

PearlLam Galleries

Shanghai

QIU DESHU solo exhibition

Press Preview Sunday, 5 November, 2017, 3–5pm

Exhibition Dates 7 November–31 December, 2017 Monday–Sunday, 10:30am–7pm

Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, G/F, 181 Middle Jiangxi Road, Shanghai, China 200002

Shanghai— Pearl Lam Galleries is pleased to present a retrospective of works by Chinese artist Qiu Deshu in Shanghai. The exhibition showcases his artworks from 1979 to the present, revealing the evolution of Qiu's unique artistic language of "fissuring" as well as illustrating the importance of aesthetics and social value within his oeuvre.

Qiu Deshu was born to a family of intellectuals in Shanghai in 1948. He began his painting practice in his early childhood. In reaction to the restrictive hegemony of art by the Chinese Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution, he began to develop his own artistic ideas. This independent spirit led Qiu to co-found the *Cao Cao She* (Grass Society), which placed importance on independent thinking and cultivating a unique technique and style. Artists from this group used wild grass as a metaphor for their uninspiring yet energetic lives and hoped that their concepts about independent thinking and creation would ignite and spread like wildfire. However, their first exhibition was unexpectedly shut down having only been open for a few days because the abstract nature of the works was taboo, just like nude paintings. At the time, abstract art was far beyond public understanding and acceptance. Even though the first *Cao Cao She* exhibition only lasted for a couple of days, it is still a milestone that cannot be overlooked in the history of the emergence and development of contemporary art in China.

During the early 1980s, Qiu Deshu lived in oppression because he had founded the *Cao Cao She*. The unbearable psychological pressure caused him to experience a stroke, which left him with temporary facial paralysis and a brief loss of linguistic competence, when he was just 32 years old. Looking back at his life thus far, Qiu considers this time period as his lowest point; to him, it was even tougher than his time as a mineral worker during the Cultural Revolution. Through it all, Qiu tenaciously fought for independence and freedom of self-expression and artistic creation. When he was experiencing grief, depression, and/or boredom, he would walk around the deserted courtyard behind his studio. This is where he was first attracted to the beauty of the cracks in the rocks, which led to a sudden awareness of the silent but unavoidable natural power hidden in the slate cracks. This deeply inspired the metaphorical concept of his "Fissuring" series, which he uses to express his inner turmoil and emotions. In 1982, by tearing Xuan paper and reassembling the pieces with cracks in between, Qiu achieved a breakthrough in his artistic expression, paving the way for spiritual balance and self-healing.

After the political fallout Qiu experienced from founding the *Cao Cao She*, he was cast to the edges of the Chinese art world, where he remained for a long time. Instead, Qiu began exhibiting abroad. In 1982, his artworks were exhibited at the Smith College Art Museum in Northampton and the Brooklyn Museum in New York, USA. Then in 1985, he was invited to be an artist-in-residence at Tufts University near Boston. When he returned to Shanghai in 1986, Qiu became an independent artist outside the governmental system.

Prior to his time in the United States and his signature “Fissuring” series, Qiu’s early artistic explorations include what he calls “expressive ink brush” and “compositions by multiple seals”. The introduction of seals into paintings and its prevalence is related to Chinese traditional literati painting (or the Southern School of Chinese painting). Later on, the seals of collectors were also brought into paintings. They not only certified the authenticity and ownership of the painting, but also served as decoration for the graphic composition. Qiu’s art creation abandoned the conventional use of seals; he analysed and rearranged the seal’s square surface, making it a fundamental element in his compositions. These earlier experimentations were a reaction to prevailing art trends at the time and based on the reconstruction of traditional techniques and elements. It was not until he began to develop the unique artistic language he calls “fissuring” that the artist found his lifelong artistic style.

Qiu’s “fissuring” technique encompasses tearing Xuan paper, reconfiguring the pieces, and mounting them to form images, creating lines, or “fissures”, that travel across the painting’s expanse in a natural, free-flowing manner. The application of colour onto a painting is here subverted as well. Qiu rubs and carves the delicate rice paper, much like in creating a bas-relief, and builds this on top of a coloured base layer, such that the colours show through the layers and combine with the “fissures” to endow his works with a sense of dynamic rhythm and spatial complexity.

