

郑圣天——我本来是要去墨西哥的

Zheng Shengtian—I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico

长征计划

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"Zheng Shengtian—I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico," Long March Project's latest initiative, will be presented at the Long March Space in Beijing on October 16, 2021. It takes Zheng Shengtian<sup>1</sup>, a seminal pioneer of Chinese contemporary art, whose life and career spanning eight decades, as the subject of a study, seeking to reactivate our historical sense and perception of Chinese art and society in the Revolution/post-Revolution era.

In 2009, Zheng Shengtian launched a website called "Sheng Project,"<sup>2</sup> which can be considered as a double-entendre for his personal history and artistic career. It is meant to serve as a precursor of an open archive, offering physical materials bearing the hallmarks of the time he's lived in to the realm of the public. In 2015, Long March Project and the Institute of Contemporary Art and Social Thought of the China Academy of Art began studying the content of "Sheng Project," taking Zheng Shengtian's artistic experience as a case study and attempting to reassess the narrative of China's 20th-century art history with an individual's creative life and experiences. This six-year research came to fruition in the form of a curatorial proposal dedicated to Zheng

Shengtian, to us, to the art world, and beyond, titled "A Proposal for 'Sheng Project'"<sup>3</sup>.

The visual iteration of "Zheng Shengtian – I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico," organized by Long March Project, unfolds based on the core thesis of the proposal mentioned above. It is not a retrospective, as it does not fully represent the complex interactions between Zheng's art and life. "I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico", a remark by Zheng Shengtian when musing on his first overseas training post in the 1980s strikes as profound now. In the 1950s and 1960s, a large number of foreign art exhibitions were showcased in China. Visits and lectures by artists belonging to the international socialist or leftist camp, such as David Siqueiros, José Venturelli, and Eugen Popa, inspired the Chinese art world to draw from a greater variety of sources. These artists experimented in an art system different from the then mainstream Soviet socialist realism, a phenomenon that prompts us to look anew at the fact that from the 1950s, Zheng Shengtian and his generation who were students at the time, began to inherit an international socialist outlook. Initially intending to go to Mexico, Zheng ended up in the United States and





became a seminal figure in mediating exchanges between Chinese contemporary art and the West. However, the aspiration to “go to Mexico” has never ceased.

The imagery of the “Zócalo” (the main public square of Mexico City) is used as the driving conceptual motif for “Zheng Shentian – I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico.” The Zócalo of the exhibition space is composed of archival materials from Zheng’s ongoing research on the artistic dialogue between China and Mexico in the twentieth century. According to Zheng, “My research on Sino-Mexican artistic exchange continues. But I put it into a

larger context. Some art historians inherited the historiography of the two camps – the East and West – from the Cold War period and considered Western modernism and revolutionary realism as the two major trends in the development of Chinese art in the 20th century, which alternates as time evolves. Such a view is too simplistic. To a large extent, they ignore that there were alternative trends and practices between these two currents. Of which, neither classifies as officially promoted revolutionary realism nor fully equates with Western modernism or contemporary art.”<sup>4</sup> When considering the narrative of twentieth-century Chinese art history as divided into a

a binary of Western modernism and revolutionary realism, this valuable collection of documents exposes the undercurrents and tributaries between these two poles, in their historical complexity. Surrounding the Zócalo are more than 60 paintings by Zheng Shengtian dating from the 1950s when he was a student at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now the China Academy of Art) in Hangzhou and later at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, followed by works from the period of the Cultural Revolution, and later works created in his time in the United States and Mexico during a government-funded overseas training program after Reform and Opening

Up. The 12-meter mobile mural, *Winds from Fusang*<sup>5</sup>, co-created by Zheng with Sun Jingbo hangs at the end of the Zócalo. Completed in 2017, seventy years after his first encounter with images of Mexican muralism as a student, this epic masterpiece depicts key individuals and events that have propelled a century of Sino-Mexican exchange on artistic ideas and expression.

Three seemingly independent narratives threads – Zheng Shengtian's personal history, his artistic practice, and his historical research on the subject of Sino-Mexican art exchange – are juxtaposed in the same space. The viewing experience strings together the chance relationships between the personal, artistic,

and epochal, bringing forth “two internationalisms.” A socialist modernism<sup>6</sup> potential was embedded within the various literary and artistic trends that emerged during the New Democratic period of the 1950s, representing one approach to internationalism in the past century. After Reform and Opening Up, Zheng side-stepped into another approach to internationalism, the internationalization of contemporary art. “One century, two internationalisms.” Zheng's life informs the historical narrative of three generations that have been divided and disconnected: the so-called “New China”, the “New Period” (post-Cultural Revolution), and the “New Century”. He sheds light in corners of Chinese art history that have been muddled and obscured by

ideologicalized narratives, and recalibrates them within the historical fabric of lived experiences, allowing us to form opinions with a new perspective.

**“Zheng Shengtian—I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico” is curated/produced by Long March Project, with the scholarly support from the Institute of Contemporary Art and Social Thought, China Academy of Art. This text draws from the research and writings collectively undertaken by the two organizations.**



## Notes:

1. Zheng Shengtian was born in 1938 in a Confucian temple in his hometown in Henan Province, so his mother named him “Sheng” Tian (sacred heaven), commemorating his birth with the blessing of the sacred. During the “Cultural Revolution,” Zheng Shengtian changed his name to the homonym “Zheng Shengtian,” which means “man will out-win the heaven.”
2. On the homepage of his website shengproject.com, Zheng wrote, “I call this page ‘Sheng Project.’ It indeed contains the work I have done and continue to do. I agree with the Asia Art Archive’s claim that a repository is not a static and passive entity but rather an active and progressive platform that is ‘dedicated to providing a means of communication and reflection.’ I also hope that these projects of mine will be beneficial to other’s thinking, and even more so that through your participation, we can enrich and deepen our exploration of these issues.”
3. “A Proposal for ‘Sheng Project’” will be presented in this exhibition as a three-volume set proposal. The research and editorial team (in alphabetical order by last name) includes Zian Chen, Cheng Yi, Roy Hoh, Clement Huang, Zhanna Khromykh, Don Li-Leger, Theresa Liang, Mo Ai, Lu Jie, Shen Jun, Tang Xiaolin, Tong Xinxin, Wang Shihua, Wang Yimeng, Yi Mengyuan, Yu Li, Yu Xiaohui, Yuan Anqi, Marisol Villela, and Zhang Yang.
4. Zheng Shengtian, “Foreword,” *Winds From Fusang - Artistic dialogue between Mexico and China in the Twentieth Century*, Socialist Modernism Research Series at Taikang Space, Beijing
5. The mural *Winds from Fusang* was made by Zheng Shengtian and Sun Jingbo, with the assistance of Dong Zhuo and Ma Xin. First shown in 2017 at “Winds from Fusang: Mexico and China in the Twentieth Century,” co-curated by Zheng Shengtian and Yu Yu at the USC Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California, the exhibition also traveled to the Museo Mural Diego Rivera, Mexico City, in 2018.
6. In his essay “Socialist Modernism in China (2015-2016),” Zheng Shengtian interpreted a critical phenomenon in the development of Chinese art in the last century by adopting the theoretical framework of socialist modernism.



2021

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鄭聖天 ——  
我本來是要  
去墨西哥的

Zheng Shengtian —  
I Was Supposed to  
Go to Mexico





## A Proposal for “Sheng Project”

Initiated by the Institute of Contemporary Art and Social Thought of the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, and Long March Project, Beijing, “A Proposal for Sheng Project” takes Zheng Shengtian, a seminal pioneer of Chinese contemporary art, whose life and career spanning eight decades, as the subject of a study, seeking to reactivate our historical sense and perception of Chinese art and society in the Revolution/post-Revolution era.

In 2009, Zheng Shengtian launched a website called “Sheng Project”, which is meant to serve as a precursor of an open archive. In 2015, Long March Project and the Institute of Contemporary Art and Social Thought began studying the content of the archive, taking it as a unique case study and attempting to reassess the narrative of China's twentieth-century art history via an individual's life experience. The six-year research came to fruition in the form of a curatorial proposal titled “A Proposal for 'Sheng Project'”. The proposal is composed of three parts, *I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico*, *YISHU#ART*, and a reader.

The research and editorial team (in alphabetical order by last name) includes Zian Chen, Cheng Yi, Roy Hoh, Clement Huang, Zhanna Khromykh, Don Li-Leger, Theresa Liang, Mo Ai, Lu Jie, Shen Jun, Tang Xiaolin,

Tong Xinxin, Wang Shihua, Wang Yimeng, Yi Mengyuan, Yu Li, Yu Xiaohui, Yuan Anqi, Marisol Villela, and Zhang Yang.

给“圣天作业”的一份提案

由中国美术学院当代艺术与社会思想研究所和展览部于2015年联合主办，以中国当代艺术的重要先驱者郑圣天八十多年来的人生经历与艺术生涯为研究对象，试图以此重新启动革命/后革命历程中我们对于中国艺术与社会的历史感一观。

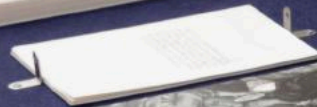
2009年耶圣天上线了一个名为“圣天作业”的网站，这个名称也是取自自己的出生历程和艺术生涯的双重命名。它的实体是一个纸质刊物，用每个人走过的材料记忆开放出来成为一个公共资源。2015年两个机构开始着手研究“圣天作业”材料，将耶圣天的艺术经历作为一个个案，尝试以这个艺术家生命与经验重新勾勒中国20世纪艺术史叙述。六年的研究带来“给‘圣天作业’的一份提案”——向圣天和我们一起，向艺术界以及超越艺术的世界，发出一个提案，它是一个展览、写作，也是一个策划行动。

设计图从供稿人处，集齐，付印刷部。



设计团队由陈正达、陈蓓、江佳颖组成。  
袁女奇、雨嫣、张杨组成（以姓氏拼音为序）。  
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“I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico”, a remark by Zheng Shengtian when musing on his first overseas training post in the 1980s strikes as profound now.

