

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ANDREAS SCHMID

Interviewer: Jane DeBevoise, Anthony Yung

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Question (Q): Why did you go to China? Where you and what were you doing? Who are some of the artists that you encountered and what do you think about them? What were the artists reading and what are your comments on those materials?

Andreas Schmid (AS): I graduated from the Art Academy in Stuttgart in 1981, studying painting. My paintings were, at that time, very different from German painters like Kiefer in that they always have free space, and transparency of layers of space in them. I painted with oil and acrylic, and it was different from my colleagues/contemporaries. I became interested in the idea of space, of Chinese Art, classical Chinese art, like Ni Zan [倪瓚] in the fourteenth century. Then I went to Cologne and saw a collection of Japanese Buddhist writings collected by Seiko Kono, abbot of the Daian-ji temple in Nara City, Japan. I would like to know the line from another side, because lines played the most important role graphically in my paintings. So I tried contacting organizations that would support me, and they informed me there was only one woman who went to China as an artist from Germany with the support of the German exchange service. I went to see her, and she had studied in Hangzhou one year ago at that time (1980). She studied birds and flowers painting. She told me, if you want to do this, you should go to China, it is interesting. I got a scholarship to go to China in August 1983, arriving on 30 August, at the Language Institute [北京語言學院] because I knew only little Chinese when I first came to China. The exchange service gave me two years, the first year I had to study in Beijing. It was an interesting year because I was in the Language Institute, but was also trying to get contact with artists and the ongoing movements in Beijing.

(Q): Who were you in contact with at that point?

(AS): Emmanuel Bellefroid, he just have left ... It was one of the first exhibitions I saw there, I cannot remember which one. But at that time I bought a book just published by the Docs, Les Non-Officiel. It was published by the Edition Docs in France in 1982 or 83, and was totally forbidden in China. I asked the French Embassy for a copy, and bought it. It was a very good document, and it was from France, and it has Emmanuel Bellefroid, Li Shuang, Ma Desheng, everybody in it, and some literates. It has a lot of photos, and lots of poems. There are photos of poets in the Summer Palace, standing on the ruins recitating. The public security did not go there, normally. When I showed it to Chinese people, they told me to hide it and not to show it officially. It was really my treasure at that time.

And then I met Gao Mingming. I can't remember how I met her, but because I could not speak a lot of Chinese in the beginning, it was really hard for me. She was an artist friend who likes music, she was a friend if Yan li. She showed me Yan Li and his paintings, she guided me to him. And he did realist painting at that time. It was the period of the campaign 'against anti-spiritual pollution', and it was hard. And I met Wolfgang Kubin 07:23 a sinologist quite famous now in Germany, he came to conduct interviews with some famous literates in China, and they didn't dare to give him interviews anymore. Everything was organized but they did not want to, because it was too dangerous. Also, his nine-year-old son died in Germany, so he had to leave very soon. He told us it was very difficult at the moment, and it was very dangerous. For example, Sommernacht's Traum (Summer night's dream) was forbidden, Brecht was forbidden, Beethoven was forbidden. We could feel that the atmosphere there was not very good. When Mingming guided us to some places, sometimes to parties

(not like the parties now), it was by knocking on some doors, putting the bags away, climbing through fences, everything. After a while you came to a room with very loud music, and I remember it was the Berlin punk group Idia(08:53). Their songs were just released in 1981, and I was very surprised to hear it in that room. I liked it very much. There were film makers, theorists, painters, all together. Eating, drinking, discussing. But it was very difficult to get to this space from outside. I was very happy to be there every now and then, but I had to learn a lot, so I could not go everyday.

