



Hans van Dijk:

5000 Names

2014.5.24 –2014.8.10

UCCA

Ullens Center for
Contemporary Art
尤伦斯当代艺术中心

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Dutch-born, Beijing-based curator, scholar, and dealer Hans van Dijk (1946 – 2002) was a foundational influence on contemporary art in China. His myriad contributions include the seminal 1993 exhibition “China Avant-Garde,” the first major show of Chinese contemporary art in Europe; the New Amsterdam Art Consultancy (NAAC), which connected Chinese artists with collectors and curators abroad; and the China Art Archives and Warehouse (CAAW), an experimental gallery and exhibition space.

Hans van Dijk acted as a teacher, curator, dealer, and scholar in a time when art infrastructure in China was virtually nonexistent. He taught artists how to manage themselves and the minutiae of the art world: how to curate and have their shows curated, pack artworks, fill out loan forms, and show to local and international collectors. Critically, he was one of the first to view these artists within their larger context, both as a continuation of Chinese art history and as a part of international contemporary art practice. Van Dijk worked against predominant post-colonial attitudes, encouraging Chinese artists to see themselves as equal contributors to a global cultural dialogue.

Based on extensive interviews and archival research, “Hans van Dijk: 5000 Names” considers his legacy as it looks at the major artists he championed and the scene they inhabited during the 1990s. The exhibition is grouped chronologically according to significant periods in the scholar’s life. A collection of documentary material from Holland, Germany, and the NAAC/CAAW archive in Beijing includes catalogues, personal correspondence, and photographs, recording in depth van Dijk’s life and work within an emergent art scene. Complementing these documents are works by Chinese artists with whom van Dijk worked closely. Van Dijk’s contribution to the introduction of photography as contemporary art into the Chinese and international art world are examined closely, and several historical works by figures originally included in van Dijk’s exhibitions are recreated or reassembled. Together, these documents and works offer an immersive look into the world of a critical figure whose legacy has only just begun to be unpacked, reopening not only the conversation surrounding van Dijk and his manifold contributions to Chinese contemporary art, but the history of the 1990s in Chinese art and culture more broadly.

The final element of the exhibition is van Dijk’s life’s work: a meticulously organized, staggeringly comprehensive lexicon of over 5,000 Chinese artists born between 1880 and 1980, documenting the history of the country’s modern and contemporary art. The lexicon, discovered on van Dijk’s computer in preparation for this exhibition, is a groundbreaking document compiled over decades that details the exhibition and publication history of virtually every important Chinese artist of the twentieth century. As exhibition curator Marianne Brouwer notes, “There has been a longstanding awareness of Hans’s importance

to the art scene in China—as a curator and a dealer, creating relations between art in China and the Western art system, particularly in the early nineties. Finding the lexicon has decisively changed the way in which we must consider his legacy. In this exhibition, we are showing a digital version that Hans created, though he also designed a book he meant to publish in print form. We are now well on our way to setting up a foundation to care for his legacy, and one of our first concerns will be to research the meaning of the lexicon and the possibilities of having it published.”

This exhibition in two parts is curated by Marianne Brouwer and developed with Philip Tinari (Director, UCCA) and Defne Ayas (Director, Witte de With), together with Venus Lau (Curator, UCCA), Samuel Saelemakers (Associate Curator, Witte de With), and Ian Yang (Curatorial Fellow, Witte de With). Curatorial assistance was provided by Andreas Schmid and Zhang Li. The exhibition is co-commissioned by the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (24 May – 10 August, 2014) and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (4 September, 2014 – 4 January, 2015).

The UCCA presentation of “Hans van Dijk: 5000 Names” is sponsored by Dior and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Beijing. Research support for Marianne Brouwer was provided by the Mondriaan Fund.

About the Curator

Marianne Brouwer (b. 1942) is an art historian, curator, and writer specializing in contemporary art. She was born in the Netherlands and has lived in Japan and France, where she earned her MA in art history at the Sorbonne University, Paris. In the seventies she worked as an art critic and journalist. During the eighties and nineties she was the curator of sculpture at the Kröller-Müller Museum. She has published and lectured widely, participated in international juries, and taught at various art institutions.

