

may aim at the political as the ultimate means of emancipation and absolute freedom from commodification—if such is still possible—but as brave as the intent here, the didactic predictability to which each artwork conformed routinely disappointed the surprise factor.

—Carolee Thea

BEIJING

Qiu Zhijie

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

Two sculptures by Qiu Zhijie, featured in a show of eight key Chinese artists, reveal that, even in three dimensions, Qiu still thinks like a calligrapher. His creations morph from the painterly to sculptural installation, but his most cogent works remain focused on ink. His early work *Tattoo* (1997) saw the Chinese word *Bu* (*No*) slathered in rich red ink across his bare chest, and in *Ten Tang Poems* (2000–01), reversed calligraphy literally vanished into nothingness. Ink culture

and writing are ingrained in the Chinese soul, and it is difficult for Westerners to fathom the deep effect that a character-based language and its compulsory brushstrokes can have on the psyche. The hours required to memorize the strokes that compose a single word are formidable.

Qiu has that type of hand/eye motor coordination hard-wired into him, and when he leaves the realm of stroke, ideogram, ink, and allusion to linguistics, his work loses velocity. For instance, *Ataraxic* consists of two enormous glass gourds stoppered with enlarged stainless steel syringes. The bubble-like transparent globes are populated with air and lethargic black butterflies that occasionally pat their pretty wings together. Perhaps the sleepy creatures are a metaphor for China's treatment of its natural resources, but the big gourds (placed like lumps in the middle of the gallery) lack focus.

The second sculpture, *All Those Whom I Have Forgotten*, offers a pro-

found look into pollution, toxicity, and, in a backhanded way, the beauty of ink. The roar from the 15-foot-high black waterfall overwhelms any other sound, and the musky smell of the thick ropes of cascading ink is as theatrical as an exhibit in a theme park. Approaching the sculpture, one is unavoidably splattered by the misty black spray—I tasted it on my tongue. An inky pond surrounds the waterfall, bubbling up into a makeshift frothy lagoon encased in an undulating metal frame. The lagoon is populated with stuffed black crows mounted on black sticks. There is a gorgeous lushness in this immersion, as if the horror of pollution is wiped out by the sheer adoration of the medium. In dealing with his first love, Qiu shines. It is as if the repetition of the ink stroke, even if abstracted and removed from its original meaning, is his real *raison d'être*.

—Ellen Pearlman

DISPATCH

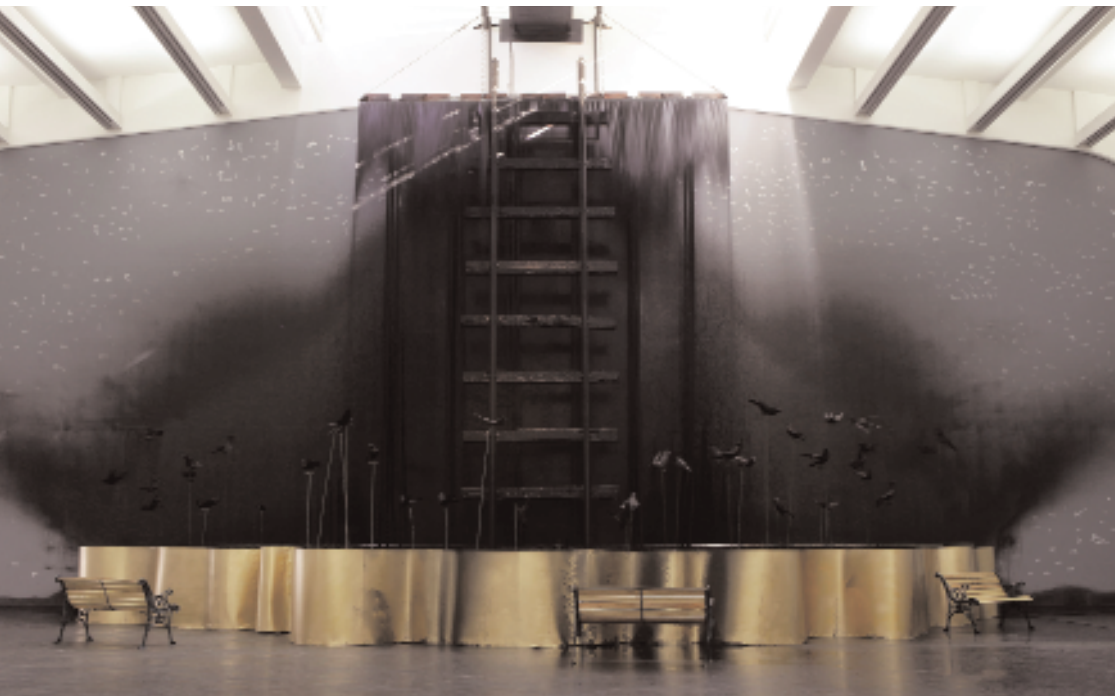
New Directions in Performance and Sculpture

Performance art has become ubiquitous in New York: archived, sold by commercial galleries in limited editions, and celebrated annually by numerous institutions, including Creative Time, Performa, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and AIOF—Art in Odd Places. Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Governor's Island also have annual performance series in place. Last fall, Performa included a Lust Weekend inspired by Futurist Valentine De Saint-Point and a sizzling, comic reading by Tracey Emin, as well as a food art banquet. Three high-level examples of craft, concept, and sculpture in performance art stood out in the busy fall season.

