there may be times when we are unable to reach a conclusion. Even so, that doesn't mean that it is meaningless to have discussions about these topics. The same might be said about our concern that the project we have just undertaken will be misunderstood, and in the long run, there is no reason to be pessimistic about it.

I just remembered a story. After Genghis Khan succumbed to illness and was buried on the plains, he had tens of thousands of horses run over his body to cover his tracks, lest his body be taken by the enemy. Doing this, however, would have made it impossible for the people who buried the body to know where they had done so. So they killed a young camel in the same place and had the horses trample it down until no trace remained. Then, after a while, even if the people did not know where they buried the body, they would take the mother camel with them and it would grunt at the place where its child had been killed. The memory of the child's death remains in place. Once the mother camel dies, however, no one will know where this is anymore. So they set up several *pao* (nomadic mobile dwellings), which could move from place to place, and regarded them as Genghis Khan's grave. During the Sino-Japanese War [1894-1895], these *pao* were moved to Qinghai (a province located in western China, closer to Tibet) in order not to be captured by the Japanese army. Even today, Genghis Khan's tomb is nothing but a vacant *pao*. The *pao* remembers his death, however. In the case of art, as I mentioned earlier, there are many ways to express oneself in terms of connecting with the past, and just as different people are interested in different things, my mode of expression does not have to be the same as other people's.

TM: Just as a mother camel senses where her child died, you sense a connection to the past in something, and connect it to your artistic practice.

CGQ: When artists come across a good place, they sense something there. I once went to the Gobi Desert to do a preliminary inspection for a project at the Great Wall of China, and I could sense that it made a good battlefield. When you fight with tens of thousands of people, you still have to choose a place for this, so that both your enemies and allies

can maximize the skills they have honed up until the time of the battle.
TM: While your Great Wall of China project (extending the Great Wall for an instant using gunpowder) was executed for a very short time, you first sense something intuitively, and then conduct a lot of research to formulate the project.
CGQ: At the time, although the Cold War was over and the Berlin Wall had fallen, there was still a sense that the problems that "the Wall" had addressed were not yet over. This year (1995) is the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, and I am working on a project related to the atomic bombing. What I am always concerned about is not so much the issue of the media that was mentioned before, but rather the question of whether or not what I am doing now has a universal meaning that is not superficial. For example, I worry about and explore whether my project has meaning beyond the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing, namely, beyond its status as an event. Over the course of this process, I myself have changed in some respects, while in others I have remained the same.

One thing I have had good fortune with is how I have been given various opportunities to connect my thinking to my artistic practice. By expressing myself artistically, I have had the chance to reconsider something, and take it to the next stage. This development is not linear, however, like a simple theory of evolution.

In recent years, research has begun on anti-universe and anti-matter. When we study the universe from a larger perspective, we recognize the existence of forces that contradict it. In my methodology, I regard unipolar ideas that do not acknowledge contradictions as dangerous. Of course, this does not mean that it would suffice to do things in a balanced manner. First of all, we need to have the courage to admit these contradictions. There are also times when we should resolve the contradictions ourselves, and times when they do not need to be resolved. Sometimes we can leave the resolution to others, to the next generation. Eastern philosophy is characterized by its ability to look at contradictions from a larger perspective: for example, there's the notion that "death is life." Since death is always present even when we are alive, this seemingly contradictory statement takes on some truth if we change our way of looking at the situation. There is no insistence on all contradictions in the world to be resolved immediately.

In this sense, it is a philosophy that holds a synthetic view. While it is only natural that contradictions come into play when we look at things from a macro perspective, we take the long view in terms of time and consider them in a synthetic way.

DN: Looking at your projects, when you criticize something, you keep a certain distance from the object of criticism, and I find that distance gratifying. Or rather, it is this distance that is most thought-provoking to me. Does the thinking behind this sense of distance represent the synthetic view that you just mentioned? In other words, you present contradictions just as they are to other people, or the next generation, and when these contradictions are shared or passed on to the next generation, one starts to move towards a synthetic position.

CGQ: You practice architecture, and when you build something, you must always embrace a certain contradiction with nature. No matter how hard you try to harmonize with it, somewhere along the way you will destroy it. Human beings cannot avoid destroying nature over the course of their lives. If we do not interact with nature, however, nature will become impoverished (from a human standpoint). If we respect nature, create works of art from it, eat its fruits, and pluck its flowers for appreciation, nature will become more and more beautiful. Evolutionary theory holds that nature would have existed in the same way without humans, but this is not true.