Then I met Ma Desheng, and he lived in a garage in an old part of Beijing. He was a little depressed as he was not allowed to study because he had polio. He could not look out to the academy but from what I saw him in the book, *Les Non* official with his crutches. He was very nice. At the moment he did abstract art, woodcuts, but also something with figures, and later with ink-splash somehow... He was very good at speaking, but he had a very bad temper. When he got angry, he would smash things, and so on. It was very interesting, but he left in I think it was spring of 1984. He left with the help of the Swiss Embassy. I thought it was the French or the Swiss who helped him. It was the only way at that time to leave the country. They didn't get a passport for sure, so they needed the help. We said sometimes these Embassies helped their own artists, the French helped some, the Swiss helped some, and the Germans as well. For example the German cultural attaché was also very nice, he helped Qin Yufen and Zhu Jinshi I got to know them in 1985, by the help of this cultural attaché. He went with me to visit them. It was nice at that time because they had been workers, working in very small spaces, painting oil paintings, a little bit old fashioned. She was already doing rolls with ink, a little bit like Zen paintings. His name was Conze, he now works for the UN in Africa...He was a very nice guy. He was the cultural attaché from the German Embassy. He was very much interested in all sorts of art. Earlier in 83 or 84 I did not know about Qin Yufen and Zhu Jinshi They were invited in 1986 by the Heidelberg Kunst, so Conze helped them both to get passports and visas to get out. They then went to Berlin, and I helped them to get the scholarship from Berlin.

...In Beijing I also got to know Ma Kelu, a very nice guy. He did quite abstract oil paintings. And he went to New York. I visited him with my wife in 1992. And also Ai Weiwei at that time in New York. In 1984 Ma Desheng went away first to Denmark, then to Germany. I met him in my gallery, it was in 86. And then he went to the States. Ma Kelu went to the States too. So it was a bit strange, but in 1984, suddenly, it was in April or early May, this campaign was stopped from one day to the other. It was just incredible. I thought some people didn't know what was pollution anymore. Everything could be pollution, so it was a mess. If you spoke to the Chinese, they were fed up with it, by March. The campaign was always going on, and we don't know what to do anymore. But in February or March, Ronald Regan first visited Beijing, and they arrested Yan Li a week before, and kept him for two weeks. And then Gao Mingming told me she had problems too. She was looking for someone to marry her and go to Germany, and she asked me if I could marry her. I said, if there were no other way out, I would do it. But then she found somebody from Peking University, a German guy, who unfortunately fell in love with her. This became a problem later on because he was a good friend of mine, but I would not have liked him to marry her. She married him and went out of the country in 1984.

Then after the campaign was over (*Q: it was in February or March when the campaign was closed down, and then suddenly in May...*) In April or May...It was very funny...In June, the foreign students were asked to show Disco to the Chinese students. (*Q: You were asked!?*) Yes. There was a day, evening, there was dance; you should show us how to dance Disco. It was like, (laughter) you have to. We thought was very strange. From one day to the other, it was absolutely pollution (*Q: and then they were encouraging it*) Yes. I finished my studies there (the language institute), and got permission to go to university. In August I moved to Hangzhou.

(Q): Why did you choose Hangzhou instead of the Central Academy?

(AS): Because it was the only few academies in which Calligraphy was allowed. It was still not allowed in the Central Academy, there was no Calligraphy class. Hangzhou was the first to open (such classes) as a main subject not

for Chinese, but a main subject only for foreigners, and as a side, smaller subject for Chinese.

(Q): The Central Academy has always been known for its oil paintings and theory. Xu Beihong came back from the West and became the director of the Academy, and was all about academic oil paintings morphed into social realist paintings. It continues till this day, that the Central Academy is strong in such aspect. Do you think it was because they did not allow calligraphy, or that they did not have people in that area?

(AS): Both. They had not come to the point to allow it and to renew it, and they did not have enough people. I was told that in Hangzhou. There were nationwide exams in Hangzhou with Sha Menghai (沙孟海) as the supervisor. He was 90 years old and a great guy, a scholar of Wu Chengshuo (吴昌硕) in Shanghai, a very highly praised painter.

(Q): And he was a student of Wu Chengshuo?