In 1994 she curated the exhibition “Heart of Darkness,” dedicated to issues of exile and the Other with site-specific installations by Huang Yong Ping, Cai Guo-Qiang, and Gu Wenda (Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands). In 1997 she was the guest curator of the exhibition “Another Long March: Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties,” the first comprehensive exhibition of Chinese conceptual and video art outside China (Breda, Netherlands, 1997). In 2004 she received the Netherlands’ AICA (Association Internationale des Critiques d’Art) award for best exhibition and best book for “Dan Graham: Works 1965-2000.”

Co-commissioned with



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◀ Thomas Fuesser, *Hans van Dijk (Beijing 1993)*, 1993, c-print, 70 x 90 cm, edition of 10. Exhibited in “Stolen Treasures from Modern China,” ShanghART Gallery, Beijing, 2009. © Thomas Fuesser.

Foundations | The Netherlands

Hans van Dijk was a foundational influence on Chinese contemporary art and a mentor to a generation of artists coming of age in the 1990s. Born in 1946 in Deventer, the Netherlands, he enrolled in the Arnhem Art Academy in 1962, where one of his teachers was Henk Peeters, a member of the international Zero artist group. In 1965, he entered the Design Academy Eindhoven on the advice of early digital artist Peter Struycken. Here he finally found the freedom he had been missing at home. He started reading avidly, and, having discovered that he was gay at an early age, became interested in literature and philosophy from gay writers. After graduation, Hans began making random, computer-generated artworks, participating in exhibitions in Amsterdam and London. With a group of close friends from the academy he established the artists' magazine *Daglicht* (*Daylight*, 1980-1982). Always interested in woodwork and the puzzle of its construction techniques, he discovered a reprint of early twentieth century missionary Gustav Ecke's book on Ming furniture. Fascinated by the furniture's masterful construction, he approached the Sinology department of Leiden University to ask for assistance with translation of the book's classical Chinese instructions, but he was met with reluctance. In 1983, Hans forsook art practice and began learning Chinese from exchange students at Eindhoven University of Technology. During these years, he created a series of tables, stools, and screens which he dubbed "Ming-inspired Rietveld furniture" for himself and his friends, but, as with all of his design works, he refused to produce them on a commercial scale. During this period, many of Hans's close friends began to marry and settle down. This, perhaps more than anything else, inspired Hans to radically change his life and career. So, at nearly 40 years old, Hans moved to Nanjing to study Chinese language and writing in 1986.



▲ Hans van Dijk in front of Sally East Gallery, London. Courtesy Ernst Dinkla.



▲ Photographs of furniture inspired by Ming Dynasty craftsmanship designed by Hans van Dijk, ca. 1983-1986. Courtesy Peter Cox, Eindhoven, © Peter Cox.

"Hans was a quiet, unassuming curator and scholar, willing to work behind the scenes to allow artists to express themselves through their works. Behind Hans's gaunt, wry smile burned a selfless desire to reveal and share meaning in a world he seemed to view as increasingly dominated by an 'unbearable lightness of being.'"

Robert Bernell

"His way of working was like a gardener's: collecting documents, making the archive."

Zhou Tiehai

"If Hans had lived, today's art scene in China would be much more diverse and interesting."

Zhang Enli

1946-1986

Immersion | Nanjing

Hans immediately took to China. Though he initially had no concept of the emerging contemporary art scene of the 1980s, Hans quickly recognized that something extraordinary was happening. Nanjing was at the center of many debates on art. He switched his concentration to Chinese art history and began researching and collecting documents on modern and contemporary Chinese artists. He traveled across the mainland between 1987 and 1989 meeting some of the country's most interesting, avant-garde artists, with whom he quickly exchanged correspondence and ideas. Most of them became lifelong friends, such as Ding Yi, Wu Shanzhuan, Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, Yan Lei, Hong Hao, Tang Song, Zhou Yunxia, and others. He began translating artists' texts and projects such as the Pond Society manifesto and *Art Project No. 2* by Zhang Peili. In 1988, Hans published his translation of Li Xiaoshan's ground-breaking essay on ink painting in the catalogue of a show on recent Chinese art in Eindhoven. When his courses ended in 1989, Hans applied for further study in Beijing, but found the tuition fee exorbitant. When it became clear that he could not continue in Nanjing, and that contemporary art in China had few immediate prospects, Hans returned to Holland with his books and his nascent archive on Chinese modern art.