TM: In your projects, does the synthetic view emerge over the entire process of executing them?

CGQ: Coming up with a plan, choosing materials, building things and so on are all related. So I try to be careful not to be tied to any particular event over the course of a project.

Takeda Norihito (TN): As a manifestation of your way of life, do you view things synthetically?

CGQ: A synthetic view is a kind of direction or methodology, and I am not sure if I can achieve synthesis successfully in real life. It is fundamentally something to aspire towards.

TM: That is why synthesis is not the same as just putting things together in a haphazard manner. In order to arrive at a synthesis in a positive sense, I think it is essential to make a concerted effort at analysis.

CGQ: Of course. I was talking about the universe earlier, but everyday life, research activities, and the like would not be possible without

analysis. Without analysis, it would be dangerous to use gunpowder in our work. The flames from an explosion and myself would become synthesized (laughs).

I received a Marxist education from elementary school through college, where I was drilled in thorough analysis and dialectics. While it is true that China lags behind the West in terms of high technology and other aspects of modernization, in terms of philosophy and ideology, China is in fact thoroughly Westernized. At least, this is what the leadership wanted, and they put it into practice. In some respects, China is closer to the West than Japan. I was taught everything about Marx, including his birth year, the age at which he fell in love, the age of his wife, and even the year of publication of his books. You don't learn this much about European thinkers in Japanese schools.

TM: You learned all this in world history classes?

CGQ: Starting in elementary school, there is a class on the history of thought, and that's where we learn about all this. It was a form of brainwashing, really (laughs), but that's how I learned the Western way of analysis. I also think the image that many Japanese have of China as Oriental is mistaken.

DN: Eastern and Western motifs often appear side by side in your work. For example, at the Biennale, Chinese herbal medicine was sold in a vending machine, a Western-style machine. If we were to consider that East and West represent two different stances, where would you place yourself?

CGQ: As far as the Biennale project is concerned, Venice happened to be the gateway to the East for the West in the past, and over the last 100 years of the history of the Biennale, it has been one of the most important centers of contemporary art. On the other hand, Marco Polo, a native of Venice, returned from Quanzhou (Cai's hometown), China, exactly 700 years ago. All of these other coincidences gave me confidence for that project. As a Chinese national, when I went from Japan to Venice, I was already representing the Eastern standpoint. As such, I wanted to bring something from the East that was lacking there. And so it occurred to me that what was most lacking in a place overflowing with contemporary art was medicine.

I remember once, in New York, when a friend asked me if there were any good Chinese medicines, I jokingly recommended a drug for

euthanasia. It works well (laughs).
DN: So we should interpret this idea of the "medicine that is lacking in the West" in a broad sense.
CGQ: Exactly.
TN: There are times when Western art moves you, aren't there?
CGQ: Of course there are. But I also feel their position as an artist is different.
TM: I think it is quite clear from what you have said so far, but your Eastern position seems to have been established by also venturing quite a bit to the side of the West.
CGQ: Yes, it has. It is a mistake to view the East as opposed to the West. Even if Asia is going to be united in the future, we should not look at the West as an enemy. If we do so, we will be no different from our ancestors of 50 years ago. On the other hand, it is also not good to say that we should stop talking about the East or the West at all, that it is nationalistic, that we are just going back to the past, or that it is dangerous. We should be clear about our position when we practice our art. If the whole world comes to think only in terms of Western standards, that would be unfortunate for the entire planet, including the West. I would like to clearly assert what I am capable of asserting from the standpoint of an Asian. I don't think one should be ambiguous about it.
TM: Are you opposed to the artist's cosmopolitan position in terms of artistic production?
CGQ: Of course, we must seek out universal values in our work, but when it comes to choosing specific materials and methods, the East and the West each have their own standpoint. Without establishing these, we will not have the power to engage in dialogue with others. Roughly speaking, while we might think strategically about the good of humanity and the universe, in terms of tactics, the East and West each have their own way of doing things.
Abe Taiga (AT): When you refer to these "tactics" of the East, what should we be envisioning?
CGQ: The East is less adept at controlling or regulating specific spaces, in the way that large-scale architecture is composed, for example. However, it has an aptitude for connecting with the land and nature, both before and after buildings are created. Highly developed systems

like feng shui [Chinese geomancy] is an example of that. However, it is not enough just to promote an Eastern methodology, and although Sun Tzu's *Art of War* was adopted in the *wakō* pirate project, Sun Tzu cannot be deployed in the Marco Polo project. It is also important to be able to incorporate Eastern methodologies naturally into a project, and link it to the notion of synthesis.