(AS): Yes. When he was sixteen or seventeen, he published a book that was totally famous in the entire China, about Calligraphy theory. I think it was during the twenties. He became very famous with his 行书 style, he was absolutely a wonderful person. But because he had cancer, he only allowed five persons in his class, once a week for three hours. It was held in his house, with a coal fire in the winter time, I remembered it very well. And we sat there with a jackets with the coal fire. He spoke *Wenzhou Hua* (dialect), it was very difficult to understand. He had an assistant who translated it into Putonghua. It was very interesting, and I appreciated that, even I did not understand a single word for one month. It was horrible. The other artists would explain things to me.

(Q): And the other people were foreigners as well.

(AS): Yes. We were all foreigners, no Chinese. It was a special class, and afterwards he did not teach anymore. He stopped teaching. Until June or May of 1985 we had this class. It was a special class. I had another class with Wang Dongling (王冬龄), he was very young at that time. He was really our main teacher.

(Q): He was already your teacher? Was he your classmate?

(AS): He was very young at that time, but he was one of the only four persons to pass the exam. Many people tried to pass the exam in calligraphy, and in an old way, you not only have to know all of the types of writing practically and theoretically. Sha Menghai was very sincere and harsh. They have to write poems, everything, the exams must be horrible. Wang Dongling told us, and he was very proud to be one of the only four to pass the exams. You can imagine, who else? There were only a few academies, but Hangzhou had a long tradition. They even had opera singing at the Academy, but not anymore after the Cultural Revolution.

In 1983 I went to Hangzhou just to have a look at the space, and Zheng Shengtian (郑圣天)(22:44) guided me around. He said, "nine teachers were killed, and our director as well. We have such a loss. We don't know, I don't know if we can refill this loss." He was very open minded and very good. Zheng Shengtian had just come back from the States, he was the first teacher to be sent to the States, and he came back with a very interesting, open pedagogy. He had a big influence after a while.

When we arrived there was a director, and he was a hardliner, with the best contacts with Russia. So it was a fight in between the higher teachers and management about how and where the Academy should proceed. In the end it was lucky that Deng Xiaoping opened the door a little bit. They then started to have film programs, it was only allowed in the Academy. I remember that "Paris Texas" was shown, synchronized in Chinese, in 1985. It was just made, and I was very surprised. I had just seen it in Germany, and it was synchronized in Chinese. The whole space was packed, and it was not allowed to civil citizens. It was all neibu (内部, internal). And also Fassbinder!

(Q): And who organized this?

(AS): I don't know! We have to ask, maybe Zheng Shengtian knows.

(Q): And it was not an official program.

(AS): No, No. It was just an event. There was also an official film program, which was also very interesting for me. The Academy was situated very near to the lake. And in summer, there was a huge outdoor screen, and from both sides people were sitting, watching the films. There were Romanian, Czechoslovakian films, mostly about the Second World War, the bad Nazis. There were also Chinese films. Some films were really interesting because they showed me another view, for example from Romania. I hadn't seen any film of that time, so it was very interesting for me to look at these films. People were drinking beer and other drinks, sitting by the lake in summer, it was fantastic. It was rare to have such events so it was so packed. It was incredible. When Wang Dongling came he was excited. And Wang Dongling at that time wanted to learn from the West, and he was very supportive to us. It was a very small class, it was fantastic because we were so few people.

(Q): You are filling in lots of information about what people were doing.

(AS): Gu Wenda also came from Chinese painting originally. I met Gu Wenda relatively early, in 1984. First I met a her who was in the sculpture department. And I brought a catalogue about Giacometti which was also forbidden. I had to wrap it in newspaper. I knew exactly that I could not give it to her like this, even not in my room. We were supervised all the time by the *Gongan* (police). They could come to our rooms, but would have to show their identity cards. And several times, they were there with the police, and they told all classes that they should not make contact with foreigners, that we only wanted to steal the techniques, and go back --- the techniques of calligraphy, of everything.

There was another Germany guy, Peter, who studied Art History, and he learned with Fan Jingzhong...The first year Peter was there, he was from Germany too, and his Chinese was much better than me. He came at about the same time as me. Peter Wiedehage. He came with me, and we met an Austrian girl, she was about to leave one year later. She wrote her thesis on Xiling Seal Society [西泠印社]. She wrote a huge thing, and her Chinese was very good.