# 前言

2021年，中国迎来了中国共产党成立一百周年。在这一百年的历程中，中国共产党领导中国人民取得了举世瞩目的伟大成就，为人类进步事业作出了巨大贡献。回首百年，我们更加深刻地认识到，没有中国共产党，就没有新中国，就没有中华民族伟大复兴。

在全面建设社会主义现代化国家新征程上，我们要继续坚持中国共产党的领导，坚定不移走中国特色社会主义道路，为实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦而努力奋斗。我们要继承和发扬党的光荣传统和优良作风，勇于担当作为，为党和人民事业不懈奋斗。



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1921年，中国共产党第一次全国代表大会在上海召开，宣告了中国共产党的诞生。



1949年，中国人民解放军在天安门广场举行盛大阅兵式，庆祝中华人民共和国成立。

# 中国共产党百年奋斗的光辉历程

中国共产党自1921年成立以来，始终坚持以马克思列宁主义为指导，结合中国实际，不断探索适合中国国情的革命道路。在革命战争年代，中国共产党领导中国人民进行了艰苦卓绝的斗争，最终建立了新中国。

新中国成立后，中国共产党领导中国人民进行了社会主义改造，建立了社会主义制度。在社会主义建设时期，中国共产党领导中国人民取得了举世瞩目的成就，为中国的现代化事业奠定了坚实基础。

改革开放以来，中国共产党领导中国人民进行了伟大的改革开放，使中国实现了从站起来、富起来到强起来的伟大飞跃。中国已成为世界第二大经济体，人民生活水平显著提高。



中国共产党百年奋斗的光辉历程，是一部波澜壮阔的史诗。在这一百年的历程中，中国共产党始终坚持以人民为中心，为中国人民谋幸福，为中华民族谋复兴。中国共产党的领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，是中国特色社会主义制度的最大优势。

中国共产党百年奋斗的辉煌成就，是中国人民团结奋斗的结果。在这一百年的历程中，中国共产党领导中国人民取得了举世瞩目的成就，为中国的现代化事业奠定了坚实基础。中国共产党的领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，是中国特色社会主义制度的最大优势。



1921年，中国共产党第一次全国代表大会在上海召开，宣告了中国共产党的诞生。



1949年，中国人民解放军在天安门广场举行盛大阅兵式，庆祝中华人民共和国成立。

## Growing Up

July 1937. The Marco Polo Bridge incident. The flames of war gradually extended themselves across northern China. My parents fled their home village of Luoshan on the northern foothills of the Dabie mountains. Not long after, my mother gave birth to me there.

1942. My father went to work in the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Nationalist government. He worked in the center of the city of Chongqing, but our home was in the suburbs. After we moved to Shandong (a small town on the outskirts of Chongqing), my four brothers and older sister all began to attend the Shengguang School in the small town. When I turned five, I joined my brothers at school and entered the first grade. Shengguang was founded by the Henanese Christian Mr. Ernest Yin who was a graduate of Harvard University. Mission schools in China had always been funded and founded with foreign money, and most were likewise run by Westerners. For Shengguang to have been founded and run by a Chinese Christian was quite something. Ernest Yin (1887-1964) from Youxian County in Hunan. Harvard graduate. Educator.

1945. Japan was defeated in the Second Sino-Japanese War and my entire family was demobilized and moved to Nanjing. My father had been able to arrange plane tickets for all of us and we flew on a cargo transport plane.

When I went to use the bathroom on the flight, I could see clouds floating past through the toilet hole on the plane. That was my first time looking down on the earth from the sky. I would never have imagined I would see the same view countless times again in my life.

After two years of upper primary and half a year of middle school in Nanjing's Stone City, the People's Liberation Army were at the gates of the city. Most of the government fell into paralysis. My parents decided it best to move to Shanghai, see how the situation was and then decide what to do next.

26 May 1949, morning. My four brothers and I took the electric tram on Sichuan North Road as usual, crossing over Suzhou River to go to our middle school in the west of the city. The city was eerily quiet and cold, not a single other car on the road. We decided to go ahead on foot. When we reached the Sichuan Road bridge post and telegraph building, we could see that the bridge was blocked off with a wall of sandbags built into a blockade. The soldiers stationed there motioned to us and told us the bridge was blocked. We turned around and headed home.

Once home, we turned on the radio and heard the station play the song "The Sky above the Liberation Zone". The south bank of Suzhou River was already occupied by the PLA. We spent a sleepless night together. On the second day as soon as it was bright, we went out on the streets. We saw many PLA soldiers wearing yellow uniforms sleeping in their clothes under the awnings along the road. A new era had begun.

--Excerpts from Zheng Shengtian "Tracks to Seattle", "Urchins of Shandong" and "Two journeys: Nanjing and Shanghai" in *An Encounter with Life – Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.



## The Yucai School

Yucai was a school founded by the educator Tao Xingzhi in Chongqing during the Second Sino-Japanese War. It was established specifically for children with literary and artistic talent who had been orphaned by war. Many famous artists including He Luting, Ai Qing, Li Ling, and Dai Ailian were taught at the school and because of the large number of famous personages who were taught there, the school became well known. After the defeat of Japan, the school relocated to Shanghai. While quite a few students still came from orphanages, the school began accepting all sorts of pupils.

The Yucai School was an anomaly in China in the 1950s. The ideological reforms and Three-anti and Five-anti political campaigns that were taking place outside the school following liberation did not have much of an impact on the teachers. Students didn't hear much about Marx, Engels, Lenin or Stalin; I'm afraid they were much more worshipful of Da Vinci, Mozart and Shakespeare. The "genius education" and "life education" advocated for by Tao Xingzhi focused on cultivating creativity and individuality. School Principal Ma Lvxian who had been with Tao since his days at the Nanjing Xiaozhuang Normal College was very capable of continuing Tao's advocacy. The school was permeated with the concepts of liberalism, the air thick with an artistic atmosphere. I can't remember

at all what classes or examinations were like back then, it is as if I just learned how to paint completely naturally. The school did not have a clear academic system. Students could spend as long or as short as they wanted and were always going in and out. Quite a number of students voluntarily left after a few years to pursue advanced studies at other art academies. We were like a large group of siblings going in and out of the house as we pleased.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "The Yucai School" in *An Encounter with Life - Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2012.

You could say that my interest in Mexican art began in my childhood. When I was 11, I entered the Yucai School founded by Mr. Tao Xingzhi. The printmaking artist Wang Qi had just returned from Hong Kong and since 1950 had headed the school's fine art group. His understanding of foreign art far surpassed that of many of his contemporaries, and it was from him that I first heard the names of "the big three" painters of Mexican muralism.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "Covarrubias meets the 'Shanghai Gang'" in *Winds from Fusang: Cultural Dialogues between Mexico and China in the 20th Century*, Beijing Taikang Space Socialist Modernism Research Series

In 1953 when the government implemented largescale academic reforms, it was decided to close the Yucai School. It was not in line with the system. The school was renamed as the Xingzhi Art School, retaining only the Normal school. The remaining students dispersed and went to other schools. Back then, the famous Hangzhou Academy of Art was called the East China Campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and the young teachers Fang Zengxian,

Yu Changgon and Wu Delong were sent there. From the fine art group, twelve students were selected to attend the academy in Hangzhou without having to take the entrance examination.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "The Yucai School" in *An Encounter with Life - Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.

# 西湖学子

"It was supposed to be to Boston", a woman has first confession featuring part in the 19 1950s and 1960s, a large number of coverage China. Plastic and isolated by artists told or lectured OSMG, such as David Siqueiros, inspired the Chinese art world to draw the Three Artists experienced in an art style Soviet socialist realism, a phenomenon the fact that began from the 1950s, Zhang Shengshun at the time, tried to connect an overseas intending to go to Boston, Zhang ended up apical figure in mediating exchanges left well. However, the explanation to "Go to Be

The history of the two "Tianan" (天南) was also very different. The first "Tianan" was a small, private, and somewhat obscure, and was founded by a group of people who were interested in the study of the Chinese language and literature. The second "Tianan" was a large, public, and well-known, and was founded by a group of people who were interested in the study of the Chinese language and literature.



## The Ivory Tower by the West Lake

In 1927, Mr. Cai Yuanpei and Principal Lin Fengmian decided to set up a national art academy in the south of China, immediately setting their sights on Hangzhou and decided to build the academy in the lonely hills on the shores of the West Lake on the edge of the city.

The Academy of Art had a very high reputation in Hangzhou at the time. The locals are still accustomed to calling it “Nizuo” (the pronunciation of “art school” in the local dialect). The Nizuo student became a fashionable part of city life. Their clothing was strange and their appearance disheveled. They were instantly recognizable on the city streets. In the 1950s the area around the West lake was quiet and lonely and exuded a sense of sorrow. But the weekend parties at the academy were always unusually festive and loud. Outside the gates, you could see the shadows figures dancing to the smooth music between the Greek columns. Entering into the auditorium, you were greeted by the sort of high-level performances that would have been difficult for most people in Hangzhou to imagine. At that time, the theatrics of Bu Wanfang, Yin Guangyu and other students of Beijing and Kunqu opera students were enough to make those like Gai Jiaotian in the audience from the older generation applaud.

When I began my studies, the academy was facing a series of very serious

academic reforms. In the 1950s, China was entirely “on the same side” as the Soviet Union, looking up to the elder brother as a model for everything. Originally, the school had a three-year academic system and was divided into only two departments: one for painting and one for sculpture in accordance with Lin Fengmian’s philosophy back then. Starting in 1953, the model was changed to imitate the Soviet art academy system and was prolonged to five years. The painting department was divided into three: a Chinese painting department, an oil painting department, and a printmaking department. Oil painting had been originally introduced from Europe and become the main painting style in Russia. Young people would pore over reproductions of Repin’s and Surikov’s paintings in Soviet magazines that smelled strongly of printing ink, prostrating themselves in admiration before their work. Because of this, most students decided to sign up to study oil painting. The directors of the Chinese painting department did their best trying to persuade students to change their minds, but most were extremely unwilling to change. I was the youngest one amongst my classmates, but was selected to join the oil painting department which made me feel very good about myself.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian “The Ivory Tower by the West Lake” in *An Encounter with Life – Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2012.

Life at the academy in the 1950s didn’t differ very much from how it was twenty years ago. To say it was an ivory tower in the lonely hills wouldn’t be an exaggeration. Students once in a while had opportunities to go out and taste the fruits of normal life, so called “experiencing life”. Starting in first year, every semester all students had to go spend time working in the countryside or at a factory under the care of their teachers for a set period of time.

We went to many villages in the countryside. Sometimes they were crowded and noisy towns, others were very remote and poor. Once or twice a year going through Socialist Mutual Aid Group, followed by Elementary and then Advanced Mutual Aid, I had a cursory glimpse of how traditional agricultural life was evolving and disintegrating. Seeing peasants disputing each other’s work points late into the night and at the end of the year a family be barely left with pennies, was difficult to fathom, as was the fierce complexity of the social reforms experiments behind all of it.



The political axe hanging over everything finally came to fall on the ivory tower. In 1955, the nationwide Campaign to Eradicate Hidden Counterrevolutionaries was launched. It would be the first time I witnessed what was known as “class struggle” at the academy. All classes were suspended so that we could partake in the campaign, and in small and large meetings we exposed and reported on one another. It was as if suddenly everyone had something suspicious about them, that there were enemies hiding in every bush and every tree.

By the time the great storm of 1957 arrived, we had already realized that life at the academy would never stray very far from the vicious circle of politics; we art students were nothing more than pawns on a chess board, forced to march on with bowed heads.

