

Pearl Lam Galleries

Shanghai

GANWU: Sensing the Material

Featuring works by Maarten Baas, Enrico Marone Cinzano, André Dubreuil, Rena Dumas, Studio Makkink & Bey, Xia Qingyong, Xue Tao, XYZ Design, and Danful Yang

Press Preview Sunday, 7 January, 2018, 3–5pm
Exhibition Dates 7 January–5 March, 2018 Monday–Sunday, 10:30am–7pm
Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, G/F, 181 Middle Jiangxi Road, Shanghai, China 200002

Shanghai—Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi wrote, “The universe and I came into being together; and I, and everything therein, are ONE.” Chinese philosophers have explored a unique and Oriental way of sensing material things. The exhibition *Ganwu* showcases works by nine artists and designers who incorporate Chinese aesthetics into their works. They emphasize human experiences through their materials and create works with exquisite handcraft techniques.

Taking the Song dynasty painting *Six Persimmons* by Mu Xi as an example, the appearance and concept of a persimmon is easily shown from a subjective perspective. Only when the artist observed the persimmons from an objective perspective, not differentiating between them as subjects or objects, could the artist reveal the persimmons’ spirituality. This is what is known as “ganwu”: how the creator becomes equal to the objects being depicted, and how he or she co-exists with them.

Western philosophical thinking focuses on mankind as an object. René Descartes (1596–1650), known as the founder of Western modern philosophy, considered humans as both an object of thinking and a subject of thought. This dualism rethinks the relationship between consciousness and the human body. Unlike how phenomenology focuses on logical thinking, “ganwu” roots itself in intuition and directs itself into a realm of instant emotion and perception. Although language has limitations, there are infinite possibilities in how one senses things.

Japanese philosophical thinking also has its own way of perceiving objects. Chinese philosophers are more concerned about the connection between humans and objects, and the unity of mankind and the universe. However, in Japan, objects and human feelings can be separate from each other. This is known as “Mono no aware”, which is an empathy towards things. Meanwhile, most of Japan is made up of islands which always face the threat of unexpected earthquakes or tsunamis. The Japanese, therefore, are extremely sensitive to the ephemeral nature of life and material things.

All of the works in this exhibition have been produced in China with artists and designers working closely with artisans. These artisans might be descendants of those who created ceramic pieces in the Song dynasty or wooden furniture in the Ming dynasty. These exquisite techniques developed by ancient masters are still used today in modern works. With designers working from different cultural perspectives, each work has its own symbolism or visual metaphors.

Just as Chinese paintings focus on combining reality with imagination, so do design objects. Something still exists in the emptiness or “liubai” (what is left blank). The traces and creases on the work’s surface are able to capture and reflect the light and shadow of the empty space beyond the work. Emptiness becomes touchable. The exhibition *Ganwu* gathers works that aim to make audiences more aware of the spirituality of materials hidden in the universe.

About the Artists and Designers

The works on show by Dutch designer **Maarten Baas** (b. 1978) break the boundaries of traditional Chinese woodcarving in both concept and execution. He remakes common objects—in this case, clothes hangers and combs—in wood and transforms their appearances by adding protruding details such as extra-long teeth coming out of the combs and extra racks attached to the hangers. His works highlight the characteristics of the material itself, allowing the spirituality of the wood to become part of the works' narrative.

Italian designer **Enrico Marone Cinzano** (b. 1963) puts great emphasis on the materials he chooses, often using recycled and sustainable materials. His artful design pieces often have a sculptural feel, although for him, practicality and function are also of utmost importance. His work *Valet* is made of hand-carved recycled elm wood and features a skull, which is both decorative and functional as a hat holder.

In this exhibition, the works by leading French decorative artist and artisan **André Dubreuil** (b. 1951) have been inspired by European classicalism, the geometric patterns in minimalism, and Chinese traditional art and craft techniques. His works are ornate, yet functional. His *Cloissoné Table* features panels representing each of the four seasons, which are made using traditional Chinese cloisonné enamel processes.

French architect **Rena Dumas** (1937–2009) integrated architectural concepts in her modern interior design works by controlling proportions and thinking about human rhythms of life. Her Chinese lacquered armoire *Hole in the Cabinet* replaces the ornate circular metal lock traditionally found on old Chinese cabinets with a hole in the front and one in the back of the cabinet.

Studio Makkink & Bey explores the interactive relationship between humans and their environment through their innovative and poetic works. Their glass snuff bottles from their *Cleaning Beauty* series feature miniature paintings of figures hard at work cleaning. Are they cleaning the surface of the bottles or something else? The works are reminiscent of Zhuangzi's philosophical musings over whether he was a man dreaming he was a butterfly or whether he was a butterfly dreaming it was a man.

Xia Qingyong (b. 1988) has been living and working in Shanghai since his graduation from Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2011. The artist began his career with a fascination with Chinese rice paper. Because of its absorbency, flexibility, and durability, rice paper can be kept for generations. Keeping these qualities in mind, as well as the cultural significance of the material, Xia has created a brand-new series for the exhibition. Wrapping wood with rice paper, the artist tries to visualize and represent the passing of time with strips of paper that trace the tree's annual rings on wooden materials.

Chinese artist **Xue Tao** (b. 1975), who was born in Dali, Yunnan province, is known for his sculptures and installation works created with discarded newspapers. He has developed his own artistic language, which involves twisting newspapers into ropes or compressing them into different shapes. His works show off the labour-intensive production process rather than the works as mere objects, and have an indescribable Zen quality. He knows a work is finished when it feels right.

XYZ Design is a team led by Pearl Lam who deeply believes that art and design should not have any boundaries. The team experiments with different methods of expression, media, and techniques. Works by XYZ Design mix Western and Chinese influences and have a bold quality about them. Among other works on show is XYZ Design's *Cloissoné Dining Table*, which is made using traditional Chinese techniques but also feature a modern colourful pattern on the table top.

Also exhibited are several works by Chinese designer **Danful Yang** (b. 1980), who is based in Shanghai. Her works are playful and eye-catching, such as *Packing Me Softly*, which is seating in the shape of a box with packing tape wrapped around it, but made with luxurious hand embroidery on canvas and foam. Her series of porcelain qilin are all handmade with intricate details, and have whimsical names like *Girly* and *Daydream*. Yang's works often combine traditional Chinese crafts techniques with modern influences from both the East and West.

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.

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