(Q): Did she continue in the field?

(AS): I don't know, afterwards she worked for the University of Vienna, for the foreign students, somehow. I don't know if she has anything to do with Chinese anymore. And there is another girl who is an artist, her name is Lise Boisseau. She came from Canada and studied calligraphy. In 1983 she told me to concentrate fully on calligraphy, do not do Chinese painting. I was interested in 山水畫 (*Chinese landscape painting*) too, but the teacher was not very good, I have to say. She was right, and I said ok. She was very good at Chinese, but unfortunately, she has nothing to do with China anymore. I met her recently. She does her sculptures and paintings, maybe she is influenced somehow, but not really.

(Q): Let's go back to Gu Wenda, and Fan Jingzhong as well.

(AS): Ok, Gu Wenda. He was a very open-minded guy at that time. At first sight he did not have a lot of "Chineseness." He just studied Nietzsche. And when I came to his studio, he showed me his works that looked like De Chirico. He was going through a surrealist phase. We talked about it a little. All the teachers lived in the campus, it was a very good thing, because you always have very good relationships with the teachers, we were very close. He was not my teacher. He was one day older than me, so we celebrated together. He invited me to his home, the only home of a Chinese person at that time in Hangzhou that really looked modern, absolutely distinguished with furniture. It was not western, it was very precise, aesthetic, very tasteful. While other teachers, for example, Wong Dongling, he had lots of books, and things, all in a mess. It was very Chinese in a way, very casual. But Gu Wenda was very tasteful.

(Q): His wife now is an interior designer.

(AS): Ok, that fits very well into that.

(Q): When you say to his home, was it an apartment in the school, or was it a dormitory room?

(AS): It was an apartment in the school. He was a young teacher, a fellow teacher. When you graduated from that school, they wanted to keep you. While other people, like Geng Jianyi he was sent to the textile academt. They wanted to keep him. But Gu Wenda was punished twice, he was sent to Shaoxing because he taught too freely. They were not going to let him teach if he were to go further on like this. That was in 1985. But he did teach, but I am not sure what lessons he taught. Whether it was Chinese painting (国画) or oil painting (油画), I was not sure. He never studied oil painting, he studied Chinese painting. He showed me some of his other works. He worked at night.

(Q): Did he have a studio?

(AS): No. It was a room, a space, for the teachers. And at night it was not used by the other teachers. So he would put aside all of the tables to create a space. It was like a classroom.

(Q): Was it a teaching studio?

(AS): He said it was for the young teachers, but he can only do his big things there.

(Q): So it was not really used for teaching, it was just given to the teachers.

(AS): More like an administration room for teachers. Like a staffroom. I thought it was some kind of a staff room. But he put everything aside and complained that afterwards he had to get it together again and clean it. I was very impressed because he did really huge ink splash paintings. I also took some photographs at that time.

(Q): What would you say about those ink splash paintings?

(AS): This was later. At first I saw his de Chirico style paintings, especially in 1985. I visited him the next year in October, and he showed me. He prepared a show in Xian, and that was in 1986, or end of 1985. He put all of his money into it, and I was very impressed. It was not much they earned. Nobody sold paintings at that time. He used all of his money to have it mounted. It was huge and he could not do it. The mounting in the Academy was very good, I always tried to get a workshop there, but it was impossible. So many Chinese wanted to join the workshop. It was even more difficult for me because I was just a foreigner. So he got it mounted there, but he had to pay something, because it was so huge, it was difficult to mount. He had his first solo show in Xian, but then he was disappointed because only Academy members were allowed in to see the show.

(Q): It was an internal show, because he had some traditional works which he showed on one floor, from what I understand. And he did this more installation kind of work, and that was only internal.

