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A Personal Diary

Photography and text by Xing Danwen

This body of photographs was taken from 1993 to 1998. It is part of my personal experience as a first-hand witness and participant in the 1990s avant-garde art scene in China. These photographs represent my personal project on the 1960s-born generation, which is very much an autobiographic subject as I was born in the late 1960s. I have always thought that our generation is very different; we were born to lead a rebellion.

I was in the right place at the right time. In September of 1988, I moved to Beijing to study at Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). There, I began my artistic career. Many artists in this section were my classmates and colleagues. Along the way, I witnessed and participated in several remarkable events, including the first "China Contemporary Art Exhibition" at the National Art Museum of China in 1989 and the unforgettable June 4 Tiananmen Incident, where many artists did performances and made installation works. I observed the circumstances with a questioning eye.

The 1990s became the most exciting period of performance and installation art. It was a period of transition for China from a regional art scene to a more international one. Many painters suddenly took off their clothes, performing naked in public. Looking for more avant-garde forms of art, they brought revolution to the traditional.

Many of these photographs were taken because the artist invited me personally to document their actions. Some were photo sessions between me and the performer; and others were photographed as feature stories for European and American magazines. Initially, I didn't intend to make a book. Later, I realized the pictures were a remarkable documentation of a decisive period in Chinese contemporary art. I decided to collect the photographs from my archive and organize them into a book, which will be released in 2009 by Mets & Schilt publishers, Amsterdam.

All images in this article are from the series "A Personal Diary: Chinese Avant-Garde Art in the 90s."

Liu Wei at his
Songzhuang Studio,
Beijing, 1995.





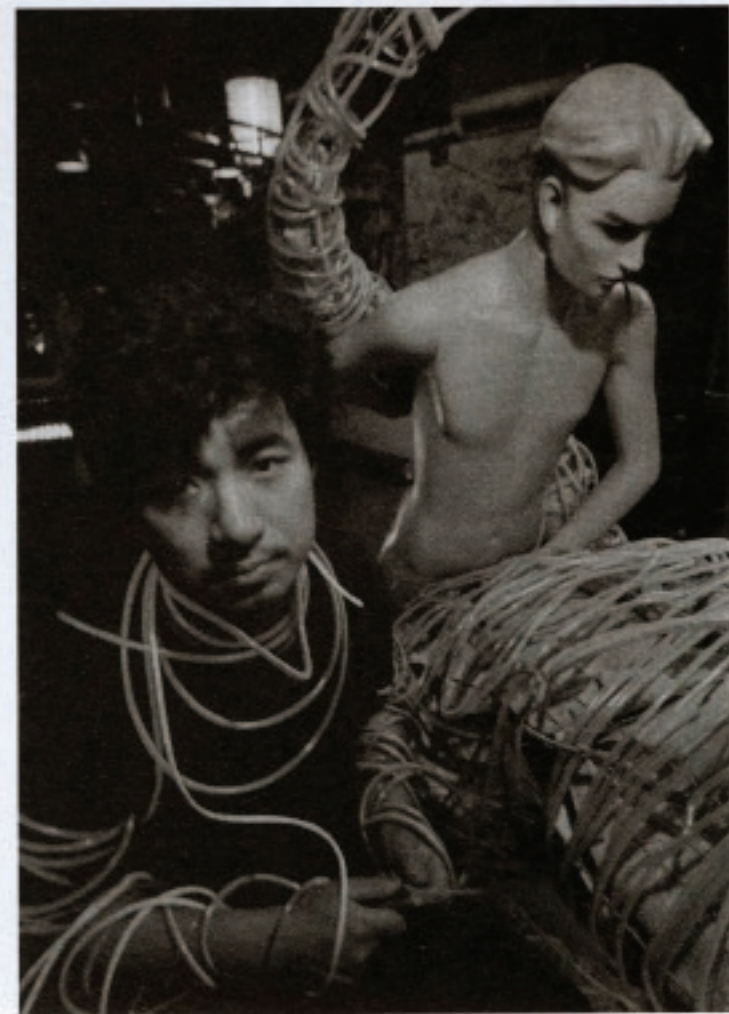
Ma Liuming preparing
for *The Third Contact*,
Beijing, 1995.

Zhan Huan and
Ma Liuming preparing
for *The Third Contact*,
Beijing, 1995.



Zhan Huan and Ma
Liuming performing
The Third Contact,
Beijing, 1995.

Are critic Li Xianting,
artists and friends
at a private party,
Beijing, 1994.



Clockwise from top left:
Liu Anping and Wang
Jinsong in *Little Red*,
Beijing, 1995.

Xu Bing in production
of *Cultural Animals*,
Beijing, 1995.

Xu Yan with *Dinosaur
Park*, Guangzhou, 1995.



Zeng Fanzhi
with paintings from
the "Mask" series,
Beijing, 1995.



Song Dong installing
Dripping in a Hutong,
Beijing, 1996.



Sui Jianguo with *Earthly Force*, in front of Roma Garden, Beijing, 1995.



Zhan Wang and Sui Jianguo with the *Zhan's Classroom Exercise*, Beijing, 1995.



Wang Jin with *Dollar Brick*, Beijing, 1995.

Lin Yilin on the street of TianHe Lu, Guangzhou, 1995.



Wang Guangyi with *Passport*, Beijing, 1995.