Qiu Deshu cultivated his own way of observing and expressing himself into a specific artistic language that departs from both traditional Chinese and Western painting. He makes Xuan paper a major element in his works, among traditional painting materials such as ink, silk, and Chinese pigment; he also strengthens the core meaning of paper as an “object” by utilizing his “fissuring” technique. In doing so, Qiu highlights the cultural meaning hidden in the material itself. The artist is deeply influenced by Chinese traditional philosophy. During his creation process, he equates himself with objects, and he works in dialogue with the material (Zhuangzi Philosophy - Equality of Things). By tearing, rubbing, and carving the Xuan paper, he highlights the nature of the material. Through external objects, he has developed his own metaphor to express his inner thoughts and artistic concepts. “Fissuring” not only reflects Qiu’s personal life experiences and way of thinking, but also depicts the common phenomenon in the context of rapid modernization and development in China today. “Fissuring” seems to exist anywhere and anytime. It is the core principle of natural transformation both in the cosmos and in a microcosm. It destroys and constructs. It collapses and is reborn. Sharing the same ideas as old masters and ancient sages, humankind has consistently believed in the message of becoming one with nature, embracing the universe and communicating with one’s natural surroundings. As an intellectual with a strong social consciousness, Qiu Deshu has continued to use “fissuring” as the major theme of his artistic practice over the past 30 years. He has chosen a non-narrative method of expression to integrate his artworks into the contemporary social and cultural context of globalization and diversity.

About Qiu Deshu

Qiu Deshu (b. 1948, Shanghai) received an early education in traditional Chinese painting, seal carving, and scroll mounting. His engagement with experimental ink painting began in the late 1970s. In 1979, Qiu co-founded the *Cao Cao She* (Grass Society), one of China’s first experimental art societies in the post-Mao era. The society was a group of twelve artists who advocated independence of spirit, technique, and style in painting. In his works of this period, the influence of concepts drawn from Western modern art is evident, but Qiu’s choice of materials remained rooted in traditional Chinese art. He was one of China’s earliest professional artists in the 1980s. The artist currently lives and works in Shanghai, China.

Qiu is a gifted painter and calligrapher. His work transcends medium and subject to become modern iterations that both honour his cultural heritage and simultaneously reject it. In the 1980s, Qiu devised his signature technique of combining ink, pigment, and paper, then rending and reforming the pieces, a method that reflects his worldview and life experience for which he has coined the term “fissuring”. He situates the breakthrough moment in 1982, when one day he glanced down and at once became fully aware of cracks in the cement ground and how they were an apt metaphor for his beliefs and personal experiences. This sparked the idea for a new method of creative expression, which he has continued to develop and deepen over the past three decades.

Qiu's unique approach to materials and process reimagine the traditional idea that ink is the essence of Chinese painting by foregrounding Xuan paper and its previously untapped potentials as an artistic medium, making inventive use of its hue, delicacy, pliability, and water permeability. While his work is indebted to the Chinese landscape tradition, Qiu transforms the language of landscape into a contemporary idiom of creative expression. His use of ink, colour, and paper in a collage-like process similar to techniques used in scroll-mounting subverts the way brush and ink once defined the forms of Chinese landscape art.

Qiu's works have been widely exhibited in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as in the UK, USA, Germany, and Australia. His works have been collected by M+ in Hong Kong, the National Art Museum of China in Beijing, the Shanghai Art Museum, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Oxford University in the UK, Taichung Art Museum in Taiwan, the AsianArt Museum in South Korea, HamburgRathaus in Germany, and other private collections.

About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China.

Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects, and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, Pearl Lam Galleries is dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

The four branches of Pearl Lam Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore represent an increasingly influential roster of contemporary artists. Chinese artists Zhu Jinshi and Su Xiaobai, who synthesize Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries has also introduced leading international artists, such as Jenny Holzer, Leonardo Drew, Carlos Rolón/Dzine, and Yinka Shonibare MBE, to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region, collaborating to produce thought-provoking, culturally relevant work.

Press Enquiries

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