



## Society Guidance: Part I

Released May 18, 2019

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### Exhibition Period:

May 18, 2019 – August 18, 2019

### Location:

UCCA Central Gallery, New Gallery

Press material available at

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From May 18 to August 18, 2019, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents the group exhibition “Society Guidance,” featuring work by Chen Shaoxiong (1962-2016, Guangdong province), Ren Jian (b. 1955, Liaoning province) and New History Group, and Wang Jin (b. 1962, Shanxi province) in relation to their practice in the 1990s. “Society Guidance” focuses on the creative trajectory of Chinese artists at the outset of the 1990s, making work against the backdrop of the sweeping social transformation that occurred as economic reforms initiated in 1978 deepened and gathered speed. The exhibition provides an opportunity to revisit the early 1990s, an era which, though well studied in terms of individual artists and their work, is still processed in art historical narratives more as a period of transition than a distinct epoch. Taking place over two installments (the second on display from August 31 to November 24, 2019), the research-driven project takes a multi-disciplinary approach, presenting artworks alongside a reading room of archival materials. “Society Guidance” sketches out the circuitous route that led from the elite, intellectual culture of the 1980s to the collapse of values and search for meaning after the onset of consumerism in the 1990s, along with the strategies that artists adopted in response, whether retreating from the social sphere or diving headlong into emerging consumer culture. The exhibition is curated by UCCA Head of Exhibitions Bian Ka, who has previously engaged with related themes through his own practice as a critic and curator of independent projects.

“Society Guidance” (*Renjian Zhinan*, 人间指南) takes its title from the fictional magazine at the center of the 1991 Chinese television comedy *Stories from the Editorial Board*, (*Bianjibu de Gushi*, 编辑部的故事). Featuring some of the biggest stars of the day, including Ge You and Lü Liping, the program humorously introduced emerging social phenomena, shaping the public imaginary of the period. As such, the title may also be understood as referring to the desire for a new and durable system of values at a time of constant change, defined by new economic paradigms, shifting social norms, and collective feelings of anxiety and confusion.

In the 1990s, as China’s economic system and society rapidly changed, and a new corresponding system of values was as yet incomplete, the country made an abrupt transition to consumerism. This revolution had a profound and long-lasting impact on private life and public society. During this period, both intellectuals and the general



public fell under the sway of consumerism's economic driving power, producing unprecedented levels of prosperity and contradiction. The exhibition focuses on how artists examined and deconstructed this incomplete modernity. The narrative of the show traces how artists-as-intellectuals faced this dilemma, while also selectively glancing back at the origins of our current cultural situation, and the complexities and absurdities of the spectacular present.

Artists around China reacted to these changes through diverse means, with a particular emphasis placed on new media (taking advantage of the increased availability of cameras and video equipment), and iconic symbols of the global economy. In the southern city of Guangzhou, traditionally a key node for the transmission of foreign influence and trade into the country, Chen Shaoxiong took the urban landscape of the city itself as raw material for his "Street" series. The artist collaged together photographs taken in different parts of the city to create new scenes, turning himself into a permanent tourist, even within the place he called home. The video installation *Sight Adjuster-7* drops viewers onto a road in Guangzhou, simulating the act of visually scanning over a street scene to investigate the relationship between landscape, media equipment, and the viewer. In *Collective Memory - Big Pants*, the artist lets the public participate in a portrait of the city by pressing their fingerprints on the canvas, using personal touch to preserve and evoke urban memory. The "Landscape" series, and *7 Days of Silence*, undertaken as part of Chen's participation in the Big Tail Elephant Working Group, are presented along with supporting documents, illustrating how the artist confronted a changing reality that set a new relationship between the self and identity as an "observer."

As China moved into this unfamiliar new era, Wang Jin created a series of readymade paintings titled "Knocking on the Door," in which he rendered the likeness of the seven presidents and historical figures found on different denominations of United States Dollars on to old wall tiles from the Forbidden City. The piece was originally named after the Chinese idiom *qiaomenzhuān* (敲门砖), meaning "a brick picked up to knock a door and then discarded"—the metaphorical equivalent to a stepping stone, indicating how American currency was used to knock on the gates of contemporary China, opening the country to trade and serving as a symbol of its entrance into the global financial system. In this exhibition, the works appear as large photographic prints, the artist counterintuitively emphasizing the painterly qualities of the images by revealing the refined technique and aesthetic taste behind the portraits, as if to



obscure the ideological entanglements of the subject at hand. These later, reimagined versions of the works are given the subtitle, "Presidents on US Dollars."

Both in his solo practice and as a member of the New History Group, Ren Jian's work has opened up new avenues for discussion by directly engaging with, and even emulating, consumer culture. The exhibition hall will include a "New History Reading Room," featuring Ren Jian's solo works from the 1980s, and materials on his related practice as a member of New History Group in the early 1990s. Building from specific examples in his work, the exhibition outlines the clear shift in his creative journey as society reoriented towards mass consumption at the turn of the decade. The "New History Reading Room" juxtaposes the artist's visual work and creative texts with their original historical setting, allowing the audience to locate them within a broader context.

With its retrospective focus, "Society Guidance" traces present conditions back to their origin. Today, the term "consumption" no longer strictly denotes purchasing behavior that satisfies economic demand, having evolved into pervasive ideology that undergirds the production of knowledge, desire, and subjectivity. In today's globally interconnected China these contradictions have not disappeared, but have instead become all the more apparent. "Society Guidance" allows us to reexamine the work of artists from an era that has profoundly shaped our present, asking how the paths they forged may offer new possibilities for the future.