In 1958, People’s Communes were established in the countryside. We were sent to the outskirts of the city to harvest “1000 catties of rice”. Even older teachers like Fang Ganmin and Ni Yide all had to roll up their trouser legs and join the students in the rice paddies. Some people were afraid of leeches and wouldn’t take off their leather shoes and stockings before wading into the muddy water, only to be mocked by the local village boys. Of course, it was impossible for the yield of one paddy to be 1000 catties, but no one took the number seriously. Once when we went to the countryside to labor for a few days we didn’t see a single family making a fire in their kitchens. When it came time to eat, everyone gathered in a line at the canteen entrance with a ladle to get a little bit of congee with sweet potato to eat. Before we left, a commune cadre said that because of the strenuous work we had done, we would be rewarded that evening. We were looking forward to the surprise all day and there was indeed an elaborate meal and wine waiting for us that evening. After we ate our fill, we walked past the commune office and through the gap in the door I could see a table with an even more abundant spread of fish and meat. The commune’s cadres were sitting there in high spirits playing games and drinking. Thinking of the children crying in hunger back in the houses where we spent the night made me feel sick to my stomach.

The most enjoyable thing we did in the countryside was to paint murals on the mud walls. During the Great Leap Forward, everyone was encouraged to write poems and paint them on the walls, something that provided us art

academy students a perfect opportunity to display our talents. We carried buckets of paint along with us all day and brushed it anywhere we could. The farmers really liked the new decorations in their village. Those who could read and explain the paintings to others followed us around, commenting on our work to the crowd that formed around us.

The frenzy of the Anti-Rightist campaign and the Great Leap Forward began to die down in the latter half of 1958, at which point the time had come for us to graduate and leave the academy. On the graduate assignment volunteering list, for all three work choices I wrote “Xinjiang”. This was partially on an impulse to “discard the old and welcome the new”, but was more about my own romanticism and curiosity. When the graduation assignments were announced, I ended up being assigned to stay at the academy and begin work establishing an art publishing house. Many of my classmates were jealous that I got to stay in Hangzhou, but I was dulled and disappointed. Later on, I heard rumors that I was going to be sent to Xinjiang, but had instead ended up in the quota left behind at the academy. I rolled up my bedspread, and moved my few simple clothes across the street from the students’ dormitory to the teachers’ quarters, I would never have imagined that I would end up staying by the bank of the West Lake for thirty more years.

--Excerpts from Zheng Shengtian “The Ivory Tower by the West Lake” and “The Years of the Great Leap Forward” in *An Encounter with Life – Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.



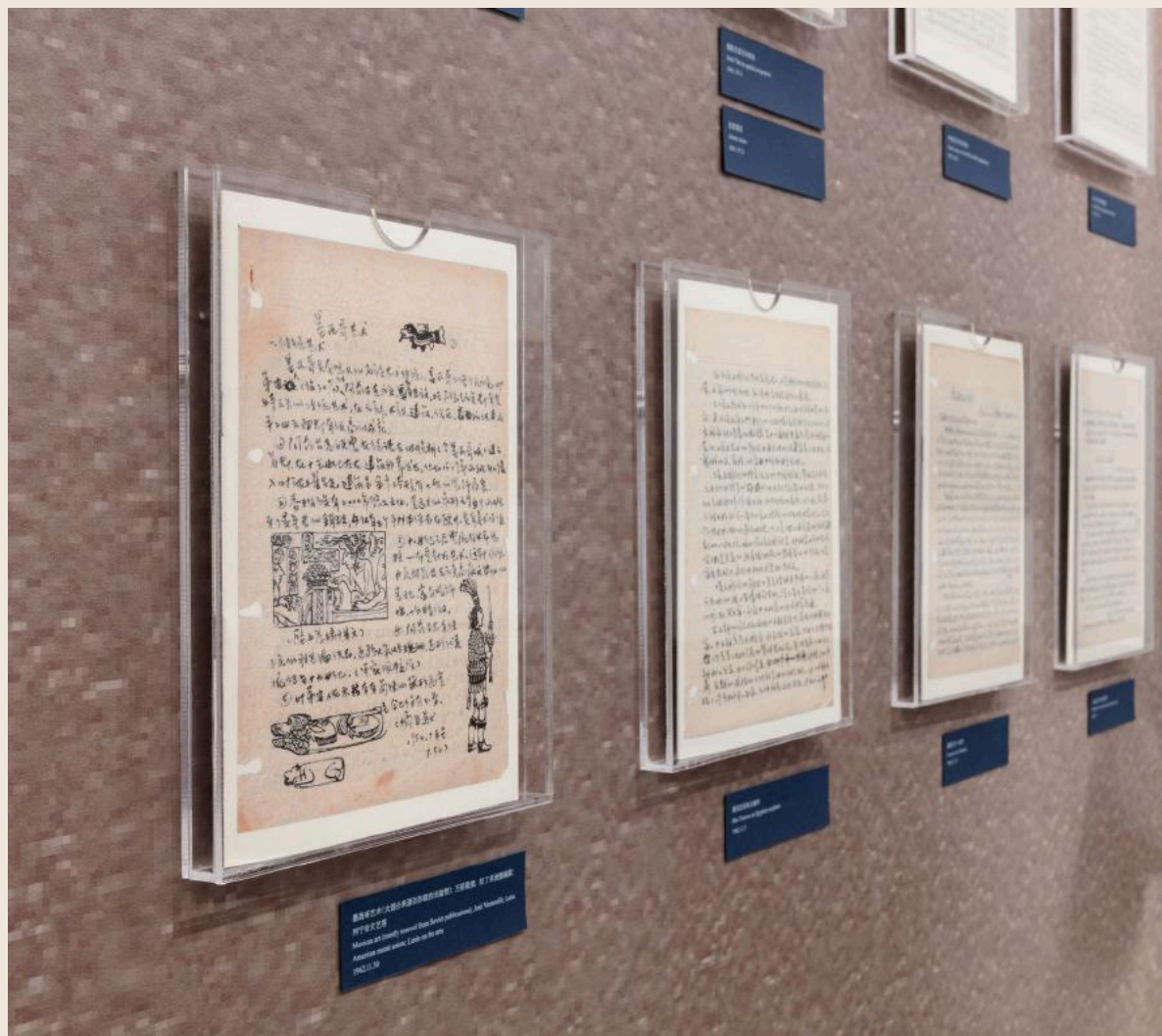
## Notes from Zheng Shengtian's studies at Dong Xiwen's studio

While the year I spent at the [Central] Academy was short, it represented an important turning point in my artistic quest. Life during the "years of difficulty"\* was very hard. Almost every day there was nothing to eat in the canteen but Chinese cabbage. Sometimes it smelled fishy or rotten. But in terms of our spiritual life, we felt unprecedently rich. Mr. Dong's advocating for "nationalization, modernization, and revolutionization" sketched out an ideal for us. We had before us the important task of smashing conventions. We all felt that each of us was standing before the threshold of a new era, that we would be witness to a true Chinese Renaissance. This positioning of ourselves as innovators often resulted in feelings of euphoria. In the studio, we swore that if what our brushes paint does not excite and astound people, we won't cease working until it does. Outside of class we spent every waking minute discussing art. Even late at night when we would go for a midnight

snack at the wonton shop at Ba Mian Cao, amidst the steam and noise we wouldn't stop thinking about and discussing the future of Chinese culture. The most beneficial lesson we took away from Mr. Dong was in understanding the position of the artist: use your own eyes to see the world, and express what you see of the world with sincerity.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "My Teacher Dong Xiwen" in *An Encounter with Life - Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.





## Home in the Grasslands

I'll never forget the feeling of that moment when I arrived at Bashang after the bus ride up onto the Mongolian steppe. The bus curved and circled the mountains driving upwards and upwards for half a day. Behind us the mountains of Hebei and Shanxi lay at our feet, when the sky is clear the Great Wall at Badaling might even be visible from up here. It was difficult for the bus to climb so high up the mountain, but suddenly the boundless expanse of the steppe appeared before our eyes. The high sky broken only by light clouds, the winds clear and the water cold, it was easy to suddenly forget the complications of the world left behind, and the spirit felt refreshed.

My old classmate Liu Tiancheng had been assigned to work at the Inner Mongolia Normal University after graduation and had been inviting me to visit for quite some time. During the year or more I had been studying at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, I went three times. At that time, I was still searching for my own personal painting style. I loved the heavy and inelegant style of Mexican artists like Rivera and Anguiano and was also quite drawn to the work of the Romanian artist Eugen Popa who was teaching oil painting in Hangzhou then. The grasslands and the people of the steppe offered ideal subjects for me to try my hand at new techniques.



After returning to Hangzhou, the rich and strong memories from my time in Inner Mongolia were difficult to forget. During this time works were being selected for inclusion in the National Art Exhibition, so I began work on an oil painting *Home in the Grasslands*. I painted a Mongolian woman serving milk tea to a passing geological survey team in her tent. Through the entire process from preparing the canvas, to the composition, brushstrokes and form of the figures, I tried to express all that I had learned over the past year. The result was far from my ideal, but I still felt that the painting wasn't lacking in creativity. Sure enough, the painting was approved by the jury and selected for inclusion in the exhibition.

In 1964, *Home in the Grasslands* was finally shown at the National Art Exhibition. But what happened to the painting after it was shown remains a mystery. At that time, talk of the Cultural Revolution was becoming more and more urgent and no one had time to bother about the whereabouts of one painting.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "Dream of Inner Mongolia" in *An Encounter with Life - Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.



1937年10月，日本帝国主义发动了全面侵华战争，中国军民奋起抵抗，开始了伟大的抗日战争。在艰苦卓绝的斗争中，中国军民团结一心，最终取得了抗日战争的胜利。



1937年10月  
 1937年10月  
 1937年10月



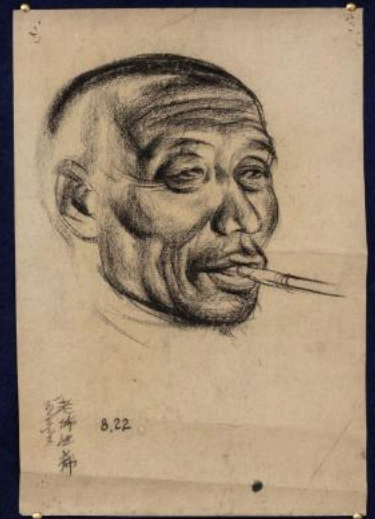
1937年10月  
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1937年10月  
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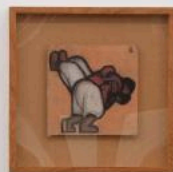
1937年10月  
 1937年10月  
 1937年10月



小孩吃水果  
陈明 1988



老人  
陈明 1988

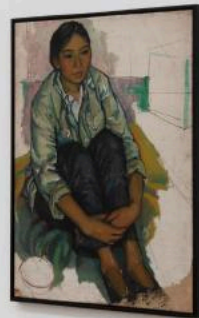
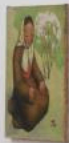


摔跤  
陈明 1988



阅读  
陈明 1988





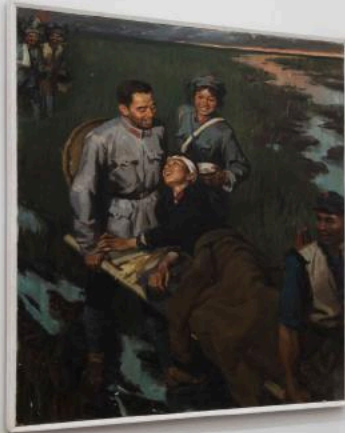


At the beginning of his oil painting instruction class at the Zhejiang Academy of Art, the Romanian artist Eugen Popa would start off by clearly stating his artistic mission. He would tell his students: "When I came to China, I didn't want to mechanically pass on to you the traditions of European oil painting. I thought that Chinese artists shouldn't blindly imbibe and imitate European oil painting. They should instead pay attention to specifically Chinese characteristics and create an autonomously Chinese oil painting. Of course, this is not something that can be realized in a short amount of time, it requires long term effort. Therefore, we must first have a deep and first grasp of the rules and theories of the medium of oil painting." Although Popa agreed that art should reflect reality and support socialism, he also emphasized the need for the artist to develop their own individual expression. His own pursuit of structure and a language of color, led his students in their search for the essence of art. Advocating for such an aesthetic conception and methodology at that time was nothing short of revolutionary.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian's "Alternative Methods in Chinese Art in the 1960s", *I was supposed to go to Mexico*, "A Proposal for Sheng Project", Long March Project Beijing and Hangzhou China Academy of Art Institute of Contemporary Art and Social Thoughts, 2021.