(AS): When he came back and I asked him how was Xian, he said, 马马虎虎. It was ok, but it was a neibu show. And then also in 1985, a group of people did a show in the Hangzhou Art Museum 杭州美术馆. Normally they would not be allowed to have a show in the Art Museum, but there was this one guy, his mother cleaned the floor there. And he told her, would it not be possible just for one day that we have a few things put up there? She was very naïve and she asked them. And they said, 'why not? they are art students.' They expected very harmless works to be put up. Then it was a huge show with erotic things, three hours later it was closed down. There was a big scandal in the school, people got punished. I took two photos of it, they're standing there, when it just closed down. And Gu Wenda was there. It was funny how they got to have this chance.

It was the time when I really liked it there, when the country just opened. Zheng Chongbing (郑重宾), a guy who is in San Francisco now, did very nice ink paintings. He is also in the catalogue here. He was invited to Japan to take part in an ink painting exhibition. He was so happy, and the school supported it very much because they wanted to make an international fame. But the police did not like it. I was always very angry at this. You depend absolutely on the person. This person would ask, did you bring this paper, you said yes. After one week, you have to bring this paper. After another week, again. They went on with this method for a

long time. It takes such a long time that afterwards he could not go anymore. It was just too late. The school could not help it. He left later on, he got a passport. In 1986 it was allowed for a short time when the Chinese could get a passport. It was just a short period because so many people from other fields left China, that they stopped it. It was half a year when one could get a passport quite easily. Not before, so many people used the opportunity. And if you had relatives in the States or in Europe, you could go or visit.

(Q): When you were talking about Gu Wenda, you mentioned that you went back and brought back this book on Bacon.

(AS): Yes, Bacon. It was the time when he did the de Chirico style. We talked about it. There were some surrealist things, some de Chirico things, some Bacon. And he said, 'Yes! Bacon, he is great; could you bring some if you go home?' In September 1985 I went home for three or four weeks. And I bought this book. It must be October 1985 when I brought the book to Wenda.

(Q): It happened to be a current show of Francis Bacon.

(AS): Yes, it was a huge show, a retrospective. It was in Munich or Stuttgart. I can look it up. And he was very happy and we talked about it.

(Q): How did he see de Chirico and Francis Bacon before? What kinds of books were accessible?

(AS): There were two libraries in Hangzhou Academy, one was for students, which you could forget, quite easily. It was only until Picasso, and then it was nearly nothing. And then there was the library for teachers, and it was very good. I was amazed by a lot of art magazines they had. They had many books from Abrams, for example the big ones, which were very valuable. They also had many art magazines from Russia, from Japan, and the US.

(Q): Were these current magazines?

(AS): These were current art magazines. They asked me about good German art magazines. I recommended the Kunst Forum, so they got it. Kunst Forum was the main magazine in German, they ordered it directly. From 1985, 86, they have this magazine. I don't know for how long, I hope they still have it now.

(Q): Did you help them with any translation of the German books? How were they able to read foreign magazines those days?

(AS): I think it was important for them to see the pictures, to get some information. What I wondered, for example, in 1986, there was a translation of a book (*Ein Gespräch*, Hatje Cantz) which was published in 1982 or 1983. It was a roundtable talk between Joseph Beuys, Jannis Kounellis, Anselm Kiefer and Enzo Cucchi, I bought it in 1982 when it was just published, it was already translated into Chinese in 1986. I saw it in Chinese. Shortly after Beuys's death, I also saw some articles on him.

(Q): Beuys was obviously very important.

(AS): Yes, and Duchamp too. Foucault was translated, like Huang Yongping said very often. I know that Nietzsche and Freud were translated as well. I was amazed. Zheng Chongbin once came to my room and said, 'You know what? From this day onwards, we are officially allowed to read Laozi again!' He was very happy because he was very much into this old Chinese. So the old ones were also forbidden.

(Q): It is interesting how Laozi, Dada, and Duchamp came together.

