

# ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART 尤伦斯当代艺术中心

## GU DEXIN: THE IMPORTANT THING IS NOT THE MEAT

March 24, 2012. Beijing, China

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art is honored to present a major retrospective of work by Gu Dexin (b.1962, Beijing) spanning three decades of this artist's vast and varied output. Entitled "Gu Dexin: The Important Thing is Not the Meat," it marks the first comprehensive attempt to showcase and elucidate one of China's most complex and original artistic voices.

An outsider with no formal training, Gu Dexin first came to prominence on the Beijing art scene with a 1986 solo exhibition at the International House in Beijing of paintings and works on paper that spanned various styles. In 1989, he was among three Chinese artists included in the epochal exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" at the Centre Pompidou, in what was arguably the first international display of contemporary art from China. Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, he responded to invitations to participate in a long wave of "China shows" with installations of fruit, meat, and plastic that consciously refused to engage with the symbolic legacies of High Socialism. Gu so disliked the idea of imposing a given reading on his viewers that he titled his works first with serial numbers, and later simply with the date on which they were completed.

"Gu Dexin: The Important Thing is Not the Meat" traces the full arc of Gu's solo career, from his amateur paintings in the late 1970s through his climactic final piece of 2009, bringing together nearly 300 works. In doing so, it presents Gu's work as an alternative history of the development of contemporary art in China: his early paintings toggle readily among the Western styles then being digested, just as his later performative installations foreshadowed larger debates over acceptable forms and materials both inside the Chinese art world and in the nascent international interpretive community around it.

Elements and sequences that appear in his earliest work recur

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### Media/UCCA Members/VIP Preview: February 24th

Exhibition dates:  
Mar. 25<sup>th</sup> – May. 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Curator: Philip Tinari (UCCA  
Director)

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throughout his oeuvre—apples and sides of meat first depicted in paintings resurface later as real objects in installations; the fantastical humanoid figure world of his earliest watercolors, pen drawings and embroideries forms the basis not only for later sculptures but for the flash animations that became part of the artist's daily practice starting in the late 1990s. His ultimate decision to end his career and return to “normal” life in the same Beijing residential compound where he grew up and made nearly all of the work on view has been read by many commentators less as a rejection of art than a protest to society.

The exhibition takes its title from a 2003 article by the artist and critic Qiu Zhijie, the title of which was itself a response to the 1996 article “The Important Thing is Not the Art” by the curator Li Xianting. In this article, Li wrote on behalf of a then-marginalized group of painters and sculptors (including Gu) whose significance he saw in terms as much social as aesthetic. Qiu wrote in defense of his own later generation, the “Post-Sense Sensibility” artists, a group which provoked public ire and official censure with their gory experiments involving animal and even human flesh around the turn of the 21st century. This title, like this exhibition, positions Gu as the missing link between these two generations and their respective concerns.

Since Gu left art for good in 2009, this exhibition has been assembled entirely by loans from private collections in China, Europe, and the United States. Curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari, it draws heavily on the collection of the Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation (Geneva), which holds over one hundred of the artist's works from every stage of his career. Other lenders include the DSL Collection, Tim & Ellen Kim Van Housen Collection, Guan Yi Collection, Xin Dong Cheng, Weng Ling, Shanghai Gallery of Art and Galleria Continua. This is the second time Gu's work has been featured at UCCA, the first being the center's inaugural 2007 exhibition ‘ ’85 New Wave: The Birth of Chinese Contemporary Art ’.

## Related Program

### smart Artists' Talk Series: Debating Gu Dexin-The Important Thing is Not the Meat

Time: April 8 (SUN) 13:00 – 15:30 Venue: UCCA Auditorium

Moderator: Philip Tinari (UCCA Director)

Guests:

Karen Smith (writer, curator, critic)

Qiu Zhijie (artist, curator, educator)

Fei Dawei (curator, critic)

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Feng Boyi (curator, critic)  
Language: Chinese with English Translation

## About UCCA

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is a comprehensive, not-for-profit art center serving a global Beijing public. Located at the heart of the 798 Art District, it was founded by collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens and opened in November 2007. Through a wide array of exhibitions and programs, UCCA promotes the development of the local artistic environment, fosters international exchange, and showcases the latest in art, design, and other fields. UCCA's cultural and educational programs bring the public into close contact with cutting-edge thought in art and the humanities, advancing the public cultural sensibility and bringing new experiences to its audience.

[www.ucca.org.cn/](http://www.ucca.org.cn/)

## About Gu Dexin

Gu Dexin was born in Beijing in 1962 and received no formal art education. He lives today in the same chemical-factory housing compound where he grew up and made most of his work. His breakthrough exhibition of paintings and works on paper was staged at International House in Beijing (1986); he then continued developing his conceptual practice throughout the 1980s, founding the Tactile Sensation Group in 1987 and the New Analysts Group with artists Chen Shaoping and Wang Luyan in 1988. Recognized as a principal representative of China's '85 New Wave movement, Gu was one of three Chinese artists invited to participate in "Les Magiciens de la Terre" at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1989, making him one of the first Chinese contemporary artists to be shown in a global setting. Gu continued to exhibit widely through the 1990s and 2000s, participating in shows abroad like "Next Phase" (London Docks, London, 1990) and "Another Long March – Chinese Conceptual Art" 1997 (Fundament Foundation, Chasse Kazerne, Breda, The Netherlands, 1997), as well as seminal exhibitions in China like "Fuck Off" (Eastlink Gallery, Shanghai, 2000) and the First Guangzhou Triennial (Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002). He also participated in the Taipei Biennial (1998), Chengdu Biennial (2001), Gwangju Biennial (2002) and Venice Biennale (2003). Gu became increasingly frustrated with the art world, though, and in 2009 he decided to quit. After a final show, "2009.05.02," at Galleria Continua in Beijing, Gu left the scene. He continues to live with his wife in Beijing, but no longer participates in exhibitions or events.