

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

Song Dong: *Wisdom of the Poor* (2005-2011) —Leading Chinese artist pays tribute to Beijing's “homegrown ingenuity” in his first UCCA solo exhibition

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This summer, leading Chinese artist Song Dong pays tribute to homegrown ingenuity by transforming UCCA's exhibition halls and corridors into “the streets of Beijing” with a series of installations inspired by Beijing's traditional *hutong* alleyways and *dazayuan* communal courtyards. For Song Dong, who was born and raised in Beijing's *hutongs*, the simple wisdom and community values of Beijing's old neighborhoods are worthy of consideration and respect, and still have a lot to teach us.

Wisdom of the Poor, a project the artist has been working on for six years, features a series of installations constructed of wooden doors, old furniture, pigeon coops and other iconic objects familiar to any Beijing resident or visitor. In a sense, it is a continuation of Song Dong's widely-acclaimed “Para-pavilion” exhibit at this year's Venice Biennale, but this is the first comprehensive exhibition of the series to date.

For Song Dong, the “wisdom of the poor” refers to how people use their intelligence and ingenuity to improve their lives and living spaces. “I am interested in how the poor can achieve more space and more rights, a concept that has been with me my whole life,” he explains. “When I was young, I took it for granted, but when I got older and started doing research and interviews, the ‘poverty that runs in our veins’ turned out to be useful in helping to revive the neglected “wisdom of the poor.”

UCCA Director Jérôme Sans says that Song Dong's work “reveals how ingenuity, frugality and neighborly values – what the artist terms ‘the wisdom of the poor’ – have transformed our homes, streets, communities and lives... [He] reminds us that we are inheritors of a simple but valuable wisdom, a spiritual wealth that has little to do with material possession.”

A project 6 years in the making comes to fruition

For the past six years, Song Dong has been painstakingly collecting, recycling, and reworking materials from demolished courtyard homes in Beijing's traditional *hutong* neighborhoods, and using them to create stunning installations. His works reflect nostalgia and affection for a rapidly disappearing way of life. When Song Dong was growing up in Beijing's *hutongs*, he noticed how his neighbors and friends were in the habit of borrowing belongings, space and use-rights from one another, a practice he terms "borrowing rights". In the process of borrowing, lending and swapping rights, *hutong* residents found a balance between personal benefits and consideration for others, and transformed the aesthetics and social dynamics of entire neighborhoods.

For Song Dong, his UCCA solo exhibition has profound personal and artistic significance, and he plans to continue the series into the future. "There are many aspects to the wisdom of the poor...ingenuity, cunning, community dynamics and a certain level of powerlessness. It is a value system, a latent force mustered by ordinary people when they have no other choice."

Jerome Sans describes the importance of Song Dong's UCCA exhibition in a slightly different way: "In recent years, urbanization and development have wiped many of the old neighborhoods off the map, uprooting communities, eroding the 'social ecosystem' and causing people to become estranged from the past—and from each other. Small wonder that many feel nostalgic for Beijing's familiar *hutongs*, with their natural scenery, sense of warmth and community, and folk wisdom passed from generation to generation."

Exhibition in collaboration with The Pace Gallery, Beijing.

Related Events at UCCA

Children's Workshop: Incredible Edible Art!

Date: Aug 27/ 10:00-11:30 / UCCA La Suite

Guest: Song Dong

Language: Chinese with English translation

Artists' Talk:

Date: Aug 27 / 14:00-15:30 / UCCA La Suite

Guests: Song Dong, Ma Qiusha, Wang Shang

Language: Chinese

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About Song Dong

Song Dong (b. 1966, Beijing) studied oil painting at Beijing's Capital Normal University and played a pivotal role in the development of early Chinese avant-garde and performance art. With a varied practice that includes installation, video, performance, photography and painting, Song Dong tends to favor familiar, inexpensive, everyday materials. In his hands, stone slabs and tap water become a diary written in "invisible ink", thin slices of meat are molded into an elegant classical Chinese landscape, and his mother's old belongings form the basis of a stunning architectural installation.

Song Dong's work has been widely exhibited in China and abroad, in numerous group and solo shows and biennales. His notable solo exhibitions include *Song Dong: A Blot on the Landscape* (2010, Pace, Beijing); *Waste Not* (2009, MOMA, New York / 2005, Beijing Tokyo Art Project, Beijing); and *Eating the City* (2006, Selfridges, London, UK/ 2008, Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, Spain.) Song Dong lives and works in Beijing with his wife – and frequent artistic collaborator – artist Yin Xiuzhen.

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.