I am also often questioned about why I use both gunpowder and herbal medicine. Gunpowder (which was used in the Great Wall of China project), even as it alludes to the communication between the universe and humans, also suggests that we ought to know that something is out there—something in the universe that is watching over human activity. On the other hand, there might be another universe inside us humans. For this universe, we work with medicine. In this way, the relationship between human beings and the universe expands. This is how the synthetic strategy works. The seemingly contradictory combination of gunpowder and Chinese herbal medicine creates a synthetic relationship as the project continues. While I may not stick to a single material or method, from a larger perspective, there is a consistent relationship to be found.

TM: You said that strategically you would explore universality, while in terms of tactics you would take an Eastern position…

CGQ: Yes, but that would be a rather extreme way of putting it. It might be easy to understand, but it veers towards analytical theory. For now, let's just analyze and think about it. If it goes wrong, we can rethink it again.

TM: Yes. So, here's my question: do you think that by taking the attitude to artistic production that you just mentioned, these projects can contribute to a kind of mutual understanding between East and West?

CGQ: No. I do not create my works with the intention of contributing to mutual understanding. Although I do pose this question to Western art: is that the only way to do it?

TM: In other words, you do not assume that there will be an understanding.

CGQ: That is also the spirit of the avant-garde in contemporary art. It is a way of questioning the dominant trends, asking whether they are good enough.

TM: From the perspective of current Western art, however, can we find

a dominant trend that the avant-garde should rebel against? Broadly speaking, there is no dogma to criticize, and each individual artist seems to be groping in the dark, in terms of methods of expression and materials.

CGQ: I am not too concerned about this. A project on *wakō* pirates, for example, would not be appropriate if you are seeking international recognition. Ordinary Americans don't know anything about the *wakō*. However, it's not that I don't do things that Westerners don't understand. As long as I have a connection with East Asia, I have to speak out on East Asian issues. If I start out by worrying over whether my work will be understood internationally, what I can do will be limited. If the resulting work is good, people will respond to some part of it, and will want to know more about it. When I did an exhibition in America, I was asked a lot about feng shui.

There are also exhibitions in Asia that bring together Asian artists from various countries, but I wonder if participating in such exhibitions really amounts to making a statement on Asian issues. For me, it is not quite enough. The *wakō* of old are much cooler than the current artists (laughs). They were much more active in East Asia, transcending national borders. Instead of gathering artworks from all over Asia in one city, it would be much more interesting to cross oceans, visiting different cities and causing a big ruckus. Even if the ports were to be blocked, it would still be fun. I can only think of these things now that I am here on Naoshima. And since the organizers are also here, they find my project interesting, are encouraged by it, and are motivated to do it. If I were in Paris or New York, I would be thinking about something else.

On the other hand, my projects are also related to the global situation. Posing questions about the interactions that occur in East Asia through the *wakō* becomes meaningful because the Cold War structure has ended, and the world is being reconstructed. Although this project deals with the past, it may actually be connected to our future.

Going further, when I went to the Biennale, for example, it took me a long time to get a visa because I was a Chinese national residing in Japan. This is something I am used to, however, because I am always regarded with suspicion whenever I go abroad. In other words, you might say that I usually find myself in the position of a stateless person,

like a *wakō*, who slipped through legal barriers.

TM: You spoke a little about the idea of internationalism, but in the recent art scene, many expressions that restate internationalism in various ways have been circulating: transversality, nomadism, inter-something, trans-something, and so on. Even though the words may be new or smack of contemporary thought, when you look at what is actually being done, there is often an emphasis on internationalism. Of course, there are some wonderful exhibitions and projects among them, but as you said earlier, it would be boring if international recognition were to be the ultimate goal of art. So I would just like to confirm what your position on the issue of internationalism is.

CGQ: The *TransCulture* exhibition that I participated in at the Venice Biennale, for instance, was meaningful because it was held in a place where artworks from all over the world are actually gathered. As I mentioned earlier, other themes would be appropriate in other places. However, at any given time, there are limits to understanding art in a way that transcends ethnic and national boundaries. I don't think we should be ambiguous about that.

