

ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART 尤伦斯当代艺术中心

Editorial contact:

Sybella Chow
+86 10 5780 0253
+86 186 1115 7030

sybella.chow@ucca.org.cn

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A Silence Louder Than Words

—Liu Jianhua turns up the volume in the UCCA Nave with *Screaming Walls*

September 24, 2011. Beijing.

This fall, acclaimed ceramic sculptor and installation artist Liu Jianhua unveils *Screaming Walls*, a large-scale porcelain installation that speaks to our past as well as our present.

The ceramic arts have had a long and fascinating history in China: from the Neolithic pottery of 10,000 years ago, to the earliest porcelain some 3000 years ago, to the exquisite vessels and vases of the Tang and Ming Dynasties, to today's most avant-garde porcelain sculpture, the medium has never stopped evolving.

Now, Liu Jianhua takes the art of porcelain to a whole new level with an installation that is both minimalist and grandly ambitious: over 200 pieces of gleaming black porcelain, ranging from 20 centimeters to 4 meters in length, that stand out in stark relief from the matte white walls of the UCCA Nave. The exhibition, which was specifically designed to suit the unique proportions and atmosphere of the gallery space, allows the viewer a brief respite from the chaos and clamour of the world outside, a quiet space free of distractions and ripe for contemplation.

In his exhibition foreword, UCCA Director Jérôme Sans describes it thus: "The 200-plus pieces of Jingdezhen kiln-fired black porcelain dripping down the walls like ink are as eye-catching as exclamation marks, as elegant as cursive calligraphy. They seem so inviting, beckoning us to read them, but is this a language we can understand? Whether we choose to interpret them as graffiti or words, marks or stains, traces left by some previous occupant or simply evidence of rain, Liu Jianhua's walls have something to say to us, if only we listen closely."

Artist Liu Jianhua notes that in this, his first UCCA solo exhibition,

“...there is a strong interaction between the work and the exhibition space: the two long white walls are like vast sheets of paper, with kiln-fired pieces of gleaming black porcelain appearing to drip down the walls like ink. These magnified ‘ink stains’ are like traces of the human mind, imprints of the human soul. When we leave the bustle of the real world and enter this tranquil space, our conflicted psyches are soothed.”

Toppling Porcelain from its Pedestal, Getting Back to Basics

Compared to Liu Jianhua's previous works, *Screaming Walls* is more abstract and open-ended. The simplicity of this installation leaves much room for interpretation, whereas Liu Jianhua's early works often had explicit social, political or economic themes. For example, 2002's *Obsessive Memories* featured a series of headless, armless female torsos dressed in colorful Chinese cheongsam, symbolizing both the vulnerability and the allure of the newly-opened Chinese market. Later works include a Shanghai skyline built of poker chips and dice, a series of “mass produced” objects rendered in white porcelain, and a collection of shattered white ceramic skulls, shoes, computers and other consumer items arranged in the shape of a crashed space shuttle. These early projects reflected not only Liu Jianhua's personal creative direction, but also China's rapid path to modernization.

Over the years, Liu Jianhua has gradually stripped away porcelain's ornamentation to reclaim its natural power. Now, with *Screaming Walls*, he offers us an empty room for our thoughts, a blank scroll on which to inscribe our hopes, dreams and fears. Using nothing more than stark black and white, he has created a work of art that speaks volumes...without ever uttering a single word.

Related Events at UCCA

Artist Talk: Liu Jianhua – Traces

Date: Nov 6, 2011 / 14:00-15:30

Venue: UCCA La Suite

Language: Chinese

Liu Jianhua Limited Edition Artwork at UCCASTORE

Liu Jianhua's *Play – 2009* series of limited-edition artworks are available at UCCASTORE. These female figures clad in colorful Chinese cheongsam are made of painted porcelain, a material that Liu Jianhua has worked with throughout his career. Both satirical and coquettish, *Play – 2009* reflects the roles we find in a modern consumer society

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(producer vs. consumer, the consumer vs. the consumed) as well as the roles determined by current gender and power structures (strong vs. weak, empowered vs. powerless, etc.) By juxtaposing these contemporary concerns with the traditional medium of porcelain and the elegant figure of a woman in a slinky silk gown, Liu Jianhua creates a series of artworks that are both thought-provoking and aesthetically beautiful.

About Liu Jianhua

Acclaimed Chinese sculptor and installation artist Liu Jianhua was born in Ji'an, Jiangxi Province in 1962. As a teenager, he began studying the traditional art of Chinese porcelain with a master craftsman in Jingdezhen. Later, after graduating from the Jingdezhen Institute of Ceramics with a degree in sculpture, he began producing his own artwork. For over two decades, Liu Jianhua has created sculptures and installations, mainly of ceramic and porcelain, in a vast range of styles that reflect not only his own artistic philosophy and sources of creative inspiration, but also the tremendous social and economic transformations that have shaped China.

Liu Jianhua's work has been widely exhibited in China and abroad. His major solo exhibitions include *Floating Landscape: Liu Jianhua's Solo Exhibition* (Z-art Center, Shanghai, 2010); *Dream in Conflict* (Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy, 2008); *Export - Cargo Transit* (Shanghai Gallery of Art at Three on the Bund, Shanghai, 2007); and *Daily · Fragile* (King's Lynn Art Center, UK, 2007). He has also contributed to numerous group shows and biennales in Vancouver, Shanghai and Venice (Venice Biennale – China Pavilion; Guangdong Art Museum, Guangzhou; Museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing). Liu Jianhua currently lives and works in Shanghai.

About UCCA

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is a non-profit, comprehensive art center founded by collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens in November 2007. UCCA presents exhibitions of established and emerging artists and develops a trusted platform to share knowledge through education and research.