人间正道是沧桑



《人间正道是沧桑》  
1945年  
徐悲鸿



《黄衣少年》  
1945年  
徐悲鸿



《白衣少女》  
1945年  
徐悲鸿



《田间》  
1945年  
徐悲鸿



《蓝衣少年》  
1945年  
徐悲鸿

## But Man's World is Mutable, Seas Become Mulberry Fields

Because of the torments and humiliation I suffered at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, I was very easily moved by Mao Zedong's new positioning as seen in his inspection tour of the South and North. When selecting a subject for paintings, I chose precisely this, and sketched out a drawing of Mao on his inspections of the country, taking as a title of the work the line from one of his poems: "But man's world is mutable, seas become mulberry fields"<sup>1</sup>. I didn't employ the usual realist methods, but placed the figure of Mao as a symbol against a backdrop of a clouded sky. Behind him, all across the land of China flutter red flags. The sketch was approved very quickly, but when I was beginning to put it to canvas, I was notified that Mao's head must be painted by a young Red Guard, and that the body likewise should be painted by a teacher with a higher revolutionary consciousness than my own. As a "bourgeois intellectual capable of reform", I was only qualified to paint the background of the painting. I didn't have any reason to complain about this. For one thing, I was already very fortunate to have been allowed to take up my paintbrush again; and on the other, I thought that the layers of rolling cloud and the wide landscape seen from the bird's eye view was the most creative part of the painting.

The work was completed by Zhou Rui'an, Xu Junxuan and myself, and

ended up being very well received and reproduced in a wide range of prints in all sizes, with many cities going so far as to print it out on massive billboards. I heard that there was one hanging right in the main entrance hall of Shanghai Railway Station visible as soon as you walk in.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "But Man's World is Mutable, Seas Become Mulberry Fields" in *An Encounter with Life – Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.

<sup>1</sup> Note: The original text comes from "The People's Liberation Army Captures Nanjing, April 1949" first published by the People's Literature Publishing House in 1963 in the volume Mao Tse-tung Poems. The full poem reads: "Over Chungshan swept a storm, headlong,/ Our mighty army, a million strong, has crossed the Great River./ The City, a tiger crouching, a dragon curling, outshines its ancient glories;/ In heroic triumph heaven and earth have been overturned./ With power and to spare we must pursue the tottering foe/ And not ape Hsiang Yu the conqueror seeking idle fame./ Were Nature sentient, she too would pass from youth to age,/ But Man's world is mutable, seas become mulberry fields." (Official English translation from Mao Tse-tung Poems, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1976.)

1966年5月4日，毛泽东在中央政治局扩大会议上，第一次公开提出“无产阶级专政下继续革命”的理论。这一理论成为“文化大革命”的理论基础。

1966年5月16日，中央政治局扩大会议通过《五一六通知》，标志着“文化大革命”的全面发动。

1966年6月，毛泽东在《炮打司令部——我的一张大字报》中，第一次公开提出“炮打司令部”的口号，矛头直指刘少奇、邓小平等。

1966年8月，中央政治局扩大会议通过《关于无产阶级专政下继续革命的若干问题》，进一步明确了“文化大革命”的方针。

1966年10月，毛泽东在《炮打司令部——我的一张大字报》中，第一次公开提出“炮打司令部”的口号，矛头直指刘少奇、邓小平等。

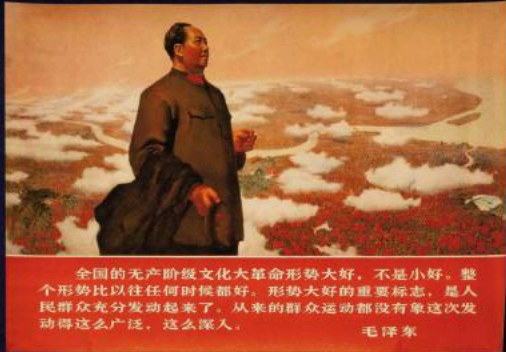
1966年10月，毛泽东在《炮打司令部——我的一张大字报》中，第一次公开提出“炮打司令部”的口号，矛头直指刘少奇、邓小平等。

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全国的无产阶级文化大革命形势大好，不是小好。整个形势比以往任何时候都好。形势大好的重要标志，是人民群众充分发动起来了。从来的群众运动都没有象这次发动得这么广泛，这么深入。

毛泽东



1966年10月，毛泽东在《炮打司令部——我的一张大字报》中，第一次公开提出“炮打司令部”的口号，矛头直指刘少奇、邓小平等。



1966年10月，毛泽东在《炮打司令部——我的一张大字报》中，第一次公开提出“炮打司令部”的口号，矛头直指刘少奇、邓小平等。



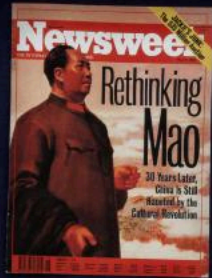
1966年10月，毛泽东在《炮打司令部——我的一张大字报》中，第一次公开提出“炮打司令部”的口号，矛头直指刘少奇、邓小平等。



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The years following the Cultural Revolution were nothing to write home about. Most of us common people were left to face the daily bitterness that remained after the social order had been completely smashed to pieces. The academy still hadn't begun accepting students again. Some of the faculty left to the countryside to build houses and started a school there. Those "left behind" in the cities met up every day and just sat around killing time doing "political studies". Our daughter grew up in these ordinary days amongst the members of this "peripatetic sect".

At the beginning of 1976, mountains of flower garlands and elegiac couplets piled up before the Monument to the People's Heroes. The square in front of Tiananmen was a sea of people, all mourning the passing of Premier Zhou in their own way among the mass of the crowd, my daughter and I among them.

At 3am on July 28, 1976 the sky and the earth shook at Tangshan, the tremors could be felt in Beijing continuously. In Nanjing, Shanghai and Nantong many moved their lives outside to "avoid the quake". In the evening I returned home to Hangzhou, I had to take my sleeping mat out to the exercise field to sleep. More than a month later, CCTV news began broadcasting mourning music for a long period of time, announcing the

passing of Mao Zedong.

In 1977, ten years after the Academy of Art had been last shut down, the gates were opened again and began accepting new students. The method of professional examination was restored, bringing many opportunities for those countless young people who nurture a passion and longing for art. The number of applications was staggering, the post office had to send a truck every day to deliver them all. All of the teachers spent morning until night looking through the thousands of applications, their eyes dazzled by what they saw.

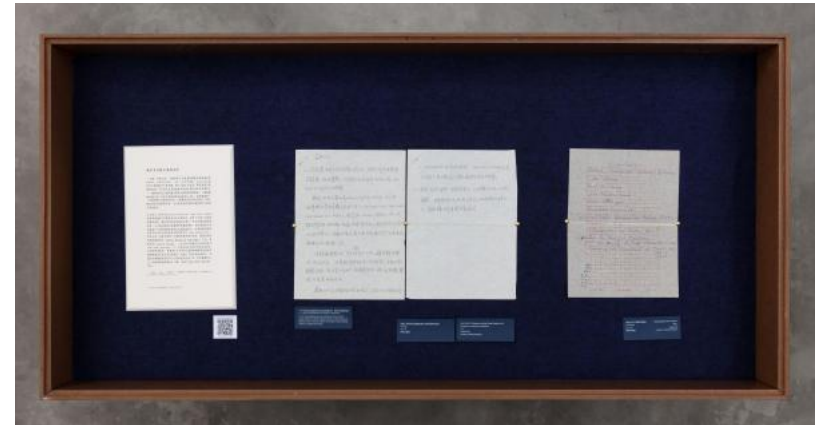
--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "But Man's World is Mutable, Seas Become Mulberry Fields" and "Hope Rises Up" in *An Encounter with Life - Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.



## I was supposed to go to Mexico

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese leadership began to arrange for academics to travel overseas to undertake studies, primarily in fields like technology, engineering and medicine, but there were also a few opportunities for those in the humanities and art. In 1979, I passed the examination set by the Ministry of Education to be selected to go abroad; I was lucky to be amongst one of the only young teachers from an art academy to be given the opportunity to go overseas. Back then, the first country that I had applied to go to was Mexico. My sister-in-law Naixin had introduced me to Mr. Yu Chengren who was studying abroad in Mexico, who in turn gave me the contact details for a few art academies in Mexico. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education didn't approve of my choice because I couldn't speak Spanish. At that time, it was really very difficult to find anywhere to learn Spanish in China.

I ended up going to the art department at the University of Minnesota in the United States. In 1982, I took advantage of a trip to Los Angeles to attend the annual meeting of the International Art Education Association and finally was able to realize my long-cherished wish of going to Mexico. At the Los Angeles airport, I exchanged my dollars for some quickly depreciating Mexican pesos and a few hours later landed in a smog-shrouded Mexico City. Yu Chengren and his wife were still at



university in Mexico and warmly arranged for me to stay with them in their dormitory. They also helped me get in contact with the office of the former president Luis Echeverría who was a staunch supporter of Sino-Mexican cultural exchange; introduced me to a number of well-known Mexican artists such as Arturo Bustos and Rina Lazo (who had previously visited China), Adolfo Mexiac, and Raúl Anguiano who had already exhibited his works in China, helping to organize visits to their studios or homes. In a short two weeks, I visited almost every single important mural and historical cultural site in and around Mexico City. I took a large number of slide photographs, recording these exciting experiences all along my journey. Afterwards I consolidated these thoughts and wrote an article titled "Impressions of Mexican Mural Paintings" which was published in the 1984 edition of *New Arts* magazine.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "Lu Xun introducing Rivera" in *Winds from Fusang: Cultural Dialogues between Mexico and China in the 20th Century*, Beijing Taikang Space Socialist Modernism Research Series

我本来是要去墨西哥的



万湖之域  
1981-1983



John Currington  
My Mother  
1995  
Oil on canvas  
10 x 12 in.