(AS): Exactly, at the same moment. And Nietzsche, I think it fits Gu Wenda very well. I asked Gu Wenda once what he wants, and he said, 'I want to be famous.' I think this really is his motto until today. It is his belief. He knows he is a good artist, he did very good seal carving (篆刻). Very forceful, and not at all conventional. I have one stone, and it is very good. He did so many great things, and developed the oil splash painting, which is washed and rubbed with water when it is dried. The color goes away a little bit, but it stands like a shadow, a special effect. And then it goes again. He experimented a lot of things, coming from landscape paintings. I met Lu

Yanshao once, and interviewed him, with Gu Wenda. I asked Lu Yanshao how he reacts to Gu Wenda. He was very Chinese. He said "I know he is a very good artist in this Chinese field, he is one of my best students. I trust him in what he does." For sure he was very unsure of what Gu Wenda was doing. He was very supportive and very calm. I was very impressed, he was wonderful. Like Sha Menghai, they never behaved like great artists. I once photo-documented the Xiling Seal Society (西泠印社) when they had a meeting in the beginning of 1984. There were many very good artists writing calligraphy, and they never had, or rarely, had this arrogance, this attitude.

(Q): Do you think this is old Chinese value? Or do you think it was because they have been through such a trial, during that tumultuous period?

(AS): In my view, it was real Chinese value. You are literati. You are just not proud of yourself. You know what you're doing, but you are not just proud of it. Wang Dongling showed us a lot of things, we visited a lot of good artists... He was very open. I was wondering sometimes, if Wang Dongling would get troubles hanging out with us too much.

(Q): He seems to be continuously very supportive of the younger artists and avant-garde types of things, while he maintained his position within the Academy as a senior member of the calligraphy department.

(AS): I think so too. He went to Japan.

(Q): He exhibited in more edgy exhibitions, but at the same time, he was a bit of an elder statesman.

(AS): That's true. What I liked there was that in the evenings we discuss, they invited us to eat with their families. There was no division between studies and private. We did a lot traveling with Wang Dongling.

(Q): Going back to the "I want to be famous" of Gu Wenda, it resonates through a number of these artists. You mentioned that artists of that period shared a sense of ambition.

(AS): Yes, perhaps someone different was Gu Dexin, in Beijing, totally different. Also Geng Jianyi. Gu Dexin is still that way even he is internationally famous. He is very human and sincere. Also Zhang Peili, he went to the States, showed in MoMA, but never exploited that. Gu Wenda is different, from the beginning. But at least he is sincere and honest about it. He said at that time, I want to be famous. He knew he would get it, and that he was good.

(Q): Did you know or meet Verbanov? What was he like?

(AS): Very nice guy with a beard, unshaved always. I did not spend a lot of time around him because we were always accompanied by the administration members, organizing things. Gu Wenda told me that there was a Lausanne International Biennale of Tapestry, and they were all preparing for that. He was a very important person. There was also Chen Yanying (陈妍音), a women artist. She later got to Shanghai.

(Q): She still paints, and is in fact, a very good painter.

(AS): She also does sculpture. She had partly horrible sculpture, and did a very interesting artwork exploring the topics of gender. She was one of the first. When you come to Berlin, I will show you. She did boxes with wooden nails coming out. In a very famous Shanghai exhibition she showed a woman vulva. No officials could recognize it, so she could show there. But everybody knew. It was about 1992 to 1993 or 4, when she had these gender topics. She was interested in Giacometti so I gave her a book of Giacometti and she was really a friend of us. I went with her and a musician traveling, it was a male with two women, which was sometimes difficult, but not in Gansu.

(Q): In terms of other books that Gu Wenda was reading, such as Nietzsche, were there catalogues around when you visited?

(AS): Only very few. Gu Wenda could get into the teachers' library, but others could not. They had to use *houmen* (后

門, personal relationship). I got to some books on calligraphy by contacts through the library woman who took care of the library. She was the daughter of one of the former directors, who was called Gestapo by the Chinese students, not by me. He really looked like one. We were always supervised by the police, so we had to be very careful.