At the 2009 Pinta Art fair, Philadelphia-based Peruvian artist Cecilia Paredes painted herself into Chinese and Japanese tapestries. She *became* those tapestries—a stand-in for the countless women effaced by centuries of subservience and bondage in Asian cultures. When she transformed one side of her body into a snake, the rest, including her head, was buried under tons of sand. As a fish, a dragonfly, and an armadillo, Paredes was exploring non-human forms that most of us take for granted. She becomes “other” bodies—creatures whose existence is peripheral, marginal. All of her disguises are constructed with beauty and craft—classic notions that Paredes updates with a contemporary understanding of spiritual, mythical, and secular states of being.

During four sold-out performances at the biennial Performa festival, up to 100 people per night entered the crotch of a giant spacesuit to view 35 models parading “space couture.” *Mother Earth, Sister Moon*, a collaborative *Gestamtkunstwerk* involving theater, monumental sculpture, and music, was created by Christian Tomaszewski and Joanna Malinowska, Polish-born New Yorkers whose

Qiu Zhijie, *All Those Whom I Have Forgotten*, 2009. Iron, ink, iron rails, railroad ties, water pump, and bird specimens, 15 x 10 x 7.5 meters.





history-laced projects merge Western and Eastern cultures. This piece alluded to Andrei Tarkovsky, Stanislaw Lem, Pawel Althamer, and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, among other sources. For example, the 50-foot-long Tyvek spacesuit paid homage to Russia's first female cosmonaut, Valentina Tereshkova, and is sized to "fit" Niki de Saint Phalle's *She-A-Cathedral*. Masami Tomihisa's accompanying futuristic music combined voice, cello, electric guitar, piano, acoustic bass, and three kinds of percussion. Adults, as well as children, became Lilliputian participants in an orchestrated drama that included a friendly giant brown bear and a bar serving milk. Tomaszewski teaches sculpture at Princeton and is the recipient of numerous awards. Malinowska's 2009 projects included a solo show at Manhattan's Canada Gallery and a Guggenheim Fellowship. This year, their mega-cosmonaut was included in "The Future Under Communism," at the Nottingham Contemporary Art

Above: Duke Riley, *Those About to Die Salute You*, 2009. **Top right:** Cecilia Paredes, *Rhythmic Garland*, 2009. **Right:** Christian Tomaszewski and Joanna Malinowska, *Mother Earth, Sister Moon*, 2009.

Center in England, and Malinowska contributed an installation and performance to "Knight's Move" at the SculptureCenter.

Duke Riley is a maestro of history-tinged naval performance art. In *Those About to Die Salute You*, he staged a battle between green- and red-helmeted, armor-clad Museo del Barrio and Queens Museum teams on a former World's Fair pond in Corona Park near the Queens Museum. As the sun was setting, costumed viewers consumed abundant free alcohol and danced to a raunchy live band at the museum before heading to the pond where dancing girls revved up the crowd. Soon, the teams manned historically styled boats, including a Venetian gondola with giraffe heads

fore and aft, an old model Staten Island ferry, and a tank-like submarine, all setting forth from a harbor complete with Roman-style buildings. As the teams "fought," viewers opened prepared boxes of microwaved tomatoes and melons and plunged into action in the shallow lake. Riley made no attempt to micro-manage the resulting melee, which quickly got out of hand. The burning of the Queen Mary II in effigy and a fireworks display signaled that it was time to dry off and go home. The freedoms (the trajectory of the battle was in the hands of the participants and viewers) and framing devices (an ancient city, incongruous fleet, historic park setting) of this performance piece made it great.

One feels strangely revitalized sitting (enwombed) inside a giant belly listening to space music and watching wild-looking mannequins enter and exit by unzipping various body parts. A naval battle is different. More dangerous, it was also a trumped-up war in a neighborhood where gang warfare still exists. Both pieces carried a strong message, yet their particular aesthetics and viewer participation were equally important. Performance art at its best, as in these works, involves synaesthesia, capturing your full attention with its parts—its core, its score, its body, how it uses time and space—whether or not it has something to say, and whether or not it changes your point of view.

—Jan Garden Castro