

Et le souffle devient signe.

Curateurs

Martina Köppel-Yang | Joseph CUI

François CHENG

CHEN Zhen

HE An

Henri MICHAUX

YANG Jiechang

SHEN Wei

Mark TOBEY

Yangjiang Group

Charwei TSAI

19 septembre - 31 octobre 2024 | Vernissage jeudi le 3 oct. à 18h

espace temps

98 rue Quincampoix 75003 Paris

espace temps

98 rue Quincampoix 75003 Paris | Wednesday - Saturday 2pm-7pm
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PRESS RELEASE

And the Breath Becomes a Sign

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September 19th - October 31st 2024

Opening October 3rd, 6pm

Artists

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And the Breath Becomes a Sign (Et le souffle devient signe)

The exhibition *Et le souffle devient signe* (And the Breath Becomes a Sign) features works by nine modern and contemporary artists who focus on writing and its process. These include François Cheng, Henri Michaux, Mark Tobey, Chen Zhen, Yang Jiechang, Zheng Guogu and the Yangjiang Group, He An, Shen Wei, and Charwei Tsai.

The title, taken from François Cheng's eponymous book, describes his calligraphy with phrases such as "the imaginary power of signs," "a connection with the universe," and "shattering the absurd." He alludes to the Chinese tradition that views calligraphy, like poetry, music, and painting, as "an emanation of the heart." Writing also serves as a pathway to the subconscious in Western modern art. As Henri Michaux (1899-1984) remarked, "Who has not dreamt of capturing the essence of life more deeply, not with words, phonemes, or sounds, but with graphic signs?" In Chinese calligraphy and Arabic script, text and image merge thanks to the fluidity of ink and brush, which enable spontaneity and rapid execution. This has influenced artists like Cheng, Michaux, and Mark Tobey (1890-1976), a pioneer of abstraction. Tobey's *White Writings* transcends the literal meaning of words, exploring a "universal language." He believed painting should be approached through meditation, creating a space that reflects life's energy and the interconnectedness of all things, resonating with Chinese tradition.

For contemporary artists, writing and drawing offer opportunities for action and reclaiming space. Chen Zhen (1955-2000), He An (1971-), and Yang Jiechang (1956-) express a pragmatic spirituality, rooted in the present. For them, text and writing are essential tools for addressing contemporary issues. He An repurposes neon signs from public spaces, turning damaged ideograms into illuminated sculptures that recreate names or inspiring phrases. Yang Jiechang's video *OOH* (2023), made during the COVID-19 lockdown, captures his vocal outbursts while writing, serving as an auspicious litany. These works invite viewers not just to read, but to actively engage with new concepts and energy.

Shen Wei (1968-), Charwei Tsai (1980-), and the Yangjiang Group (Chen Zaiyan (1971-), Sun Qinglin (1974-), and Zheng Guogu (1971-)) incorporate writing into interdisciplinary, playful processes. Shen Wei, a choreographer, sees energy as the starting point of creation, expressed through body movements that are translated into imagery on canvas. Charwei Tsai inscribes Buddhist texts on natural objects like stones, shells, or mushrooms, forging a link between humanity and nature. The Yangjiang Group's photo series *After Dinner Calligraphy* (since 2012) documents calligraphy performances using ink and food remnants, reviving traditional Chinese scholar gatherings with simplicity and ingenuity.

This exhibition highlights the "imaginary power of signs" described by François Cheng through its diverse artistic approaches.

Curateurs

Martina Köppel-Yang

Dr. Martina Köppel-Yang is an independent scholar and curator specializing in contemporary Chinese art since the mid-1980s. She has authored extensive works on the subject, including her noteworthy Ph.D. thesis, 'Semiotic Warfare – The Chinese Avant-garde 1979 – 1989: A Semiotic Analysis' (Hong Kong: timezone 8, 2003), which has become a reference book on Chinese art from the 1980s. Additionally, she serves as a member of the advisory board of Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong.

Joseph CUI

Joseph Cui, director of espace temps, curator and art critics. Specialized in Chinese artists in France. He holds degrees in philosophy from the Ecole des Bernardins and in Comparative Literature from Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III. With a background of dedicated researcher, his focus holds within study consists of a whole century of Chinese artists in France, spanning from the beginning of the 20th to the actual generation. As a close associate of François Cheng, he has initialed to build up an archive of Chinese artists in France and to analyze the transcultural phenomenon of their artistic creations.

Artistes

François CHENG

François Cheng, born in 1929 in Nanchang (Jiangxi Province, China), is a French writer, poet, and calligrapher of Chinese origin. He became a naturalized French citizen in 1971 and has been a member of the Académie française since 2002. His work includes translations of French poets into Chinese and Chinese poets into French, essays on Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, monographs on Chinese art, poetry collections, novels, and an album of his own calligraphy.

Henri MICHAUX

Henri Michaux (1899-1984), born in Namur and raised in Brussels, was a Belgian-born writer and artist. After abandoning medical studies, he became a sailor and discovered literature through reading Lautréamont. Settling in Paris, he befriended literary figures like Jules Supervielle and explored various genres of writing, from poetry to travel narratives. Fascinated by painting since 1925, he combined writing with graphic arts. Michaux is also known for his experiments with psychotropic drugs, particularly mescaline, which he explored scientifically in his works.