I had some good contacts with Zheng Shengtian . I knew Fan Jingzhong through Peter, my friend, who studied in the theory department. He also edited Xin Meishu (新美術, the journal of Zhejiang Academy). He asked me to contribute to an article as well, and we tried to read it together. He told me about Gombrich. When Peter left the next year, there was another German, a woman, Uta Lauer. She is now situated in Stockholm teaching Sinology. She was the assistant of Lothar Ledderrose, a famous sinologist in Heidelberg (he retired in 2010) a few years ago. She did a lot with Fan Jingzhong, and knew Sir Gombrich very well. She studied and lived in London. She got very close with Fan Jingzhong. I was amazed by this guy, not only by what he knew, but also what he did. He lived a very simple life. He had a very little child, who is now grown up and studies in Cologne, or somewhere

(AS): I also met Han Fang (Q: Han Fang has now become a designer, right?) Exactly...Han Fang is part of our family at that time. Han Fang was extremely open, like Gu Wenda, or even more. It was unusual for someone to be so open to foreigners.

(Q): Do you think it was because of her family, or her personality?

(AS): She had a very interesting personality. My very good friend, as well as Uta's, was a French girl. For the first two weeks she would not speak to me because her grandparents were murdered by the Nazis. When she first knew I was German she did not talk to me. But we became very good friends eventually, until now. We went often with Han Fang to her family in Hangzhou; everyone was invited, and it was unusual at that time. Han Fang's father hanged himself during the Cultural Revolution, and Han Fang found his body as a child. It was horrible. Her mother told her that, I will not marry until we two together find a new man. One day Han Fang said 'I want this guy to be my father', and then her mother married this guy. He was there when we visited, and we would sit around the same table, discussing. She was very open.

In the beginning of 1986, she and an English teacher, Stuart Schonberger, fell in love with each other. They could not show it publicly, but privately. We met him, and he was a Jewish guy. It was the first marriage between someone from the Academy and a foreigner. When Han Fang told them she would marry, they could not make much trouble anymore. It was more open. But in the beginning, some people were being sent to the punishment camps during our time, just because for having something, you don't know even what that was. If they saw you in the night going into someone's house, and did not reappear until the next morning, then, you'll face huge difficulties. While the foreigners among themselves, they did not pay attention. But with the Chinese it was very hard. We paid extra attention to this, so as not to get anyone into trouble. Only if you really love and want to marry somebody, that's a different matter, you would risk this for sure.

She was one of the first to marry a foreigner, and I visited her afterwards. It is incredible what she does in New York. It really is like a fairy tale, because she started from washing things. They did not want to accept her into the family. The Jewish father said, we don't accept you, you have to work under my brother and assist him, and we will pay you a normal salary, but nothing more. You are not in our family.

(Q): Are they still married?

(AS): No, they are divorced now, it's a pity. It did not work out after some years. When they were still together, she really got into the business. She succeeded and was accepted into the clan. It was a real estate clan in New York. She was always very nice to us, and her English was not bad. Most of the Chinese could not speak English, but she improved, with Steward. We toured at Shaoxing.

Han Fang had a good influence on the atmosphere, the free atmosphere. The students made coffee, official coffee in old Hangzhou. It existed only for half a year, but it was student-run. It was a coffee shop that was opened until eleven o'clock in the evening, which was absolutely unusual in Hangzhou. So it is also salon; everybody went. You went there, smoked like hell, with music and all. I think for a normal Chinese it must have been a challenge.

(Q): When was this student-run coffee shop?

(AS): It was either in 1985 summer, till winter of that year. By 1986 it was already closed down. I didn't know the reason behind its closing, but probably because they did not have enough staff.

In 1986 Zhao Wuji came, and Bruce Parsons, a guy from Toronto University. He invited Gu Wenda officially. He gave lectures and we talked a lot. Zhao Wuji also came with a female director of one of the big spaces in Paris. I can't remember. Zhao Wuji got to give a lesson and a talk. And Vabarnov. I do not remember the German guy with a Russian name...I can't really remember, maybe because I was not there. Once I had to leave because my father was very ill.

(Q): You were talking about Fan Jingzhong. He was a pivotal person in terms of providing translations. People talk about him with great respect, and he is the official librarian.

(AS): Yes he gave us some lessons, private lessons, obviously, in translating calligraphy theory (書法理論). We read a little bit of *The Red Cliff*. It was just amazing. I could not follow all of this, because it was too special. Uta was there sometimes too, because she was good at classical Chinese. For me, not at all, but I tried a little bit. We read *Shupu* (書譜) in a theory class. It was great, but it was very hard for me.