TM: One of your projects involved using gunpowder flames to rebuild the wall in Berlin after it fell. At the time—when even international affairs seemed more liberal, with no longer any apparent confrontation between East and West—you said something along the lines of "there is still an invisible wall that we cannot see." I sympathize with this attitude. I believe that we can ask questions about internationalism only on the assumption that this "invisible wall" exists. In recent years, however, I have noticed some works of art that try to win our sympathy solely by articulating their ethnic origins, or their own personal problems. It is as if they are trying to say "understand me."

CGQ: This is a big problem. Such works of art have no influence on the viewer. If you only want to talk about your ethnicity or yourself, then it has nothing to do with us, that's all. Of course, I also use ethnic or folkloric forms of artistic expression, as these are the materials I can use most effectively. Sometimes I don't, however, depending on the nature of the project. This is because ethnic or folkloric expression is not my goal.

There used to be a kind of universality in the original Western art that we in the East also see as our own problem. That is why I also

respect Western artists: Andy Warhol, for instance. His works might look very decorative, but they are not. They are deeply concerned with the issues of his time, which are fundamental issues. On the other hand, there are many artists these days who create sculptures with ethnic and traditional designs. Such things are merely decorative.

TM: Art that reminds you of a trinket that you bought at a folk craft shop…

CGQ: Speaking of the contemporary Japanese situation, there is now a debate about modernism. Theoretically speaking, the type of universality that typically appears in modernism is important, but it is also necessary to consider Japanese identity. Japanese identity can refer to different things depending on whether it emerges from a decorative point of view or from the real Japanese cultural situation. In that sense, I always think the work of Miyajima Tatsuo is wonderful.

TM: I think it is fascinating that you position Miyajima Tatsuo as a canonical figure in contemporary Japanese culture. To return to the topic, the bad thing about art that emphasizes ethnicity and individuality is that, as you mentioned earlier, if people say "I don't care about that," that would be the end of the matter. If a particular consideration towards respecting minorities disappeared from the international stage, such works will quickly be exposed as powerless. Modernism is being reevaluated today because of a critical awareness of this situation, and this discussion needs to be clearly distinguished from the easy glorification of internationalism.

CGQ: While it's good to discuss modernism, I don't think we're doing quite enough at the moment. More people need to get involved. If we stop here, it would be a waste of time. I also think it would be a terrible shame if the purpose of the discussion came to center on what kind of work Japanese artists should submit to international exhibitions. Art is there to bring vitality and a brighter future to the region where it is created. People in the art world think only about international exhibitions, but ordinary Japanese people have no interest in contemporary Japanese art. On the other hand, if you bring a work to the Western art world with an obvious intention to be recognized, you will only be laughed at. At the moment, the discussion about modernism is not being conducted with such narrow-mindedness, so I think there is a lot to look forward to.

TM: In a situation where individual artists are so preoccupied with their own identities that it becomes difficult for them to discuss art with each other, I feel that modernism would serve as an effective starting point for debate. The quality of the discussion itself is important, as is the presence or absence of new discoveries, but I think the most important thing is to continue to create a situation where influential discussions about culture can take place. If we continue to have a situation that yields no discussion, the act of violent denial is the one that will be the strongest.

CGQ: Like the Attack on Pearl Harbor? (laughs)

TM: I fear there's unfortunately some truth to that joke (laughs). In any case, what is important is how patiently we can continue the discussion.

TN: I would like to continue our discussion too in some way, rather than ending it here.

CGQ: Please interview me again (laughs).

APPENDIX (FROM A CASUAL CHAT AFTER THE INTERVIEW)

Takeda Norihito (TN): Doi Nobuaki and I assisted you at the Venice Biennale. We felt then that we were able to understand the significance of the project quite clearly only after we had assisted you. On the other hand, there are people who view your works without knowing anything about you. For example, when you had your centuries-old boat plow the canals of Venice, the gondola rowers who saw it said something like "that's a very unusual boat" as they passed by. Their sense of that boat might have been quite different from mine. At the end of the day, do you think a work of art needs to have value independent of the artist?

Cai Guo-Qiang(CGQ): It is a blessing to get to know the artist personally, but the artist dies before the work does. Although, in my case, some of my works have been buried (by curators) before me (laughs). Some works remain after the artist dies, while others disappear along with the artist. It is not necessary to have one or the other. In my case, certainly, getting to know me will change your view of the work considerably.