“Hans was important for his personality, and for his way of thinking about art and judging art. He was very serious about art. He would never lower his standards—the standards of contemporary art. West or East—there is only contemporary art.”

Ai Weiwei

“A lot of people thought I was on the wrong track when I first showed my new cross paintings at the Shanghai Art Museum in 1988, but Hans didn't. He rented a bike and came all the way to see me in Hongqiao, where I lived in a small farmhouse. He would look at photos of my works and analyze them for me, pointing out the consequences if I were to go in this or that direction.”

Ding Yi

“Hans had no boundaries about what was art or not. That has interested me to this day. Back then, when I was very young and constantly talking about my ideas of how to be more radical, Hans would always respond to my anxiety in a very light manner, never answering me directly. Then, after I made the nail varnish paintings, I was so scared of what I had done that I stopped making art for two years.”

Liu Ding



▲ Zhang Enli, *Indignation*, 1993, oil on canvas, 160 x 100 cm, 164 x 104 x 5.5 framed. Courtesy the artist and ShangART Gallery.

Introducing China's Avant-Garde | Beijing-Berlin

Upon returning to Eindhoven, Hans published a two-part scholarly article entitled "Painting in China After the Cultural Revolution" in a Leiden University publication. He wrote a number of short articles on Chinese art, which were published over the next two years. He also immediately started working on plans for a major survey show of Chinese contemporary art in Holland. Interest was slow to materialize, however. In 1990, Hans met German artist Andreas Schmid, who had studied in China, and, with former Maoist Jochen Noth, had recently convinced the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) in Berlin to hold an exhibition on recent developments in Chinese culture. The two quickly realized that Hans's expertise would be invaluable to the project and adapted their proposal according to his ideas. With his first advance as a curator, Hans bought a computer, which would house his growing database on Chinese artists. He returned to China in late 1991 with Andreas Schmid to scout for the show in Germany. At the "Garage Show" in Shanghai—one of the first shows to open after two years of silence—art critic Chen Xiaoxin, editor of the magazine *Jiangsu Art Monthly*, announced, "I have good news. Hans is coming back!" Meanwhile, Hans and Andreas had to compete for artists and works with the Hong Kong show "China's New Art: Post-89." Ultimately, many artists ended up in both exhibitions. "China Avant-Garde" opened in Berlin on 29 January, 1993, the first major exhibition of Chinese contemporary art in Europe. The show went on to travel across the continent, and Hans moved back to Beijing. With loans from friends, he established Artfame Development Ltd. in Hong Kong, a company that would enable him to open a gallery in China. While looking for a suitable exhibition space, he also tried hard to set up a serigraphic printing workshop for artists in Beijing, but in vain. Later that year, Hans led critic Andrew Solomon of *The New York Times* around China, introducing the writer, and consequently American audiences, to artists' studios and avant-garde art on the mainland. He also met with Director of the Goethe-Institut China Michael Kahn-Ackermann, who introduced him to visiting German artists and eventually invited him to organize exhibitions at the institute. Meanwhile, Hans still needed a space to stay. Although it was illegal for foreigners to live outside certain designated areas, Hans refused to be confined to the Friendship Hotel—he wanted to lead the same Beijing life as his artist friends. Finally, on the introduction of Gu Dexin, Hans met and rented a room from the artist Li Yongbin.



"Hans and I once had a long talk about his research on China's modernizing process. I think that research enabled him to tell the story of Chinese contemporary art outside of the political story. For Westerners, in particular, the political story is much more simple and easy to tell. Nowadays, even Ai Weiwei's story is told like this: always about 'Big Brother' and the fight for democracy. Hans's story, on the contrary, was much more complex. We need as many stories as possible again today. Don't just give people a simple story; reality is much more complex."

Qiu Zhijie

► Yu Youhan, *The Girl of Flower*, 2011, silkscreen print, 76.7 x 94.2 cm, 80 x 97.5 x 4 cm framed. Courtesy the artist and ShanghART Gallery.