John Currington  
My Mother and Daughter  
1995  
Oil on canvas  
10 x 12 in.



John Currington  
My Mother  
1995  
Oil on canvas  
10 x 12 in.



John Currington  
My Mother  
1995  
Oil on canvas  
10 x 12 in.



John Currington  
My Mother  
1995  
Oil on canvas  
10 x 12 in.





Portrait of a woman  
with a necklace  
1974



Portrait of a woman  
with red overalls  
1974



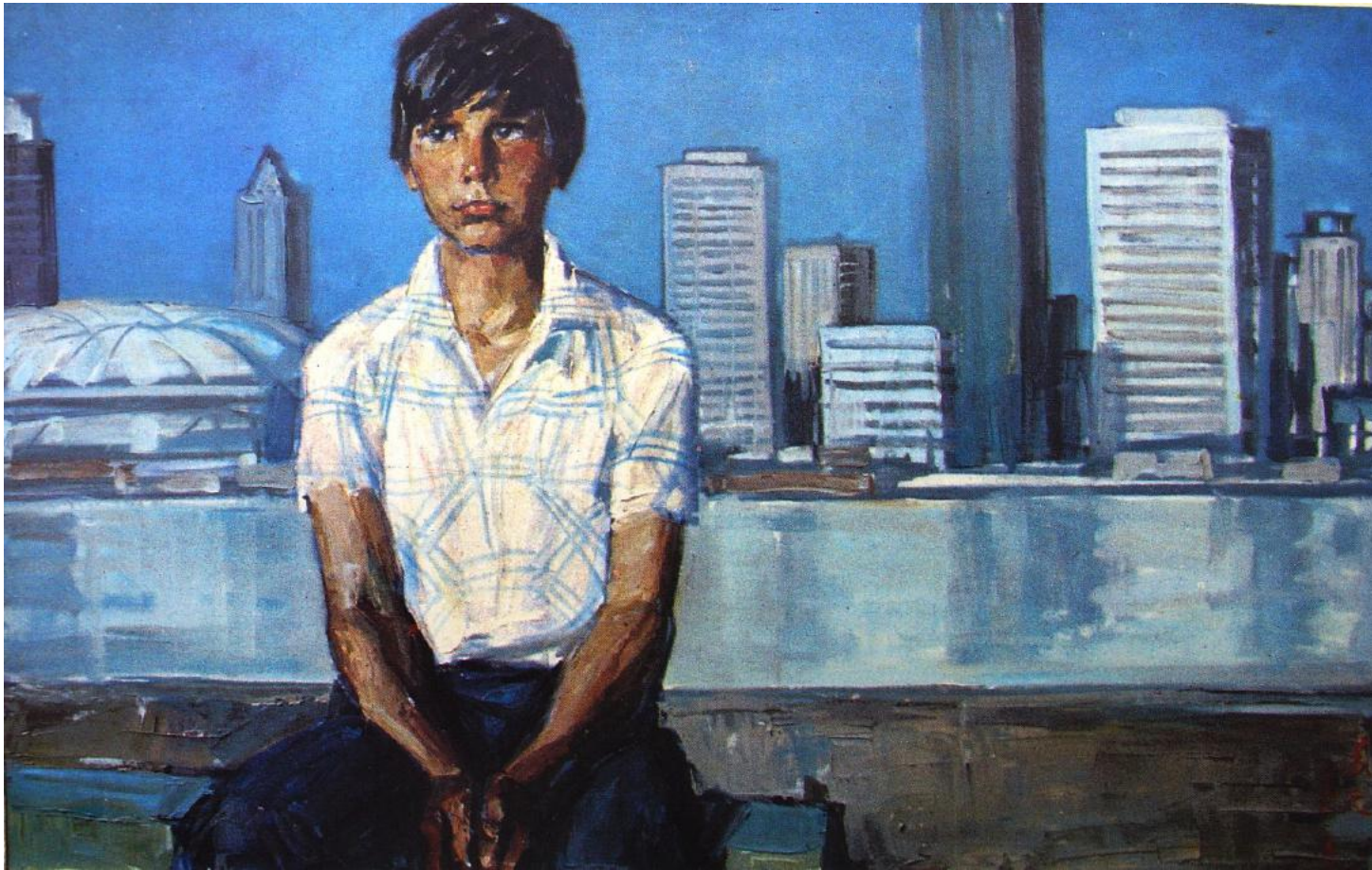
Portrait of a man  
in a white shirt  
1974



Portrait of a man  
1974



Group portrait  
1974



Native Boy in the City

1983

Oil on canvas

68 x 100 cm





Karl

1981

Oil on canvas

51 x 61 cm







## Journey to Europe/Trans-Siberian Railway

In the early summer of 1983, I began planning a trip to Europe, hoping to use this hard to come by opportunity to visit all as many countries as possible. I wanted to have a chance to visit those museums I had thus far only admired in books, and planned on ending in Moscow and taking the Trans-Siberian railway back home to China.\* I had made my decision and spent a few months applying for the visas for every country. In the 1980s, it wasn't easy for a Mainland Chinese person to explain their reasons for travelling to all these countries. I tried my best, but the faces of the visa officers still stared at me with suspicion every time.

Only when I landed at the airport in London and got off the plane did I begin to realize that it wasn't all just a dream.

\*Note: Route travelled by Zheng Shengtian in 1983: London-Dover-Brussels-Antwerp-Brugges-Amsterdam-Paris-Madrid-Toledo-Barcelona-Florence-Rome-Milan-Venice-Vienna-Munich-Tübingen-Cologne-Hamburg-Copenhagen-Stockholm-Helsinki-Moscom-Leningrad-Kiev

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "From the Thames to Lake Baikal" in *An Encounter with Life - Scan Oneself*, China Academy of Art Press, Hangzhou, 2013.



# 八十年代



贾尼斯·库奈利斯 Jannis Kounellis  
《两个形象》 1974  
布面油画 150x150cm



贾尼斯·库奈利斯 Jannis Kounellis  
《无题》 1974  
布面油画 150x150cm



贾尼斯·库奈利斯 Jannis Kounellis  
《无题》 1974  
布面油画 150x150cm



贾尼斯·库奈利斯 Jannis Kounellis  
《无题》 1974  
布面油画 150x150cm



贾尼斯·库奈利斯 Jannis Kounellis  
《无题》 1974  
布面油画 150x150cm



贾尼斯·库奈利斯 Jannis Kounellis  
《无题》 1974  
布面油画 150x150cm



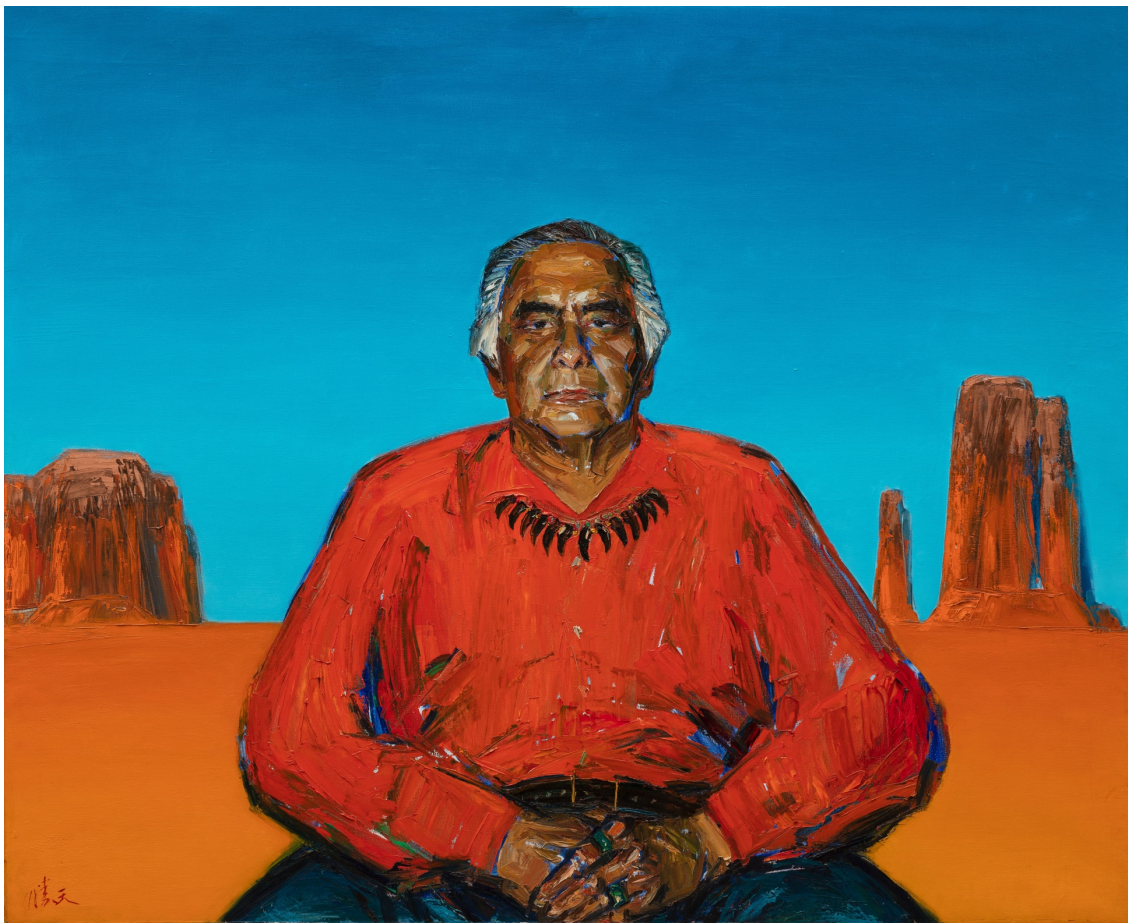


Lonely Tourists

1984

Oil on canvas

129x129cm



Indian Artist

1987

Oil on canvas

121.7 x 149 cm

## Two Lectures

**[University of Minnesota, 1981: Zheng Shengtian is among the first group of college instructors sent abroad for training after the Cultural Revolution]**

I remember the first time I was invited to speak in English at an academic symposium, about twentieth century art and art education in China. I pulled several all-nighters to prepare my lecture, but as the time came, I was still worried my vocabulary would be limited and my materials insufficient. After the symposium, the organizers collected audience feedback forms and sent them to each speaker. I opened the envelope with trepidation, and what it said was, "The content was good, but it was a bit too long." After that, I was no longer afraid to accept invitations to speak or give interviews. People at that time were very curious about artists from mainland China. I introduced the state of the arts in China, which most of them had heard nothing about.

