



Ullens Center for
Contemporary Art
尤伦斯当代艺术中心

Editorial Contacts:

Ling Chen, UCCA
+86 10 5780 0252
+86 183 1025 4287
ling.chen@ucca.org.cn

Dylan Shuai
Sutton PR Asia
+852 2528 0792
phoebe@suttonprasia.com
dylan@suttonprasia.com

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Exhibition Venue:
Central Gallery

Press material also available for
download from the UCCA website

The Chinese Photobook

Released on 2 April 2015

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art and Aperture present “The Chinese Photobook,” an exhibition in six chapters offering viewers a glimpse into the complex history of modern China through this telling yet often overlooked medium.

The conclusion of an extended research project initiated in 2007 by photographic revolutionary **Martin Parr** and Beijing- and London-based, Dutch photography team **WassinkLundgren**, “The Chinese Photobook” reappraises the role and status of the photobook within the history of photography in China, adding deeper nuance to an evolving culture increasingly reliant on the mediated image. Unfolding in six chapters, the exhibition features documents from the early twentieth century through the present, inviting viewers to witness the evolution of modern Chinese history through the lens as wielded by nationals and foreign visitors alike. An often overlooked and undervalued medium, the photobook has been at the heart of Martin Parr’s concerns for many years, starting with the project *The Photobook: A History*, volume I, II, and III, in collaboration with Gerry Badger.

The UCCA exhibition follows the structure of the eponymous book, published in the US by Aperture and forthcoming in China from the China Photographic Publishing House. Staged in UCCA’s Central Gallery, the show includes over 100 photobooks displayed in vitrines, larger wallpapers reproducing key spreads and explanatory texts, videos which give a sense of the feel and structure of select books, and a reading room where certain books are made available for viewers to physically peruse.

“We are honored to present this exhibition which so elegantly and thoroughly traces not only the evolution of this medium, but the history of a nation,” said UCCA Director Philip Tinari, “and pleased to collaborate with Aperture Foundation and Rencontres d’Arles to close the loop by bringing this show, which debuted in Arles and continued to New York, ‘home’ to China.”

A History in Six Chapters

The exhibition begins with a section devoted to early endeavors in graphic printing, entitled **“From Empire to the People’s Republic of China (1900–1949).”** An invention imported from the West and popularized by the likes of Jules Itier, Felice Beato, and John Thomson, the camera was quickly adopted by the state for its capacity to inform a largely illiterate population with objective clarity. Books from this section contrast with the second section, **“Manchuria**



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and the Sino-Japanese War (1931–1947),” a collection of documents mainly produced by the Japanese in an attempt to justify their occupation of northeast China. Chinese examples protesting the occupation are also present.

The exhibition continues with **“The Image of a New China (1945–1966),**” demonstrating the key role photobooks played in the construction of national identity under Mao Zedong. With clean compositions and optimally lit subjects, the photographs unmistakably take cues from **“Talks at the Yanan Forum of Literature and Art” (1942).** These trends are compounded by increasingly strict rules on publishing as explained in **“State Publishing: The Cultural Revolution and Beyond (1966–Present).”** China’s state propaganda becomes increasingly efficient and sophisticated, but after Deng Xiaoping’s ascension to power, publishing restrictions are liberalized once again, resulting in a new era for printed materials that also include foreign language editions.

A surge of unofficial publications follows as seen in **“The Renaissance of Chinese Photography (1979–Present),”** with individuals reclaiming the medium for personal use. This chapter shows the excitement and diversity of recent Chinese photobook publishing, which has become an integral component in the documentation of conceptual and performance art. With collectors’ decidedly early investment in the nascent scene, Chinese contemporary art has been rapidly absorbed into the international arena. In spite of the, at times, chilly relationship with the outside world, China has continuously produced a wealth of inspiration for foreign visitors. The final section **“Global Perspectives on China (1949–Present)”** presents yet another facet to the story of China’s meteoric rise in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, with attention paid to the documentarians seeking extraordinary tales of industrial prowess and urban rejuvenation.

Opening to the public April 3 and running through May 31, 2015, the exhibition is co-produced by Aperture Foundation and Recontres d’Arles with the generous support of the China Art Foundation. Additional support is provided in part by Sondra Gilman Gonzalez-Falla and Celso Gonzalez-Falla, Marina and Andrew E. Lewin, and David Solo.

“The Chinese Photobook” at UCCA is part of the 2015 UK-China Year of Cultural Exchange program, and is supported by the Cultural and Education Section of the British Embassy and IELTS.

798 Art District
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北京市朝阳区酒仙桥路4号
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The exhibition premiered at The Rencontres d'Arles 2014 and appeared at Aperture Gallery, New York, during February 2015. The show will travel to the Photographers' Gallery, London, and several venues across China. Texts for the "The Chinese Photobook" are provided by Gu Zheng, Raymond Lum, Stephanie H. Tung, Ruben Lundgren, and Gerry Badger. The show is curated by Martin Parr and WassinkLundgren, with support from UCCA Assistant Curator Felicia Chen.

About Martin Parr

A key figure in the world of photography, Martin Parr is recognized as a brilliant satirist of contemporary life. In addition to his work as a photographer and curator, he is a renowned collector of photographic books, and the co-author with Gerry Badger of *The Photobook: A History*, volumes I, II, and III. He is a contributor, curator, and advisor to several other projects about the photobook, including "The Latin American Photobook." His own photographs have been featured in over twenty-five photobooks, and are in the collections of museums worldwide, including the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tokyo; and Tate Modern, London. Parr is the current president of Magnum Photos International.

About WassinkLundgren

WassinkLundgren is a collaboration between Dutch artists Thijs groot Wassink and Ruben Lundgren. Their work together includes book projects, exhibitions, and photography commissions. They met while studying at the Utrecht School of the Arts in the Netherlands and have worked together since 2005. They have produced over a dozen books, including *WassinkLundgren is Still Searching* (2006); *Empty Bottles* (2007); *Tokyo Tokyo* (2011); and *Hits* (2013), a catalogue published on the occasion of their solo show at FOAM, Amsterdam. They have received several awards, including the Prix du Livre at Rencontres d'Arles (2007) for best contemporary photobook; the China Academy Award (2010); and the award for best independent photo exhibition at the Lishui photo festival (2014). Thijs groot Wassink is based in London and Ruben Lundgren is based in Beijing. Their work is represented by Pékin Fine Arts, Beijing.

About Aperture

Created in 1952 by photographers and writers as "common ground for the advancement of photography," Aperture today is a multi-platform publisher and center for the photo community. Based in New York, Aperture produces, publishes, and presents a program of photography projects, locally and internationally.

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About the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is an independent, not-for-profit art center serving a global Beijing public. Located at the heart of Beijing's 798 Art District, it was founded by the Belgian collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens and opened in November 2007. Through a diverse array of exhibitions with artists Chinese and international, established and emerging, as well as a wide range of public programs, UCCA aims to promote the continued development of the Chinese art scene, foster international exchange, and showcase the latest in art and culture to hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

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