Mark TOBEY

Mark Tobey (1890-1976) was an American abstract painter known for his unique "White Writing" style. After studying at the Art Institute of Chicago, Tobey worked in New York as a portraitist and fashion illustrator. He converted to the Bahá'í faith in 1918 and embarked on numerous travels to Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, where he studied Chinese and Japanese calligraphy. Starting in 1935, he developed a meditative painting style characterized by a flurry of signs, influenced by calligraphy and Zen aesthetics. His works, which influenced artists like Jackson Pollock, earned him numerous awards.

CHEN Zhen

Chen Zhen (1955-2000) was a Chinese visual artist. Placing the body, illness, and Chinese medicine at the heart of his work, Chen Zhen explored the relationships between matter and spirit, the collective and the individual, as well as interiority and exteriority throughout his life. Coming from a family of doctors fluent in both English and French, he aimed through his work to connect traditional Chinese thought with Western culture. Through his creations, especially his uniquely composite installations, Chen Zhen forged philosophical and sensitive links, bridging Western modernity with the traditions of Confucian and Maoist China.

YANG Jiechang

Yang Jiechang is a contemporary Chinese artist, born in 1956 in Guangdong. He lives and works in Paris and Heidelberg. Trained from a young age in traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting, he graduated from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Invited to exhibit at the Centre Pompidou in 1989, he eventually settled in France. He is known for his works combining layers of ink, ceramics, and sculpture, exploring political and philosophical upheavals.

ZHENG Guogu & Yangjiang Group

The Yangjiang Group is a Chinese artist collective founded in 2002 by Zheng Guogu (born 1970), Chen Zaiyan (born 1971), and Sun Qinglin (born 1974). The group's name comes from their hometown. Their work, primarily focused on calligraphy but also incorporating video and sculpture, is characterized by an apolitical and non-figurative approach, with a strong interest in the direct experience of the audience. Inspired by traditional Chinese art, they explore the connections between art, everyday life, and space. The collective also critiques the commercialization of art and seeks to promote the local art scene in southern China, away from the major centers of Beijing and Shanghai.

HE An

He An, born in 1970 in Wuhan, China, lives and works in Beijing. Since the late 1990s, he has transformed neon Chinese characters into emotional and visual landscapes that reflect the atmosphere of Chinese cities. His work spans various mediums, including installation, sculpture, and photography, often using industrial materials to create sensory narratives. He An's art engages with cultural, historical, and social issues, making his work relevant to both geopolitical and aesthetic discussions.

SHEN Wei

Shen Wei, choreographer, painter, dancer and director. Born in China's Hunan province, Shen Wei was trained in Chinese opera, painting, and modern dance. He moved to New York City in 1995 and founded Shen Wei Dance Arts in July 2000. His company toured 140 cities in 30 countries. Shen Wei is a recipient of a fellowship from Nikolais/Louis Dance Lab (2004), which is often regarded as the "Oscar of the Dance World", and the "MacArthur Genius Award" (2007). In 2008, he was invited to serve as the creative planner and choreographer for the "Scroll Painting" performance of the Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony. In 2022, Shen Wei received the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement in Choreography.

Charwei TSAI

Charwei Tsai, born in Taipei in 1980, is a Taiwanese artist with a degree in industrial design and art history from the Rhode Island School of Design. Highly personal yet universal concerns spur Tsai's multi-media practice. Geographical, social, and spiritual motifs inform a body of work, which encourages viewer participation outside the confines of complacent contemplation. Preoccupied with the human/nature relationship, Tsai meditates on the complexities among cultural beliefs, spirituality, and transience.

Partenariats

Association Les voies de l'art

The association "Les voies de l'art" succeeds the VIA Paris association (since 2013). With the aim of creating a new momentum, we have decided to pool our resources, establish ourselves in a permanent space (espace temps), and initiate this new identity: "Les voies de l'art" (given by François Cheng). This new framework will enable us to build a meeting place, develop more qualitative, relevant, and regular projects. The "Les voies de l'art" Association continues the mission of promoting intercultural exchanges and working in the wake of the academician Mr. François Cheng, who has always experimented with and sought artistic collisions between different cultures.

DSL Collection

The DSL Collection was created in 2005 by Sylvain and Dominique Levy, with Karen Levy also actively contributing to its development. The collection focuses on contemporary Chinese art, with a maximum of 350 works, featuring the creations of 200 contemporary Chinese artists. What sets the DSL Collection apart is its strict concept of collecting and its use of new technologies, such as virtual exhibitions and e-books. The collection promotes the discovery of contemporary Chinese art while encouraging openness, sharing, and a nomadic approach to culture.

La Galerie Jeanne Bucher Jaeger

Founded in 1925 by Jeanne Bucher, the gallery became one of the most vibrant artistic hubs in Paris from the prosperous period of the mid-1920s until the end of World War II, presenting uncompromisingly all movements, whether Cubist, Post-Cubist, Surrealist, Naïve, or Abstract.

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