1990-1993

Establishing the NAAC | Beijing

In 1994, Hans found a space at Hanmo Art Gallery in an abandoned factory. He immediately established the New Amsterdam Art Consultancy (NAAC) as an umbrella for his dealership and curatorial projects. Unlike any other commercial gallery, Hans would only take 35% of any work he sold; 65% went to the artist. Alongside Zhang Li and Jule Noth, sinologist and daughter of Jochen Noth, they organized their first show of *Moon Flight* by Zhao Bandi in cooperation with Hanmo Art Gallery. On 8 July, 1994, Hans's friends Zhao Shaoruo and Liu Anping staged a happening in the Dahua Cinema, in which Zhao Shaoruo threw ink on dozens of Chinese artists and critics who had assembled to see a performance video by Wang Jinsong and Liu Anping. Later in July, Hans published the NAAC's URARC Report, a manifesto inspired by Alfred Jarry's absurdist play *Ubu Roi*. Though written in a characteristically tongue-in-cheek style, the manifesto nonetheless shows some of Hans's theoretical assessments of Chinese contemporary art. In the report, Hans "classifies" dozens of Chinese artists into various categories, placing Ding Yi and Mai Zhixiong in a class of their own.

Throughout 1994, Hans curated shows in whatever spaces were available in Beijing, including exhibitions of photographer Zhang Hai'er in Ritan Park and of photographer Xu Zhiwei at Ammonal Gallery. Like many shows at the time, Xu's exhibition was not allowed to open. Hans helped curate and install Ding Yi's first solo exhibition at the Shanghai Art Museum. He collaborated with Goethe-Institut director Michael Kahn-Ackermann on a show by the New Analysts (*Xin Kedu*) with German artist Günther Uecker of the Zero group at Hanmo Art Gallery. This show, too, was not allowed to take place due to the wording of Uecker's "Letter to Beijing," a component of the New Analysts' work. The New Analysts were instead shown at the Haus der Kunst in Berlin in cooperation with Director Alexander Tolnay. 1994 also saw Hans publish his essay "Art Theory Is Not Art" in *Jiangsu Art Monthly*.

"Hans did not compartmentalize the development from modern art to contemporary art in China. What hid in seemingly traditional and orthodox ink painting, oil painting, and wood cut was the process of modernization, which formed the historical basis of contemporary art as we see it today. Hans attached special importance to those artists who contributed to this process in the early twentieth century."

Chen Tong, founder and director of Librairie Borges, Guangzhou



▲ Mai Zhixiong, *Machinery Series No. 2*, 1994, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 200 x 200 cm. Courtesy Librairie Borges Institut d'Art Contemporain.



▼ Zhao Bandi, *Moon Flight*, 1994, photograph, 190 x 139 cm. Courtesy the artist and ShangHART Gallery.

Meanwhile, demands were pouring in from abroad for Hans to act as a consultant on the many shows of Chinese contemporary art that were now being organized throughout Europe. For the show "Forändren" (Change) at the Göteborg Art Museum in Sweden, he suggested the artists and provided the organization on the Chinese side. He did the same for a show at the Kvindemuseet, Denmark; for "Configura 2" in Erfurt, Germany; and for the Triennial of Small-Scale Sculpture in Stuttgart. He now had four to five employees working full-time at his newly founded office, which also housed his archive and served as his home. Hans's NAAC apartment quickly became a center of artistic life in Beijing. At a time when the infrastructure for supporting and promoting contemporary Chinese art was virtually nonexistent, Hans was integral in forging structural connections with Europe in an attempt to create a continuous showing of the best of contemporary art in China. Throughout the years, he introduced many Chinese artists to the Western art system of museums, galleries, and curators. He also provided the artists with portfolio material and academic support as a facilitator and consultant for exhibitions.

In 1995, Hans met ex-Maoist Frank Uytterhaegen, a Belgian businessman and art collector, with whom he developed a lifelong friendship. Together they organized an exhibition of Flemish artists entitled "3 x 3" at the private Yanhuang Art Museum in Beijing in 1996. Meanwhile, Jule Noth had left NAAC to return to Berlin, where she continued to help with Hans's shows on the German side. In Beijing, Hans curated a seminal show of photographer Han Lei and set up a year-long exhibition program for the Goethe-Institut.

1994-1995

Unrealized Projects | Beijing

Abroad, Hans prepared for the 1996 Chinese Cultural Weeks in Munich, a massive project that included theater, music, and a show of Chinese artists for which he undertook curatorial work. In 1996, he managed to temporarily rent the CIFA Gallery space at the Central Academy of Fine Arts Gallery. In the scope of six months, together with Zhang Li, Hans curated seven of the best exhibitions of his career at a breakneck pace, including shows by Zhou Tiehai, Li Yongbin, and the first solo presentations in China of Wang Xingwei and Luo Yongjin. He also published a second article in *Jiangsu Art Monthly*, “The Myth of Art History.”