—Zheng Shengtian, "Land of a Thousand Lakes," in *A Life of Encounters—Giving Myself a Full Scan*, Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Publishing House, 2013.

**[Upon his return to the Zhejiang Academy of Art, 1984]**

Not many people were able to go abroad during the 1980s, and those who returned were even rarer. Everyone yearned to understand the outside world. My personal experiences along with a large number of photographic slides, were quite a draw for audiences. I also let loose and spoke with great candor. I would go on for hours about everything from artistic trends to art education, from museology to ways of expanding one's knowledge. I was then invited to speak outside the academy, and then I really went wild. When I spoke at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Zhu Naizheng wrote out a poster in bold: "Zheng Shengtian Talks All About Western Art." I spoke for two hours and hadn't had enough. I came back to the auditorium after dinner to keep talking.

—Zheng Shengtian, "The '85 New Wave," in *A Life of Encounters—Giving Myself a Full Scan*, Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Publishing House, 2013.



The imagery of the “Zócalo” (the main public square of Mexico City) is used as the driving conceptual motif for “Zheng Shentian – I Was Supposed to Go to Mexico.” The Zócalo of the exhibition space is composed of archival materials from Zheng’s ongoing research on the artistic dialogue between China and Mexico in the twentieth century. According to Zheng, “My research on Sino-Mexican artistic exchange continues. But I put it into a larger context. Some art historians inherited the historiography of the two camps – the East and West – from the Cold War period and considered Western modernism and revolutionary realism as the two major trends in the development of Chinese art in the 20th century, which alternates as time evolves. Such a view is too simplistic. To a large extent, they ignore that there were alternative trends and practices between these two currents. Of which, neither classifies as officially promoted revolutionary realism nor fully equates with Western modernism or contemporary art.



## Lu Xun and Diego Rivera

In the first decade of the 20th century, Mexico and China were both stewing and launching their respective revolutions on either side of the globe. In 1911, the Díaz dictatorship and the Manchu government of the Qing Dynasty were both overthrown. After revolution, society in both countries suffered from long term chaos and unease, but an equally important challenge was how to educate their populations and lead them to agree with and accept the ideological concepts and goals of the revolution. In both countries, the majority of the population was illiterate, and inciting revolutionary consciousness became one of the most pressing tasks.

At the beginning of the revolution, Mexican artists had tried to use prints, murals and other traditional art forms as a means to express their concerns about their country's culture and present reality. In 1921, José Vasconcelos who had been appointed Minister of Public Education, proposed a grand plan for the creation of murals with government support. The plan advocated for the walls of modern government offices and public buildings to be the site of new murals, murals employing a visual language legible to an illiterate public to interpret Mexico's history, cultural identity and revolutionary ideals, echoing the murals painted by the ancient Mayas and Aztecs on the walls of their temples and graves. Vasconcelos not only succeeded in mobilizing many artists working domestically, but also those

living abroad in Europe like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who returned to Mexico and threw themselves into the work of mural painting. After executing incredible works including those at the National Preparatory High School, Palacio Nacional, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Chapingo Autonomous University, National School of Medicine, and at the headquarters of the Secretariat of Public Education, the artist gradually came to found and launch the renowned Mexican muralism movement in the 1920s.

At the same time in China, a similar intellectual-led enlightenment was commencing. Unlike in Mexico, language and literature was the medium for mass education, not painted images. Leaders of the movement like Chen Duxiu, Liu Dazhao, Lu Xun, Hu Shi and others advocated for colloquial everyday speech close to the vernacular to replace the classical literary Chinese that was difficult for the majority of people to understand. By employing a language and literature easily understandable by all, it became easier to spread advanced ideas on science and democracy to the population... Lu Xun was the greatest Chinese writer of the 20th century and was considered as "the chief commander of China's cultural revolution" by Mao Zedong. What's interesting is that it was also Lu Xun who first introduced Mexican muralism to Chinese readers. In the second issue of the first volume of the Shanghainese cultural magazine *Bei Dou* from October 1931, Rivera's *Night of the Poor* served as the cover image. On the transparent cover placed on front of the magazine was printed a brief introduction of the work written by Lu Xun.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "Lu Xun introducing Rivera" in *Winds from Fusang: Cultural Dialogues between Mexico and China in the 20th Century*, Beijing Taikang Space Socialist Modernism Research Series

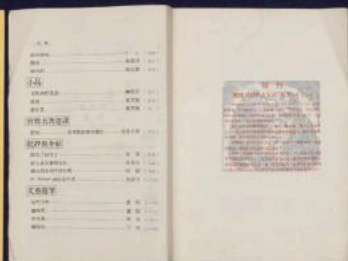
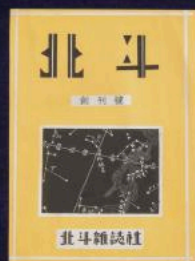


北斗星圖

一、北斗星圖之起源：北斗星圖之起源，可追溯至先秦時期。《史記·天官書》載：「北斗七星，指天而視，其星如斗，故曰北斗。」此為北斗星圖之最早記載。後世之北斗星圖，多係根據此書而繪製。其圖中，北斗七星之位置，與實際之天象，多有出入。此乃因古人觀星，多係以肉眼為限，未能精確測量之故。然其圖之基本輪廓，則與現代之北斗星圖，無大異也。

二、北斗星圖之流傳：北斗星圖之流傳，可分為兩派。一派為道教之北斗星圖，其圖中，北斗七星，多被賦予神格，視為降魔之利器。另一派為世俗之北斗星圖，其圖中，北斗七星，多被視為導航之工具。此兩派之北斗星圖，其圖式，多有不同。然其基本輪廓，則多相若。

三、北斗星圖之變遷：北斗星圖之變遷，可分為兩派。一派為道教之北斗星圖，其圖中，北斗七星，多被賦予神格，視為降魔之利器。另一派為世俗之北斗星圖，其圖中，北斗七星，多被視為導航之工具。此兩派之北斗星圖，其圖式，多有不同。然其基本輪廓，則多相若。



北斗星圖



北斗星圖

## Covarrubias in Shanghai

The first Mexican artist to visit China last century was Miguel Covarrubias. He was an important Mexican cartoonist, illustrator and archaeologist. Covarrubias was born in Mexico City in 1904. Already at a young age he exhibited enormous artistic talent, drawing illustrations for the Ministry of Education and other institutions from the age of 14. In 1923 when he was 19, Covarrubias emigrated to New York City where he quickly attracted the attention of the art world. His works began to appear in *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and other magazines. He served as *Vanity Fair's* Art Editor for ten years. Rivera held Covarrubias' works in very high regard, noting "in Covarrubias' art, there is no viciousness or crudeness, his satire is without malice and his humor is fresh and clear. His portrayals are also completely accurate." For a time, foreign magazines were imported into China through the foreign-owned Kelly & Walsh company. Kelly & Walsh could be found on Shanghai's bustling Nanjing Road, where they had a stand selling foreign newspapers and magazines. As the cartoonist Ye Qianyu recalls, "Zhang Guangyu and I would often go to Kelly & Walsh to look for these magazines...I just had to buy every edition of *Punch* from the UK, and both *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* from the US. It was in the latter we discovered the regular column of cartoons of celebrities done by the Mexican painter Covarrubias. Guangyu absorbed his own exaggerated style from [Covarrubias] while I studied his skills as a sketch artist." Chinese

artists were already brothers in spirit with Covarrubias before getting a chance to meet him.

In the early 1930s, Covarrubias and his first wife Rosemonde Cowan undertook two visits to Asia. In 1930 after they married, they chose Bali as their destination. The six-week ship voyage went via Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Manila and other cities along the way, so both on their way there and on the return, they spent time in Shanghai.

Covarrubias' brief sojourn in China would exert a deep and wide-ranging impact on Chinese artists. The most notable examples of this can be seen in Zhang Guangyu and Ye Qianyu. Ye recalls how he felt when meeting Covarrubias: "Covarrubias carried the tropical clouds and news from the poetic island of Bali with his arrival, this was such an inspiration to me, I felt like I was flying up in the clouds far above the world".

Of course, it was not only these two artists who were influenced by Covarrubias. We can see his influence in the works of Zhang Ding, Liao Bingxiong, Ding Cong, Yan Zhexian, Chen Jingsheng and others, who borrowed and appropriated Covarrubias' imagery. The 1930s were a golden age for cartoons in Shanghai, undeniably in part due to Covarrubias' visits to China. In the decades that followed, many members of Covarrubias' "Shanghai Gang" of artists would go on and become leading figures in the Chinese art world.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "Covarrubias meets the 'Shanghai Gang'" in *Winds from Fusang: Cultural Dialogues between Mexico and China in the 20th Century*, Beijing Taikang Space Socialist Modernism Research Series





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## 圣天藏书

郑圣天至今保存着20世纪五六十年代国外来华展览的几十本画册。从这些画册大致看来，这些展览内容不只来自当时社会主义阵营，也来自英国、法国、意大利、芬兰、丹麦等西方资本主义阵营，可见“国家”并不是当时开展文艺交流的唯一主体。而且，当时人们非常认真地交换对各自艺术发展的思考和意见，把文艺的互动看作一件大事。它不仅是国际左翼势力联结共生的手段，也是在一定范围内完成了社会革命之后，进行新的社会思想文化的汇筑，进行新社会中人的感性塑造的重要而切实的方法。所以这个过程中人们遇到的问题 和困难，进行的思考和努力，非常值得详加考察与体会。

——唐晓林：《在历史褶皱的深处：试析1956年〈中国美术家与墨西哥画家西盖罗斯展〉（纪实）》，《人和社会10：思想第三世界》（台北人间出版社，2019年）





中国 1956



## The Dream of Peace and the Nightmare of War

In 1949, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, all contact was cut with the capitalist countries in Europe and North America. Consequently, in 1950, when the Korean War broke out, China began to seek support from Asian, African, and Latin American countries and the left-wing intellectuals in the West. In February 1951, the World Peace Council (WPC) in Berlin suggested holding a peace conference for the Asia Pacific region. The Indian delegate proposed to hold it in Beijing and received unanimous support. Chinese leaders also saw that this conference would be beneficial for New China, which was facing hostile forces from all sides, and decided to make a determined effort to launch this first major international conference of the young republic. Premier Zhou Enlai was intimately involved in the organization of the conference and Peng Zhen was appointed as the preparatory committee chairman.

In June 1952, the preparatory meeting for the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions took place in Beijing and was attended by 47 representatives from 20 countries. The philosopher Eli de Gortarii was the chief representative of the Mexican delegation. De Gortari, along with another representative, Rafael Mendez, landed in Beijing on May 23. Reports about their arrival stated: "With hearts bursting with enthusiasm, coming all the way from distant Mexico to participate in this meeting, they disembarked from the plane and immediately showed a photo to their Chinese friends.

