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LA CENSURE SELON ZHANG DALI, ARTISTE CHINOIS – LA CINA È VICINA (BLOG MEDIAPART)

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Alexis Kouzmine- Karavaïeff, qui dirige IFA Gallery (Shanghaï) et Zane Mellupe ont eu l'excellente idée d'organiser, lors de la Art Basel / Hong Kong Art Fair qui se tient actuellement au HK Convention and Exhibition Centre, une exposition sur le thème de la censure dans l'art, « sensor ship 0.46% »

Cette exposition présente certains travaux des Gao Brothers – que je viens d'évoquer dans mon dernier billet -, de Dai Guangyu, auquel j'avais rendu hommage l'année dernière dans ces colonnes, et de Zhang Dali, qui s'est rendu célèbre jadis en « marquant » certains sites de Pékin en voie de destruction par ses autoportraits « destroy », bombant son profil géant sur les

murs à moitié dilapidés de la capitale.

Depuis plusieurs années, Zhang Dali travaille, preuves à l'appui, sur tous les trucages photographiques de l'ère maoïste, et ils sont nombreux, qui relèvent soit de la censure, soit de la propagande, soit des deux ! Objets d'étude et de critique d'un système totalitaire qui n'hésitait pas à tronquer la réalité pour magnifier le culte du Grand Timonier et éliminer ses adversaires.

Zhang Dali n'est ni le premier ni le seul à avoir montrer ces trucages. Son travail a surtout le mérite d'en montrer tous les aspects, non sans humour puisqu'il y a ajouté certains sceaux qui « authentifient » sa recherche.

Alexis Kouzmine-Karavaïeff, il est vrai échaudé par certaines mésaventures récentes avec la censure à Shanghai concernant une des œuvres des Gao Brothers, et Zane Mellupe, co-commissaire de cette exposition, ont posé les mêmes questions aux artistes qu'ils exposent à Hong Kong. Ces entretiens sont diffusés en boucle sur le site de l'exposition. J'ai choisi de donner ici de larges extraits des réponses faites par Zhang Dali à propos de la censure en Chine. Vous me pardonnerez de livrer le matériau brut, en anglais.

La clairvoyance de cette artiste est…aveuglante !

Pour illustrer le travail de Zhang Dali, voici deux images, l'une réelle, l'autre tronquée, avec le Président Mao et son alter ego et futur ennemi Liu Shaoqi, lequel a disparu par enchantement sur la seconde.

Zhang Dali répond aux questions qui lui sont soumises sur une tablette d'ordinateur:

(…) What details do you know about the censorship of art in China?

Actually, I don't know any details about censorship in China. The censorship system has never been explicitly written down — what works are allowed, what works aren't allowed — I've never set eyes on any such regulations. Maybe they exist in somebody's mind; maybe they're in some officials' heads. They might suddenly get an idea about a piece, and block it from exhibition because it might affect the image of the government or the nation. I don't know what's in their heads.

Do you feel the censorship system will become more relaxed in the near future?

I think the regulations might not exist someday; I hope so, but I really don't know how far off that day is.

What are the pros and cons of the Chinese censorship system specifically? Who benefits in the end?

Nobody benefits. Artists don't benefit, and the government doesn't benefit. When the government sets limitations on the artist's imagination and exhibitions the suppression negatively affects a nation's culture, and when the censorship system interferes with the artist's imagination, it ends up hurting his entire artistic career, so no one benefits.

Do you think there should be a system of censorship in any context? Why?

I don't think there should be any censorship; it shouldn't exist anywhere. If your works are censored again and again, and you even receive warnings from the government — would you keep going down your own path? Or do you begin to do work the government doesn't consider sensitive? Each artist is different, but I choose not to change my mind. I will continue to forge my own path for my work; it doesn't matter if the work can never be exhibited, because I don't create the works for exhibition, I create them for my imagination. So I don't mind the censors.

Some artists' works become more well-known after censorship. Do you think this is positive or negative?

I think this is negative. If artists start making a name for themselves through censorship, then artists will begin to create for the sole purpose of inciting censorship. This kind of work is meaningless; art has its own standards.

Do you think the censorship system is becoming more stringent?

The Chinese censorship system has not become more stringent; actually, it's the same as it always was. There haven't been any major changes.

What are you afraid of as an artist?

The most frightening thing to all artists is the absence of creativity and dreams. There comes a point when you can't think any bigger in terms of space, or come up with any more new and different creations; this is the most frightening thing for an artist.

In your opinion, what kind of art is censored the most?

In China, political art is censored the most; anything related to the government — that's what the government fears the most. If you paint a flower or a tree, no one cares; but if you truly start to question: is this regulation reasonable? Who are *we* in this system? What rights do we have? When you touch on these topics your works will most definitely be checked. This is a certainty; I don't know what it's like in Europe.

The Chinese government has begun to support contemporary art in China. Is this a sign that they want to control the art market? What do you think?

The market is quite big; it generates foreign currency – the Chinese government is paying attention to the art market because it generates a large amount of foreign currency. Contemporary art has been accepted by society; it's become a form of philosophy which is continuously transmitted; so the government should start to pay attention to it. The government shouldn't only pay attention to the market; they should pay attention to artists' ideas — this is very important.

Has the censorship system affected your work?

It hasn't affected my work; as I said before, I work in service to my ideas regardless of the censorship system, and my works exist within my own private space. I am able to complete my works; it doesn't matter how severe the system is.

What role do you think artists play in today's society?

Artists play the role of thinkers. We want to tell the public how a portion of people within society think.

What does art represent?

I believe artists should represent humanity's dreams.

Do you speak freely about the government's censorship system with everyone?

I don't talk about issues like this because I think the topic is meaningless; It doesn't affect my creativity. What interests you the most about the topic of artistic censorship? The relationship between the artist and the government — whether it is truly one of enmity. If the government wants to censor an artist's work, what are their reasons? That's what I want to know. If the government tells me I can't do a piece, then tell me the reason.

What is the justification for censoring art? How does it affect society?

Like the example I just mentioned: perhaps the reason is because one person should not violate another's personal property, or violate another's dignity – If the reason for censorship is justified, then I will comply with those regulations in the context of the present society and the present time.

What is the reason for censorship of art?

I think they should tell the artist whether they have formal regulations in place or if it's all based on a sudden fancy in some leaders' or some peoples' minds – they don't like a particular work so they decide it's harmful to the nation.

Zhang Dali

Zhang Dali's studio, Beijing
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