北京大学艺术学院
School of Arts
Peking University

Call for Papers

5th International Forum

CHINESE ART AND THE WORLD

Peking University, School of Arts

Beijing, 17-18 April 2027

"Stories of Art"

In his book *Stories of Art* (Routledge 2002), reflecting on the legacy of E. H. Gombrich's landmark *The Story of Art*, James Elkins writes: "Even with the increasing interest in non-Western art, the discipline of art history hasn't yet produced a textbook that could be an adequate replacement for Gombrich's."
Art-historical writing, whether confined to a single tradition or spanning multiple cultures, relies heavily on narrative. These narratives serve as essential interpretive tools for analysis; however, they are not neutral, as they embody assumptions specific to particular cultural and historical contexts. The 2027 International Forum "Chinese Art and the World" invites papers on the nature, forms, limits, and value of art-historical narratives, with a particular focus on their relevance to Chinese art history.
Is a project such as Gombrich's universal art history doomed to failure, or are its limitations merely the product of contingent biases and blind spots? Does Chinese art benefit from a pluralistic approach to art history? Did indigenous theorizing and historical writing about art in China also fall prey to the universalism often reproached in its Western counterparts?
This Forum is the 5th iteration of the "Chinese Contemporary Art and the World" Forum. Starting with the 2027 edition, the title reflects a broader concern with Chinese art across all time periods. This wider perspective is particularly appropriate to this year's topic, as the continuity or rupture between older and newer art is as much a matter of the works themselves as of how they are presented in specific art-historical contexts and narratives.
We invite papers that discuss the theoretical foundations of art-historical practice, particularly those that bear a clear relation to the Chinese context, as well as case studies. We also welcome submissions by curators, or on curatorial practice, a field where narrative construction often emerges before it is

canonized in art-historical writing. We are also interested in contributions from practicing contemporary artists who may wish to discuss how their practice relates to art-historical narratives.
Some more specific questions and sub-topics include, but are not limited to:

1. *Anachronism in theory, history, and practice.* Art historians and theorists frequently use concepts that were not available to the people whose practices they describe. Some criticize this as an irresponsible projection of contemporary categories and interests onto a distinct cultural and historical context. However, anachronism is hardly avoidable, and sometimes it seems more than a necessary evil, as it reveals blind spots or biases in the theoretical and art-historical production of the time it describes. What constraints govern the use of "anachronistic" concepts in theorizing art and writing its history? How does anachronism manifest itself in art-historical writing and curatorial practice?
2. *Art narratives in a postcolonial world.* Postcolonial critique has closely examined narratives rooted in cultural power relations, and the scholarly investigation of Chinese culture has not been immune to this scrutiny. Gu Mingdong, for instance, argues that Western and Chinese accounts of China are shaped by a "cultural unconscious" he terms *Sinologism* — a knowledge system whose distortions cannot be reduced to an example of Orientalism, and that calls for alternative postcolonial theoretical paradigms. This view prompts us to consider the tools used in the debate: are the conceptual frameworks from the postcolonial tradition sufficient to reinterpret Chinese art history without Western-centric bias? What kinds of postcolonial — or post-Sinological — narratives of Chinese art can be constructed?
3. *New China, new art?* Narratives of post-1949 China must engage with the fundamental question of whether, and to what degree, one may see continuity between the new and the old. What sort of continuity may one find between contemporary Chinese art and its historical counterpart? Does the curatorial world emphasize the break, or does it more often try to establish a continuous lineage? How do contemporary artists leverage their connection to China's artistic heritage?
4. *Narrative and ideology.* The question of how narratives may embody and advance ideological outlooks is of interest to both philosophers and historians. How do artworks carry meaning, and what is the art historian's role with respect to this content? Must historians adopt a neutral or non-committal perspective in narrating a particular moment in the development of art, regardless of how imbued with ideology it was? Is such neutrality even attainable? What strategies do artists employ to advance ideological goals, and how might they resist pressures to do so? How do art historians or curators justify their inclusion or exclusion of objects, artists, and practices within a given narrative? To what extent can historians and curators resist the demands of institutions, the market, or prevailing ideological

frameworks?

5. *Translation and the making of art history.* Art-historical narratives are often shaped by acts of translation: across languages, historical periods, conceptual traditions, and differing understandings of what art is. In the case of Chinese art, translating historical texts and critical terms has played a key role in determining how works, practices, and ideas become legible beyond their original contexts. What happens when terms and ideas developed in one historical or cultural context are carried into another? What is preserved, transformed, or obscured in the process? Can translation bring historical and contemporary understandings of Chinese art into dialogue without reducing their differences? And how have particular acts of translation shaped the ways Chinese art has been written about, exhibited, and understood within China and elsewhere?

Format: 20-minute presentation, 10-minute Q&A.

Submissions:
The forum invites submissions from early career scholars, PhD candidates, and practitioners (artists, curators, collectors, administrators) from any relevant background.

While the Forum's primary focus is Chinese art across periods, we welcome submissions that address a wide range of questions, provided they remain clearly relevant to the topic of this Call for Papers.

Paper proposals, in the form of a long abstract (approx. 500 words), along with a CV, may be sent by **15 February 2027** to the following address:

ccawpku@163.com

The authors of accepted papers will be notified by **22 February 2027**.

Free accommodation:
Participants selected to present at the Forum will be provided with one night of complimentary hotel accommodation.

Scientific committee:
Michael Cavayero (Peking University),
Matteo Ravasio (Peking University).
Veronica Di Geronimo (Peking University).
Yiying Liu (Peking University).
Sam Sklar (Peking University).