After this string of successes, Hans’s luck ran out. The Munich festival was canceled by the Chinese side, though Hans’s show “News from 15 Studios” still managed to go through. Sales commissions were slow to come in. Around two-thirds of his projects would fail to materialize, and Hans would spend all the money he earned buying art and helping artists. Knowing that he needed help on the business side, Hans asked Frank Uytterhaegen to be



▲ Zhang Hai'er, *Miss Xiao*, 1988, gelatin silver print, 47 x 47 cm, 79.8 x 66.1 x 4 cm framed. Courtesy Three Shadows Photography Art Centre.



▲ Hong Hao, *Kassel City Defense*, 1998, silkscreen print, 56 x 78 cm, 67 x 91 cm framed. Courtesy the artist.

the business director of NAAC. In 1996, Zhang Wei joined the gallery as his new assistant. Hans acted as a mentor to both Zhang Li and Zhang Wei, teaching them about curating and contemporary art practice. 1997 took off promisingly with “Face to Face,” a three-part exhibition for Siemens pairing Chinese and German artists. The first show of Luo Yongjin and German photographer Thomas Struth at the China Cultural Art Palace was a success, but it received official criticism possibly because Luo Yongjin was not a member of the China Photographers Association. Afraid of reenacting the Munich debacle, Siemens stalled on the two next shows: Ding Yi with Katharina Grosse, and Zhang Peili with a yet undetermined German artist. They eventually abandoned the project without officially saying so, leaving Hans with a large gap in his agenda.

During this period, new galleries began sprouting up across Beijing and China. Several of Hans’s close artist friends left him for other, more financially successful galleries. As there was little concept of gallery loyalty, artists frequently sold to the highest bidder. Foreign curators were flocking to China, kicking off a wave of exhibitions and diminishing Hans’s importance to the local scene. Young Chinese art critics had come of age and demanded to be heard as well. Nonetheless, Hans realized a two-part show of Ding Yi’s “Crosses” in cooperation with ShanghART Gallery and a seminal show of Chinese photography in Berlin with Alexander Tolnay and Andreas Schmid, which established Chinese photography abroad. Hans’s role in the promotion of Chinese photography cannot be overestimated. He did not merely theorize on photography; from the outset, he engaged the medium by exhibiting it alongside other art forms as equal.

Leaving a Legacy | Beijing

In 1998, Hans successfully curated “Mondrian in China,” a show which traveled from Beijing to Shanghai and Guangzhou. Though he had previously acted as an agent and consultant, he formally entered the art market that year with the founding of the China Art Archives and Warehouse (CAAW) in south Beijing with Frank Uytterhaegen and Ai Weiwei. The gallery, which Frank funded, opened in 1999 and was an instant success. Even as he worked in a commercial gallery, Hans was able to maintain his standard of meticulously curated exhibitions. He launched several artists’ careers through solo exhibitions, including Zheng Guogu and Duan Jianyu. He was one of the few curators supporting abstract and conceptual art, organizing shows by Yan Lei and Xu Hongming. The gallery moved to its current location in Caochangdi in 2000. On 9 June, 2000, Hans founded the Modern Chinese Art Foundation with Frank and his wife Pascale Geulleaume. With MCAF, they undertook a number of important exhibitions in Ghent and Shanghai. However, years of poverty and sacrifice had taken their toll on Hans. He fell gravely ill in 2001, settling in France to recover. Even in his absence, the gallery was making around USD 11,000 a month from sales by Hans and his assistants. While preparing a solo show by Wang Yin and working on his lexicon, Hans died unexpectedly from a gastric hemorrhage on 19 April, 2002. His art collection and archive passed to Frank and Pascale.



▲ Duan Jianyu, *8 5/4*, 1998, oil on canvas, 180 x 140cm. Courtesy the artist and Vitamin Creative Space.

◀ Zheng Guogu, *10000 Customers (16)*, 2005, c-print, 76 x 106 cm. Courtesy the artist.

1998-2002

Hours

Tuesday – Sunday, 10:00-19:00

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