TN: When I assisted you in Venice, I was dissatisfied with the curation of some of the organizers. I was told that they were selling works to European museums without the permission of the artists. I hear that they deal with Asian artists because they expect a large amount of revenue to come from Asian corporate sponsors, and I believe that this kind of treatment of Asian artists is problematic. What is your opinion on this matter?

CGQ: They are interested in Asian art, and I am happy about that. There are many people who are not. However, the curatorial approach is still

based on the old view of modern Asian artists, and sometimes there are things we have to teach them. There is a misconception that we are eager to show our work in Italy, or that we consider the Biennale as a stepping stone to Europe. But they are good people. They are interested. When Asian artists hold exhibitions in the West, there are often differences of opinion. They have their own positions, but since we have the same goals in mind, there is always a way to solve the problem.

TN: I feel that you enjoy dealing with the messier, more frustrating side of the art world. Rather than being openly hostile, however, I get the sense that you are working your way around to the other side. It is as if the curatorial wrangling is part of your work.

In terms of the process by which you create your works, you do not do it alone: many people who find themselves drawn to you gather, and work together. Naturally, while it is good that the work bears your name, it is also true, however, that it is not the work of you alone.

CGQ: Certainly, even if I don't go somewhere in person, someone who has volunteered to help me will be able to make my work. You guys also helped me in Venice, so you can make it (laughs).

Doi Nobuaki (DN): I noticed when I was working with you that you are always free and unencumbered in terms of how you go about things. You will suddenly find materials for your works while driving around town. On the other hand, some artists (including architects) are obsessed with the same materials and techniques.

CGQ: In terms of forms and materials, it is also important to delve deeply into the same methods and objects, using them over and over again. This is necessary to enhance the sophistication of the work. I happen to have no interest in such things. I always stand by the maxim that "having no method is a method"—in other words, to have the freedom to choose, use, and express things in their natural state (as they are) at any time.

TN: Frankly, how do you like the museum here (Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum, designed by Tadao Ando)?

CGQ: It suits me fine, but I think artists working with two-dimensional formats might have a hard time with it. The space itself changes too much: it rises, falls, lengthens, and so on. The more changes there are, the greater the flow of energy. It is swirling all over the place. A work of

art placed in that environment would be very unstable. Personally, I am interested in various modes of artistic expression, so I can think of ways to make use of these changes in an effective way, but I don't think this museum is suited to hosting solo exhibitions by artists who work purely in two dimensions.

Interviewers: Abe Taiga, Doi Nobuaki, Takeda Masaaki, Takeda Norihito
Photos: Abe Taiga, Kitaoka Tomoko
With the support of the Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum and Art Space Niji

(October 8, 1995, at the Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum)

ABOUT THE 46TH VENICE BIENNALE PROJECT

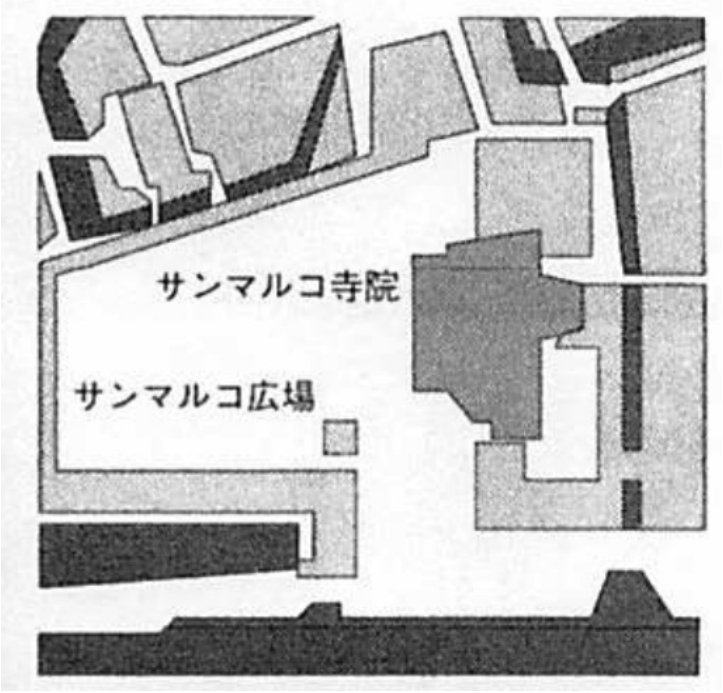
The 46th edition of the Biennale (June 10—October 15, 1995) marks the 100th anniversary of this art festival, held every two years in Venice, the city of water.

