

CfP: Symposium “Cohabitation – Worlding the Sinophonecene and Planetary Aesthetics in Contemporary Art”, Sat. 3rd June 2023, online (zoom)



Zheng Bo, “You are the 0.01%”, installation view at Oi Art Centre Hong Kong, 2021, courtesy of the artist.

2nd International Gathering of the Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Art (ReNetMoCoCA)

Organizing Team: Cila Brosius (independent curator), Nora Gantert (Freie Universität Berlin), Claudia König (Heidelberg University), YiYi Liang (Freie Universität Berlin), Xuan Ma (Utrecht University)

Host and Chair: Franziska Koch (Heidelberg University)

The Hong Kong based artist Zheng Bo uses the phrase “You are the 0,01%” to highlight the infinitesimal role that humans play in the planet’s biomass. Using grass as an organic medium, he creates a living sculpture of the shockingly small number that stands in complete disproportion to the disastrous impact humans have had on Earth. Zheng is one among a growing number of artists in the Sinophone world, who investigate different forms of **cohabitation** and interspecies relationships, prompting viewers to consider what **planetary thinking** means in relation to being **locally situated**.

Following these artists' lead, the symposium "Cohabitation – Worlding Concepts of the Sinophonecene and Planetary Aesthetics in Contemporary Art" will explore the particularities of planetary aesthetics within the Chinese context—a region that, after historically suffering from the consequences of modern anthropocentrism and mass industrialization, has recently developed into the key driving force of global capitalism and extractivism. It is also a region that is intrinsically linked to traumatic experiences of imperialism and colonialism, followed by other authoritarian regimes, which effectively up-rooted earlier cosmological understandings and aesthetic negotiations of man's (minor) place in the world. Therefore, despite an increasingly shared awareness, the growing environmental concerns expressed in artistic practices from the 1970s and onwards in Europe and North-America have reached the Sinophone world differently.

Since the 1970s, human-made catastrophes such as nuclear melt-downs, deforestation, sea pollution, and consequences of global warming have repeatedly driven people into the streets and urged artists to take action around the globe. The natural sciences have prominently responded with a growing cross-disciplinary discourse crystallizing around the concept of the **Anthropocene** (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) that provoked a range of alternative concepts in the humanities such as **Capitalocene** (Malm 2016; Ruccio 2011, Haraway 2016) and **Chtulucene** (Haraway 2016). The latter critically acknowledge the global crisis caused by anthropocentrism, but seek notions of the world that allow for a more relational and a less human-centered worldview. Post-modernist and post-colonial discussions in the field of art history have been particularly informed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's book *Death of a Discipline* (2003) proposing a planetary frame to reconsider natural spaces as intrinsically related with us and inhabited by powerful non-human agents, who counteract the hierarchical political and human-centered spaces defined by globalization. The discussion has grown to include literature, visual arts, and cultural studies that explore the idea of planetary aesthetics (Elias and Moraru 2015; Ballard 2021) and propose an alternative "worlding" through art (Pheng Cheah 2008; Kaiser 2014; Peeren 2022; also compare the project "Worlding Public Cultures" 2020-23). It asks to un-learn the hegemonic and violent modern episteme that revolves around the dichotomy between nature and Man with a capital "M", conceiving of himself as the (white, male) master of the universe (Sylvia Winter 2003). More recently, and in productive tension with it, the concept of the **Sinophonecene** has been introduced, highlighting the considerable environmental impact of the greater Chinese region as one of the most densely populated areas on the planet (Hai 2022).

Our symposium will build on these suggestions by querying the fundamental observation of "the planetary as a post-anthropocentric framework [that] shows artistic engagements of

environmental issues as both locally grounded and simultaneously planetary” (Hai et al. 2022, 25). We will focus on **artistic practices regarding cohabitation as a spatially defined as well as an inter-species related response** to this challenge.

What resonates differently with the aforementioned concepts is the question of **how we can inhabit the planet with other species in a conscious manner**. This question allows us to tease out local cultural, (art) historical, biological, cosmological, and aesthetic aspects of the planet and planetary practice in order to further challenge the notion of the Anthropocene.

We welcome **case study-based contributions** that respond to one or more of the following questions, but do not have to be limited to them:

- How does art from the Sinophone region negotiate the planetary complex and respond to the climate breakdown, capitalist extractivism, and environmental destruction?
- What kind and how does art envision, enable, or even perform ideas and practices of cohabitation?
- Are there culturally or historically specific ways of imagining interspecies relationships, non-human centered cosmologies, and modes of cohabitation?
- Is a term like “Sinophonecene” opening a new chapter of planetary discussion? Or does it inverse the cultural essentialist, nationalist, and human-centered thought of a “Chinese way” that contradicts a relational positionality?

We invite proposals for English presentations of 20 min. length. The symposium will take place **online (via Zoom) on Saturday, June 3rd, 2023**. We intend to publish selected, revised contributions in a themed issue of a peer reviewed publication (planned for 2024).

The proposals should include:

- Abstract of proposed paper (max. 500 words) with a bibliography
- Short biography of speaker (max. 200 words)
- Contact information of speaker

Please send it no later than **December 1st 2022** via email as a single PDF file (file name: name_title.pdf) to **mococa@web.de**

The symposium constitutes the second international gathering of the **Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Art** and hopes to institutionalize the format on a geographically rotating, annual, (hybrid) basis, invigorating the network that was founded in 2015. The informal, grass-root based association welcomes new members free of charge. To apply for membership, please send a letter of motivation that outlines your academic focus or other engagement related with modern/contemporary art of the Sinophone world and its diasporas.

The network also greatly appreciates receiving calls for papers, announcements of scholarly/exhibition activities, announcement of member publications and their reviews, as well as job opportunities to publish on the network's blog: [Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art – ReNetMoCoCA \(hypotheses.org\)](https://hypotheses.org).

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