#### **About the Exhibition:**

Fengmi Technology and Shanghai HELU Culture Communication Co., Ltd. provide video equipment support. Exclusive audio equipment support comes from Genelec. Ergeng Video provides video recording technology support. Exclusive support for environmentally friendly wall solutions comes from Dulux. UCCA sincerely thanks strategic partner Aranya for its support for the exhibition.

#### **About the Artists:**

##### **Chen Shaoxiong**

Chen Shaoxiong (1962-2016, Guangdong province) was educated in the department of printmaking in the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Chen's practice encompasses a variety of artistic mediums, including photography, video, installation



and ink painting, investigating the ever-changing urban landscape of contemporary China. His major solo exhibitions include “Chen Shaoxiong: Prepared” (Power Station of Art, Shanghai, 2016) and “Chen Shaoxiong: Ink. History. Media.” (Seattle Art Museum, 2014). Chen’s work has also appeared in major group exhibitions such as “Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World” (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2017); “Xijing Man: Xijing Is Not Xijing, Therefore Xijing Is Xijing” (21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, 2016); “Sights and Sounds: Global Film and Video” (The Jewish Museum, New York, 2014); and “Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China” (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013). His artworks have also appeared in the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018); the Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture, (Shenzhen, 2017); and the 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012).

#### **Ren Jian**

Ren Jian (b. 1955, Liaoning province) holds Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts in Shenyang. During his time in college, Ren Jian met Bei Dao, Mang Ke, and Dao Zi, and together they established the “Northern Art Group,” a collective driven by the members’ shared views on culture. During his time as a graduate student, Ren created the series “Heaven & Earth” and “Primeval Chaos.” In 1988, after attending the China Modern Art Conference held at Huangshan, he started to work at Wuhan University, where in 1992 he cofounded “New History Group” with artists including Zhou Xiping, Zhu Xikun, Liang Xiaochuan, Yu Hung, Zhang Sanxi, Wang Yubei, Zhao Bing, Wei Ming, Dao Zi, and Fu Zhongwang; Ye Shuanggui, Ye Niu, Yu Youbin and Chen Mo joined later. During the 1992 Guangzhou Biennial, New History Group conducted their first performance, *Disinfecting*, recognized as an important artistic event of the period. In November 1992, the collective began planning *New History 1993, Mass Consumption*, a multimedia event involving music performances, fashion shows, and a sale of artifacts. In April 1993, the evening before the opening at the brand-new McDonald’s in Wangfujing, Beijing, the event was shut down by the city’s Public Security Bureau. The project was eventually realized later that year at the venues of Wuhan Clothing City, Wuhan Exhibition Center, and Wuhan Donghu Park. After 1995, New History Group gradually incorporated more elements from everyday life into their artistic practice, and members began focusing more on individual work. The solo exhibitions of Ren Jian and New History Group include “Inside Out; New Chinese Art” (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Asian Art Museum, Museum of Modern Art, and Asia Society and Museum, San Francisco and New York, 1998-2000); “China’s New Art, Post-1989” (Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1994);



and “China/Avant-Garde Exhibition” (National Art Museum of China, Beijing, 1989). His work has also appeared in “History: Not Always What it Seems” (OCAT Xi’an, 2015) and the 4th Gwangju Biennale (2002).

#### **Wang Jin**

Wang Jin (b. 1962, Shanxi province, lives and works in Beijing) graduated from the China Academy of Art in 1987. His artistic career begun in the early 1990s, and his practice involves experiments in various mediums. His major artworks include *Knocking at the Door*, *Fighting the Flood—Red Flag Canal*, *To Marry A Mule*, *Ice 96*, *Central China*, *The Dream of China*, *My Bone*, *Installation People’s Republic of China*, *Passport No.1295109*, *Wang*, and *Ursa Major*. He has participated in exhibitions including “Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China” (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014); “Power and Prestige: Chinese Dragon Robes, 18th-21st Century” (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014); “Mahjong, Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection” (Kunsthalle Hamburg, 2006-2007); and “Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China” (International Center of Photography, New York, 2004). His artworks have also been included in the First Guangzhou Triennial (Guangdong Art Museum, 2002-2003) and the 48th Venice Biennale, Venice (1999).

#### **About UCCA**

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art is China’s leading contemporary art institution. Committed to the belief that art can deepen lives and transcend boundaries, UCCA presents a wide range of exhibitions, public programs, and research initiatives to a public of more than one million visitors each year. UCCA Beijing sits at the heart of the 798 Art District, occupying 10,000 square meters of factory chambers built in 1957 and regenerated in 2019 by OMA. UCCA Dune, designed by Open Architecture, lies beneath the sand in the seaside enclave of Aranya in Beidaihe. Formally accredited as a museum by the Beijing Cultural Bureau in 2018, UCCA also operates non-profit foundations, licensed by the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Hong Kong government. UCCA’s commercial ventures include the retail platform UCCA Store, the children’s education initiative UCCA Kids, and collaborations and projects under the rubric UCCA Lab. Opened in 2007 and revived by a committed group of Chinese and international patrons in 2017, UCCA works to bring China into global dialogue through contemporary art.

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