On this historic occasion, Jean Clair, Director of the Picasso Museum in Paris and the first non-Italian artistic director in the Biennale's history to lead the entire event, devoted his efforts to staging a large-scale retrospective of the last 100 years of art history, and as a result, the Aperto exhibition of young artists that had been running since 1980 was discontinued. This incident was covered from various angles, and caused quite a sensation.

The works were installed in various locations, including Castelo Park, where the national pavilions are located, various museums, churches, other buildings in the city such as private residences, piazzas, and on the decks of sailing ships, among others. Cai participated in the *TransCulture* exhibition, one of the official exhibitions akin to the Aperto exhibition on a smaller scale, and was awarded the Benesse Prize.

TransCulture
Date: June 11 - September 4, 1995
Venue: Palazzo Giustinian Lolin
Organized by The Japan Foundation, Fukutake Science and Culture Foundation
Curators: Fumio Nanjo, Dana Friis-Hansen
Exhibiting artists: Gordon Bennett, Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, Cai Guo-Qiang, Ping Chong, Simryn Gill, Joseph Grigely, Kohmura Masao, Shani Mootoo, Takashi Murakami, Shirin Neshat, Reamillo and Juliet, Technocrat, Adriana Varejao, World Tea Party, Rene Yung

This Biennale comprises
1. 100th Anniversary Special Exhibition *Identity and Alterity: Figures of the Body 1895/1995*
2. Exhibitions by participating countries
3. *Self and Duality: Italian Portraits 1895-1995*
4. *Venice and the Biennale: Journeys of Taste*
5. Official exhibitions
6. Other related exhibitions



Map of Piazza San Marco

CAI'S PROJECTS AT THE BIENNALE

INITIALLY, CAI PLANNED to stage three projects in Venice: a project on Piazza San Marco, using gunpowder for explosions; a second project that was planned to be part of the Asiana exhibition curated by a Milanese curator; and a third project that was included in the aforementioned TransCulture exhibition, curated by Nanjo Associates from Japan.

1. About the Piazza San Marco project
One side of this L-shaped square faces the sea, and waves lash the shore every time a water bus or gondola passes by. In Venice, where the land is always in danger of subsidence, this square is no exception, having been submerged several times in the past.
Cai planned to revive the memory of the submerged piazza with the flames of gunpowder. Gunpowder was to be placed in strips starting from the shore facing the sea, and as they ignite one by one, a wave of flames would spread throughout the piazza before returning to the sea.

2. About the *Asiana* exhibition project
For the *Asiana* exhibition, Cai planned to install the work not in the pavilion (Palazzo Ca' Vendramin Calergi, which is used as a casino during the winter) that had originally been set aside for it, but rather a campo, a small piazza, facing the Grand Canal that runs nearby.

The work *Pavilion* was to be created with a gondola turned upside down, intended to be both a gateway to the Asiana exhibition and a 'trap' to lure people into the casino. A rope was to be tied to the

The *TransCulture* exhibition venue, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin
(photo taken from the Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia)

pillar supporting the gondola, while the other end of the rope would disappear into the window of a nearby house, thereby extending people's awareness from the work itself to the cityscape that surrounds it.

The two projects above were not realized in the end.

The project for Piazza San Marco was not approved by the City of Venice and the Fire Department, while the Asiana project was canceled by Cai himself because it took a long time for him to obtain a visa from the Italian government due to his complicated position as a "Chinese resident of Japan." By the time he did obtain it, there was almost no time left to produce the Piazza San Marco project.

However, this was also a protest against the curators who did not give Cai enough support in his negotiations with the Italian government, or fully understand and cooperate with Cai's project.

When Cai had no choice but to change his initial plan and to exhibit in the pavilion because he could not obtain permission to use the *campo*, the artist thought of using the stairwell, but Fondazione Mudima revoked the permission to use it, which they had already given to him. Ostensibly, this revocation had been for fire safety reasons, to secure an escape route in the event of a fire. On the day of the opening party, a work by Nam June Paik was exhibited on the landing of the stairwell.

