**The Wind Makes The Sky**

**The Perfect Path**

Art Museum China Academy of Art

10 November 2024 – 10 January 2025

Statement by **Luigia Lonardelli***Curator*

*The Perfect Path* is one of the ways to describe the concept of dao – the path that each of us is called upon to discover and pursue. Around this principle the exhibition gathers a group of Chinese artists who have distinguished themselves for their unconventional approach to artistic genre, with an open outlook mindful of tradition, which at the same time fully embraces the latest technological developments.

The first phase of *The Wind Makes the Sky* project starts in Hangzhou, a city much loved by Marco Polo. The journey through the places travelled by Marco Polo will not follow the *schèmata* of the Greek geographers, whose aim was to help the human imagination shape its idea of countries near or far whose boundaries could only be inferred, but will follow still-evolving paths that speak of our near future. La Biennale di Venezia inaugurates its journey titled *The Wind Makes the Sky,* a Confucian expression, with a collective exhibition to be held at the Museum of CAA, based on the research that has found fertile ground for growth at the Academy itself.

This is also an opportunity to present a stage designed by the artist Cevdet Erek from Istanbul, *Amfibio*, a modular and adaptable space of encounter and performance conceived, in its realisation and audio system, to be permeable to the architectural traditions and rhythms of the places through which it will travel. Many are the influences to be found in its design, ranging from the temporary architecture to the merchandise display systems to the aquatic structures; *Amfibio* preserves its dual nature in its very title, while the root of “amfi” refers to the idea of being around. This gathering space will travel to the next destinations as a shelter that can offer a place for respite and being together.

The exhibition *The Perfect Path* gathers the works of artists operating within the Chinese artistic system, which continues to reveal itself as one of the most significant areas of renewal in the languages of visual art, with the aim of portraying a generation that has envisioned and traced an original and innovative path rooted in a millenary tradition. *The Perfect Path* in this sense is understood both as the achievement of a personal signature style, and as the new atmosphere that has led Chinese art to engage with a near future that it has fully embraced. The exhibition seeks to present a panorama of the versatility within the individual careers of the artists who have developed many different techniques and

working methods, with particular attention to the installation-based and digital nature of the most recent experimentations. These works bear witness to an educational model that has furthered an interpretation of the fragilities of our time taking into account all the interstitial space that better than others illustrate the complex process of fragmentation that the modern world is undergoing.

The celebration of the anniversary of Marco Polo’s death is an opportunity to retrace the steps of a journey that not only led to the conception of a refined treatise on trade universally recognized for its extraordinary nature, but also represents the path towards the unknown of a young man who travelled through the familiar lands of the Middle East, through the Central Asian deserts, coming into contact with a new world and becoming fully part of it, without erasing the differences but acquiring a mutual language of respect and understanding. Today, over seven centuries later, the language of art still embodies that same instinct, both mad and sublime at the same time, to chase the thrill of the thirst for knowledge by turning the gaze eastward.

The Chinese contemporary art system, just a few months after the inauguration in Hong Kong of the seminal exhibition *China’s New Art, Post-1989,* had its first international appearance in Venice during the 1993 Biennale with the major collective exhibition *Passaggio a Oriente.* With *dAPERTutto,* the Biennale Arte curated by Harald Szeemann in 1999, ample exhibition spaces were dedicated to the area of Asian experimentation. In the decades that followed, Chinese artists definitively broke free of every last Orientalist interpretation, and found in the vernacular and the variety of languages a possibility for expression and a vision for the future. The exhibition highlights various approaches and capabilities, for example in the works of Qiu Zhijie and Gao Shiqiang with the Shanshui Creating Collective, which bear witness to a know-how driven by personal and innovative visions of the world, in which the western canon at times appears with an ironic spirit and at times cultivates a practice of citation that arises from a profound understanding of classicism.

While in the works of the younger generation of artists such as Cheng Ran and Kang Kaiwen, the languages that not coincidentally rely on the highest technology developed by that country, combine with traditional materials or those found inside the houses we were long confined to, to even include elements of absolute intimacy such as the dust and hair of Shi Bing and Lin Yi. These apparent contradictions, reflected in the changes of scale that fluctuate between monumentality and the intangibility of the works by Liu Wei and Feng Bingyi, mirror a society that has fully accepted the mutability of the modern world. It begins with an educational model that has deeply understood that art has broken free of an elite discourse to become a practical and theoretical tool for social innovation: a curriculum that fully constitutes a part of the productive system and effectively involves artists in society.

*The Perfect Path* also reflects upon the potential of schools to establish an open approach to all fields of knowledge. The exhibition also presents a selection of creations by the students of the School of Animation and Games and the School of Film Art, that stand out for their particularly innovative approach. The works presented here speak of a relationship untethered from classification within specific categories, and of a daily intimacy with the masters that generate a diversity of approaches: many of these artists’ biographies include teaching experiences, in an uninterrupted flow in which knowledge is conceived as a continuous passage constantly enriched with new experiences and achievements. These artists, born primarily in the 1970s and 80s, are fully aware of the disintegration of the promises of the twentieth century, but have not however lost an optimistic yet disenchanted view of the future, as in the works of Cao Shu and Yi Lian.

The works of Chen Liang and Dai Chenlian draw from their personal life experiences to build universal stories. Their works become tools with which to examine the collective imagination: with an irreverent and lucidly disenchanted spirit, they view contemporary phenomena as metaphors for a time in which personal and collective identities are constantly evolving and history is made in a continuous present time. *The Perfect Path* highlights their totally open and savvy approaches, looking to these trajectories as soul-searching practices that are not limited to the field of art, but view creation as a maieutic tool to understand the reality that surrounds us; an approach fully underscored by the extensive experimentation of Xu Jiang and Yang Fudong.

*The Perfect Path* is indeed the dao of man, the way that must be found for self-realisation, but it is also a path for searching for one’s own essence within society. The works of Ye Yufeng and Yuan Keru demonstrate a remarkable capacity to adapt to the eyes of those who will look at their works, eyes that have changed profoundly in recent decades. Without affectation, they experiment with channels, languages or media that at first glance are not always recognizable as part of the global artistic language. Their attitudes point to a route that is yet to be travelled, they are the trailblazers along an unexplored path who respond to the ancestral need to go just a little bit further.

In other works, such as the installations by Liu Yi and Ying Xinxun, time seems to expand, their experience does not accept a distracted gaze, but urges a profound reconsideration of our perception: the reflection on our visual culture and the imagery of our time is presented through statements whose power lies in their simplicity. These works do not seek to be understood, but offer themselves as decoding tools that might serve as compasses to understand our own individual paths: they are at the same time indications and avenues within as yet unexplored systems for representing the world.