The photo was a small reproduction of a very large oil painting—the name of the oil painting was *The Dream of Peace and the Nightmare of War*, created by Diego Rivera, one of the founding members of the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions. In it, the leaders of the peace-loving people, Generalissimos Stalin and Chairman Mao Zedong are portrayed; the work also depicts the brutal atrocities and massacres against peaceful people committed by the US military. The delegates wanted to give this painting, a condemnation of war and a eulogy for peace, to the Chinese people, to express the Mexican people's desire for Peace."

According to an account in *World Affairs*, there was a reproduction of Picasso's *Dove of Peace* on the wall of the meeting room of the Preparatory Meeting for the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions held from June 3-6th, but on the last day of the meeting, on the wall across from *Dove of Peace*, a large, black and white reproduction of Rivera's work was displayed.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "Latin-American Art in Beijing in 1952" in *Winds from Fusang: Cultural Dialogues between Mexico and China in the 20th Century*, Beijing Taikang Space Socialist Modernism Research Series



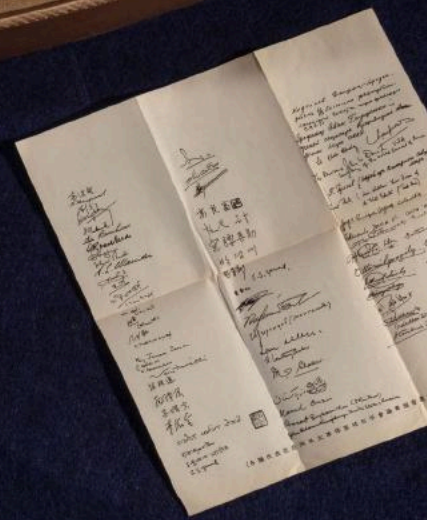




1954年12月，在曼谷舉行的亞洲及太平洋戰爭難民會議。會議旨在協助戰爭難民，並促進亞洲及太平洋地區的和平與合作。



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1954年12月1日，南華晨報報導亞洲及太平洋戰爭難民會議。報導指出，會議旨在協助戰爭難民，並促進亞洲及太平洋地區的和平與合作。



1954年12月，林彪著《保衛和平》。該書旨在呼籲亞洲及太平洋地區的和平與合作，並強調戰爭難民的困境。



1954年12月，近代在國民革命。該書旨在探討國民革命的意義，並強調亞洲及太平洋地區的和平與合作。



Handwritten notes and documents, including a letter dated 1955 and a document dated 1956.

亞洲及太平洋區域  
和本會議籌備會議

中華民國政府駐外館處  
外交部國際司

1956年西貢藝術展在中國的發展

### 1956年西貢藝術展在中國的發展

蕭冬芳

1956年西貢藝術展在中國的發展，是當時中國藝術界的一個重要事件。這個展覽會展示了西貢藝術家的作品，包括繪畫、雕塑和手工藝品。展覽會的成功，反映了中國藝術界對西貢藝術的興趣和重視。

展覽會的主題是「西貢藝術展」，由中國政府駐西貢領事館主辦。展覽會分為兩個部分：繪畫展和手工藝品展。繪畫展展示了西貢藝術家的作品，包括油畫、水彩畫和墨畫。手工藝品展展示了西貢藝術家的作品，包括陶瓷、木雕和竹編。

展覽會的成功，反映了中國藝術界對西貢藝術的興趣和重視。展覽會吸引了大量的觀眾，包括政府官員、藝術家、記者和公眾。展覽會的成功，也為中國藝術界與西貢藝術界的交流提供了平台。

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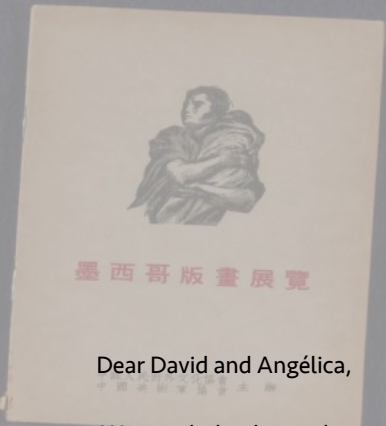
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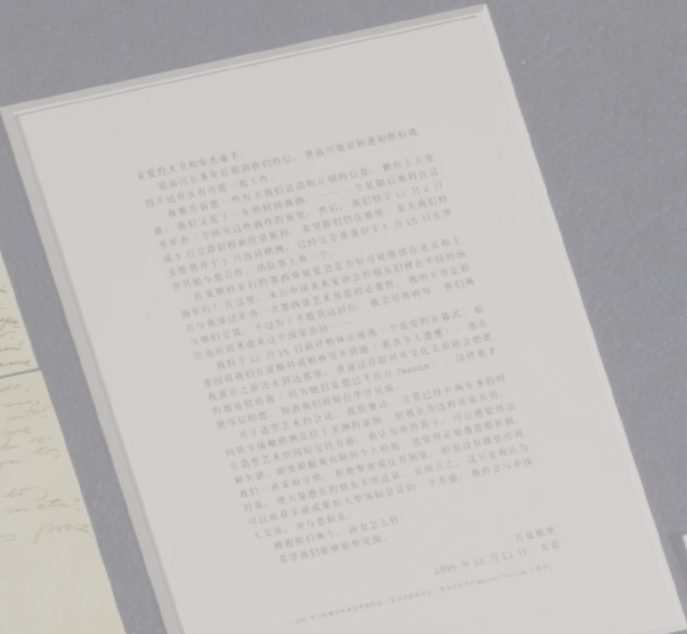
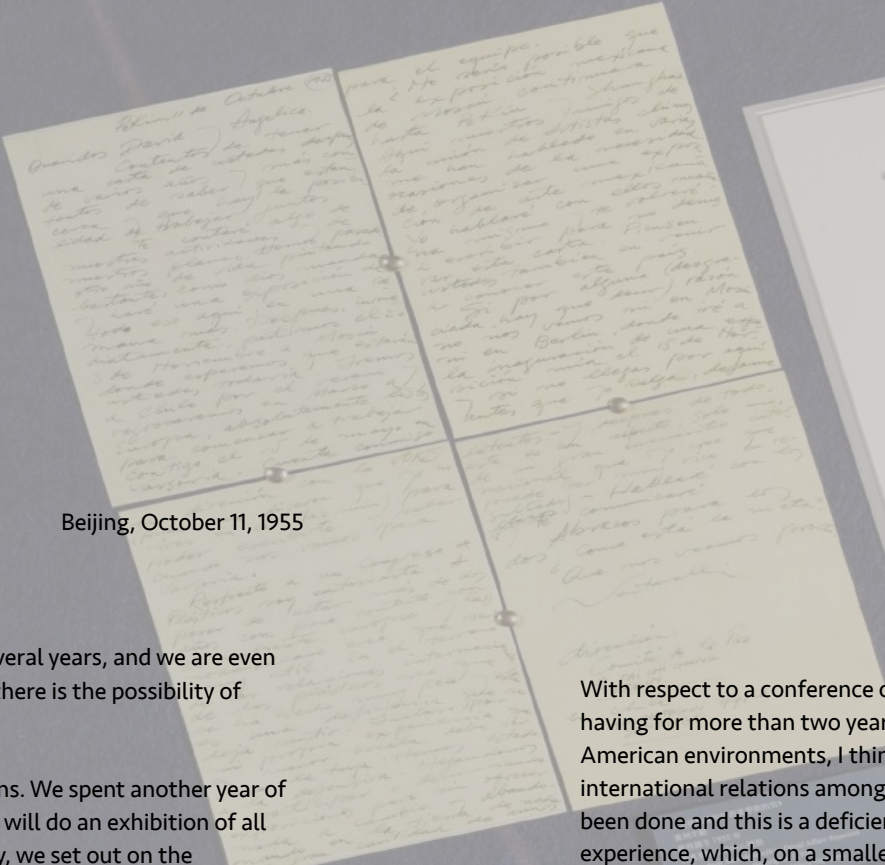
Beijing, October 11, 1955

Dear David and Angélica,

We are glad to have a letter from you, after several years, and we are even more glad to know that you are near and that there is the possibility of working together.

I will tell you some of our activities and our plans. We spent another year of life painting, which is as things should be, and I will do an exhibition of all that work here, in one week. Then, immediately, we set out on the November 2 or 3 to Moscow, where we hope that you will still be. We will go to Chile for the summer and return in March to Europe, absolutely ready to begin working with you on May 15 in Warsaw. Count on me for the team.

Would it be possible for the Mexican exhibition of Moscow to continue to Beijing and Shanghai? Here our friends of the Union of Chinese Artists have told me on several occasions of the need to organize an exhibition of Mexican art. I will speak with them tomorrow without fail and I will write to you again so not to delay this letter. The two of you should also consider coming to visit this country...



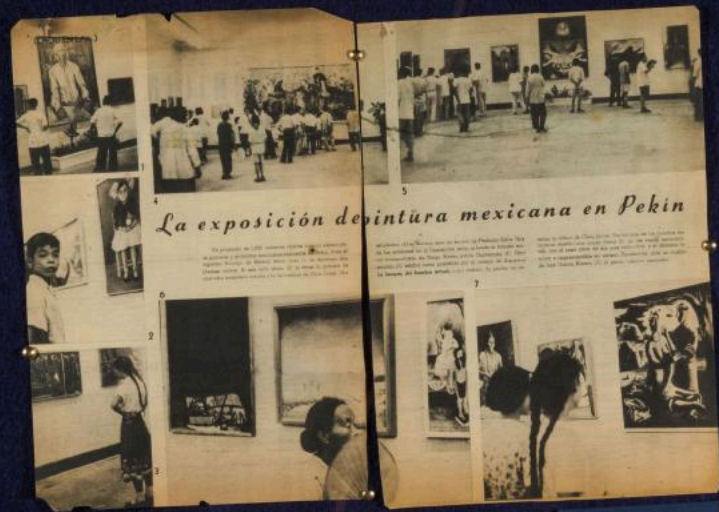
With respect to a conference of plastic art, I am enthusiastic. Despite having for more than two years little contact with the European and Latin American environments, I think it would be very useful. In the field of international relations among plastic artists I believe that very little has been done and this is a deficiency that can be felt. Even by my own experience, which, on a smaller scale, should be like yours. We have been on the defensive by refusing to participate or denouncing exhibitions, but without offering anything in return and leaving a great number of latent friends in no man's land. And, after all, this is an aspect, only one, of a large international meeting that I believe can be very rich in results. I will speak with the Chinese and will let you know.

Hugs for both of you. How is the granddaughter?  
May we meet soon.



Handwritten manuscript in Chinese characters, likely a historical document or letter.