3. On the *TransCulture* exhibition project

Cai gave this project, the only one that was realized, the title *Bringing to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot*. 700 years ago, Marco Polo traveled from Venice to Cai's birthplace of Quanzhou, bringing back many things to Europe. However, he completely neglected to bring with him Oriental culture and thought. In view of this, Cai wanted to deliver what Marco Polo had forgotten by transcending the time and space represented by these 700 years and the distance between Quanzhou and Venice. In this project, a small, one-person Chinese fishing boat was loaded with Chinese herbal medicine as a metaphor for Oriental thought, and made to sail from Quanzhou to Venice.

Other works in the exhibition included a vending machine that sold bottled Chinese medicine as a symbol of the Western system, large plastic bags with printed diagrams of the human body showing the location of acupuncture points, hung in the shape of how the Grand Canal in Venice flows, and needles inserted into 100 of these acupoints.

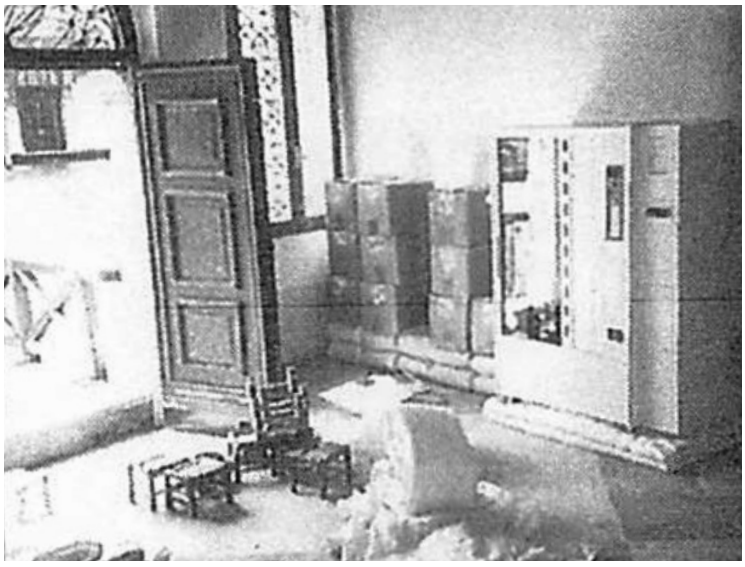
CAI'S MAJOR PROJECTS SINCE THE BIENNALE

AS A COMPLEMENTARY honor to the Benesse Prize that he received at the Biennale, Cai will hold a solo exhibition (duration to be determined) at the Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum run by Benesse Corporation.

After returning from the Biennale, Cai participated in a project related to the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Subsequently, since last September, he has been living and working in New York as Japan's representative to the National and International Studio Artists Program organized by P.S.1. Art Center. Cai continues to present projects in New York related to the atomic bombing, confronting his audience with a variety of issues.

In addition to participating in an exhibition at the Nagoya City Art Museum in Japan at the moment, Cai will also show at *New Art of Japan, Korea, China* at the Museum of Modern Art, Saitama in October this year, October this year, the Hugo Boss Prize Exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in November, and *The Promenade in Asia* at the Shiseido Gallery in Tokyo and a solo exhibition at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark in February the following year. While these are just a few of the major exhibitions, he will also be showing his work at various other venues, and we are very much looking forward to seeing what issues he will present to us with his future works.

The small boat floating on the Grand Canal, and Cai



Chinese herbal medicine in the vending machine

Works depicting the acupuncture points of the human body

CAI GUO-QIANG

Biography

1957	Born in Quanzhou, Fujian, China
1981	Studied at Shanghai Theater Academy
1989	Research student at the University of Tsukuba, School of Art and Design
1992	Participated in *Encountering the Others* at the Kassel International Art Exhibition, Germany, and *The Work of Art in the Age of Telecommunication* in Vienna, Austria
1993	Three-month residency in France, at the invitation of the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain
1995	Participated in the Johannesburg Biennale, South Africa Participated in the *TransCulture* exhibition at the Venice Biennale, Italy
1995-96	Artist-in-residence, P.S.1. Contemporary Art Center [now MoMA PS1], New York, US

Representative works

Works in the Projects for Extraterrestrials series including:

Fetus Movement II, Hann. Münden military base, Germany

Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters, Jiayuguan, China

The Horizon from the Pan-Pacific, Iwaki, Japan

All of the above are among the Projects for Extraterrestrials.

Participated in numerous other group and solo exhibitions.

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