1956年 中国 北京  
墨西哥全国造型艺术展览会在北京举行，这是墨西哥艺术史上第一次在亚洲举办的展览。展览展出了墨西哥著名画家迭戈·里维拉、何塞·克莱门特·奥罗斯科、阿曼多·博拉尼奥斯等人的作品。展览期间，还举办了墨西哥艺术家的讲座和音乐会。展览受到了中国观众的热烈欢迎，被认为是中墨文化交流的重要事件。



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The exhibition of Mexican painting and sculpture was held in Beijing in 1956. It was the first time that Mexican art was introduced to the Chinese people. The exhibition featured works by famous Mexican artists such as Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and Amado Bernal. The exhibition was a great success and was well-received by the Chinese audience.

墨西哥全国造型艺术展览油画版展览会  
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智利作家 万德斯勒文

智利作家万德斯勒文，1914年出生于圣地亚哥。他的作品以对社会现实的深刻批判和对人性的细腻描绘而著称。他的代表作《万德斯勒文》（Wanderer）讲述了一个流浪者的故事，反映了当时智利社会的种种矛盾和冲突。万德斯勒文的作品不仅在智利国内广受欢迎，也在国际上享有盛誉。

智利作家 万德斯勒文

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according to the old definition that is common to us the Latin Americans, a country of well dressed people, [beginning of illegible passage]with well-deserved respect of young people[end of illegible passage] and an old land, maybe the oldest of the world, a place that is walking with gigantic steps towards modernity, progress and peace. And speaking from artist to artists, I would ask you what have you done so the totality of your art creators, regardless of their current differences about content and form, have already united so tightly in the general struggle of your people, what in a short term will allow you to take to the aesthetic field the equivalent of the gigantic collective effort of all your nation.

Believe me, I will take to our lands of America as best as I can the great message of what you have done and continue doing.

--Excerpt from David Alfaro Siqueiros' writings regarding his visit to China in 1956, 1956

When I arrived to Beijing the painters, my Chinese colleagues, with that authentic humbleness and logic that today characterizes all the people of this country, asked for my advice about their artistic work. "Advice, to you?" I replied. Perhaps I could only present to you our Mexican experience of almost fifty years in what we call public art, this is, our experience in mural painting and printing, in all its aspects, positives as well as negatives, but that is all I can offer you in exchange for the many, almost incommensurable offerings, that you, the greater part of the people of your homeland, can give us, the people of Latin America [.....]

To all men of Latin America, you will tell us how you have made the miracle that an entire nation of 600 million inhabitants is now building a new society, always singing and laughing, even without the violence before enemies that seemed inevitable in all social transformations of magnitude. What do you do, tell us, so the young people and children go out euphorically to cultivate the land on Sundays and during all their spare time? And how the hell did you manage to completely fill with fabrics and workshops, new cities in immense extensions of your great territory. It is your responsibility, in short, to tell us how you have been able to make of your country, of your "Chinese misery,"





## Beijing Capital Airport Murals

In 1978, with the economy growing in step with the process of Reform and Opening Up, Beijing Capital Airport was expanded. The relevant authorities decided to commission mural paintings for the newly built Terminal 1. The person in charge of the new construction was the Beijing Deputy Mayor Li Ruihuan and he invited the Vice Principal of CAFA Zhang Ding and the Chairman of the Artist's Association Jian Feng to support the initiative and expressed that it was up to the artists themselves to discuss what they would paint and how to paint it. For an art world that had been ideologically constrained for such a long time, this represented an unprecedented opportunity. After more than ten months of work, the artists completed the dozen or so murals. These included Zhang Ding's colorful *Nezha Stirs Up the Sea*, Zhu Danian's ceramic tiled painting *Song of the Forest*, Yuan Yunfu's acrylic work *Mountains and Rivers of Sichuan*, Li Huaji and Quan Zhenghuan's acrylic painting *Legend of the White Snake*, Xiao Huixiang's pottery engraving mural *The Spring of Science*, Zhang Guofan's glazed pottery mural *Folk Dance*, and others. Yuan Yunsheng was offered the space in the corner of the main hall on the second floor of the building like he had requested. He chose a legend from the Dai minority people in Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province as his subject, using acrylic paints for his mural *Water-sprinkling Festival – A Song of Life*.

The murals for Beijing Capital Airport were the first largescale mural commissioned since the founding of the People's Republic and marked an important occasion in the resurgence of Chinese contemporary art after the Cultural Revolution. This was all taking place before the Stars Art Exhibition had been held. To the critic Yin Shuangxi, "the airport murals were the first pinnacle reached on the post-Reform and Opening Up journey of Chinese art towards modernity. When the murals were completed and revealed to the public on September 26, 1979, they received attention from all over and generated quite significant controversy triggering discussions on two issues: one on the issue of formal beauty, the other on the ethnicization of fine art. These two disputes remained important throughout the Reform and Opening Up period in the field of art theory. The airport murals are an emblem and a peak in the history of Chinese modern murals, and represent a milestone in the history of modern public art in China."

From the 1930s to the 1970s, Chinese artists had been waiting for an opportunity to allow the fire for mural paintings in their hearts to flourish. Zhang Ding, Yuan Yunsheng, Yuan Yunfu and others of that older generation of artists who contributed to the Beijing airport murals did not shy away from crediting the Mexican muralists for providing enlightenment for their work.

The airport mural initiative marked the prelude to a renaissance in Chinese mural painting. Beginning in the 1980s, alongside China's rapid economic growth, more and more murals began to appear on public buildings in cities across China. Every art academy began setting up their own departments of mural painting, leading to the gradual establishment of a comprehensive mural painting teaching system in China. Countless mural painters have since been nurtured through this system.

--Excerpt from Zheng Shengtian "The Renaissance of Chinese Mural Painting" in *Winds from Fusang: Cultural Dialogues between Mexico and China in the 20th Century*, Beijing Taikang Space Socialist Modernism Research Series



首都机场壁画  
1979





Winds from Fusang

2017

Acrylic on canvas

300 x 1200 cm







八十年代



和平的美梦和战争的噩梦 1954

1985





## Portrait from Sheng Project

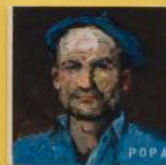
Since 2008, when Zheng Shengtian began writing his memoirs *An Encounter with Life*, he also began painting portraits of the people he has come across in his life. Zheng Shengtian has said that "life is like a square". The figures who have left a mark on this square were by no means selected based on any standard, but are part of a continuously evolving group of unordered figures, who knows when it will end. The portraits completed [as of the present] are: Lin Fengmian, Maxim Gorky, Anton Chekov, Gauguin, Tao Xingzhi, his father Zheng Ruogu, Van Gogh, Siqueiros, Orozco, Rauschenberg, Yan Peiming, Chen Danqing, Wally Nelson, Wang Guangyi, Fechin, Chen Yifei, Chistyakov, Konstantin Maksimov, Feng Zikai, Rafael, Lenin and Stalin, his mother Xiao Qinghua, Modigliani, Frida Kahlo and Rivera, Ba Ba, Renado Guttuso, Li Xianting, Li Dan, San Mao, Mao Zedong, Jo-Anne Birnie-Danzker, Miguel Covarrubias, Roman Verostko, Jose Venturelli, Dong Xiwen, Wang Qi, Popa, Keith Wallace, Zhao Yingsi, Varbanov, Cao Guoqiang, Käthe Kollwitz, Alice Neel, Zao Wu-ki, Kokscha, Chen Zhen, Huang Yongping, Geng Jianyi, Chen Dongtian, Lin Lin, An-mei Chen, Zhi Ping, Rina Lazo...

--Excerpt from "Portraits from Sheng Project", *YISHU=ART*, "A Proposal for Sheng Project", Long March Project Beijing and Hangzhou China Academy of Art Institute of Contemporary Art and Social Thoughts, 2021.


## 圣天作业系列之一——肖像

2008 — 持续中

自2008年起，郑圣天在撰写回忆录《偶遇人生》的同时，开始将他历来所遇所知的人物随机画成一幅幅肖像。他曾说：“人生就像一个广场。”这些在广场上留下痕迹的人物并不按任何标准选择，只是一组进行中的无序人像，也不知在何时结束。目前完成的肖像有：林风眠、高尔基、契诃夫、高更、陶行知、父亲郑若谷、梵高、西盖罗斯、奥罗斯科、劳生柏、严培明、陈丹青、尼尔逊、王广义、费中、陈逸飞、契斯恰科夫、马克西莫夫、丰子恺、拉斐尔、列宁和斯大林、母亲肖晴华、莫迪里阿尼、弗里达和里维拉、巴巴、古图索、栗克庭、李丹、三毛、毛泽东、乔安·伯尼·丹兹柯、珂佛罗皮斯、维罗斯科、陈安枚、万徒勒里、董希文、王琦、博巴、华睿思、招顺思、万曼、蔡国强、阿勒惠支、尼尔、赵无极、柯利希卡、陈箴、黄永砗、耿建翌、拉佐、和平、安吉亚诺、布斯托斯、墨西亚克、圭雷罗……







## Sino-Mexican artistic exchange

"My research on Sino-Mexican artistic exchange continues. But I put it into a larger context. Some art historians inherited the historiography of the two camps - the East and West - from the Cold War period and considered Western modernism and revolutionary realism as the two major trends in the development of Chinese art in the 20th century, which alternates as time evolves. Such a view is too simplistic. To a large extent, they ignore that there were alternative trends and practices between these two currents. Of which, neither classifies as officially promoted revolutionary realism nor fully equates with Western modernism or contemporary art."

--Zheng Shengtian, "Foreword," Winds From Fusang -  
Artistic dialogue between Mexico and China in the  
Twentieth Century, Socialist Modernism Research  
Series at Taikang Space, Beijing



**Zheng Shengtian** is an artist, scholar and curator based in Vancouver, Canada. He is the Managing Editor of *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, the Adjunct Director of the Institute of Asian Art, Vancouver Art Gallery, a Research Fellow at Simon Fraser University and a Trustee of Asia Art Archive in America. In the 1980s he taught at China Academy of Art in Hangzhou as Professor and Department Chair. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota and at San Diego State University. Since immigrated to Canada in 1990 he was the Chairman of Chinese Canadian Artists Federation in Vancouver, the Secretary of Annie Wong Art Foundation and co-founder of the Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (Centre A). As an independent curator, he has organized and curated numerous exhibitions including *Jiangnan - Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art Exhibitions*, *Shanghai Modern*, the 2004 *Shanghai Biennale*, *China Trade, Art and China's Revolution*, *Landmark* and recently, *Winds from Fusang : Mexico and China in 20<sup>th</sup> Century* toured to USC Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena and the Diego Rivera Mural Museum in Mexico City. He was the senior curator for Asia of *Vancouver Biennale* and won the Lifetime Achievement Award for his curatorial work. He is a frequent contributor to periodicals and catalogues and four volumes of his writing on art and culture were published by China Academy of Art Press in 2013. He has lectured widely at institutions including Harvard University, Columbia University, Princeton University, Stanford University, McGill University, Tate Modern, Getty Museum, San Francisco Asian Art Museum, M+ among others. His artwork has been showing in China, USA, Canada and Russia. Zheng received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 2013.