Fan Jingzhong was like a living dictionary, he had everything in his head. Incredible. On the other hand, he did not eat a lot, and his clothes were mostly, really, not washed. He slept on a table. More than once I saw and asked him where he slept, and he would say, here, on the table. He would spread his green coat out and slept. He worked so late, and very often they were controlled by the school or security. We have to put this away, or put that in my bag. He had to hide some things because it was simply not understood by the administration. Too *mafan* (麻煩, troublesome). He had a daughter. She was very nice....I forgot her name, I have to look it up.

Fan Xiaoming (樊小明) was also a very good translator, an official English translator for the school at that time. She was very good and interested in contemporary art. She was kind of a friend of Gu Wenda, and knew the groups. She did not play an active role, but she knew and was supportive. She went to Spain somehow, to teach or to study again. So some people were just open-minded, this was the most important thing.

(Q): I don't know if you can speak to that, because you were not at the Central Academy, and it is just my projection... But it seems that the atmosphere in Hangzhou was very different from that of Beijing.

(AS): Everybody told me so, even artists. They say we were not as close to the power. In Beijing you always had the feeling of the power, because they had the power. The further away you were from Beijing, the better it was, normally. And in Guangdong it was just weird. On one hand it was far away, but also the academy was a mess somehow, I thought, at that time. The city was interesting, but had no culture; it was like Hong Kong for me. When I looked for exhibitions, there were really no contemporary art in 1986, in my opinion.

(Q): So you went to Guangzhou in 1986?

(AS): Yes. I thought it was interesting from the side of shopping; it was always a little bit towards Hong Kong. You could smell the feel of capitalism.

(Q): Did you meet any artists there?

(AS): At that time, no. I knew Zhang Haier since 1990, and the Big-tail Elephant group in 1991. Since then I have contact with the group. It was wonderful. Since our exhibition I have maintained great contact with them. I later curated a show in Berlin on photography. I also went to Guangzhou. Unfortunately Zhang Haier had

stopped doing anything. I heard. It is like one's creativity stopped....He had such a wonderful time between 1989 and 1992. He had been in Tiananmen and he photographed. He also did a wonderful series on trains. The police stopped all trains going out from Beijing in 1989, and he was on one of them. When it was stopped he made a photograph series. I am not a collector but I wanted to have it for myself because I liked it very much. He came to Berlin and stayed in my place. Qiu Zhijie too.

(Q): So you know Qiu Zhijie afterwards. Did you know who he was when he was in Hangzhou in the 80s?

(AS): No. I photographed him in 1991, this is him. Hans van Dijk was sitting next to him, and this is Qiu Zhijie, in his second year in academy.

(Q): And who is the third person?

(AS): I don't know unfortunately. I think Han wrote it down, he noted everything in his notebook. I was the photographer of that trip.

(Q): I think we can work very close with Hans, he is a person with a very strong spiritual identity that fits very well in what we are trying to do.

(AS): Yes, absolutely. He is really a wonderful friend and guy.

(Q): Back to Fan Jingzhong. He was a great 'motor' of this kind of project, and he is not old now...

(AS): He was quite young at that time, but he was energetic. Uta made the contact to Gombrich directly afterwards, so the library of Art Academy in Hangzhou got all the private books from Gombrich. He donated the books because of Fan Jingzhong. Uta was the link between Fang Jingzhong, but I lost contact. My contacts are more with the artists. When I graduated from the school, Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi also graduated. I saw these oil paintings they did.

(Q): Did you go to their activities during the Pond Society? And the '85 New Space Exhibition?

(AS): I once went to an exhibition but it was more a hidden exhibition while I have not seen other photos on this. At that time I also did not see a film of Zhang Peili, but I think that was 1988, it was a little bit later when he started working with video.

(Q): Can you tell us when you met Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi, what you thought they were doing? What books were they looking at anything?

(AS): I did not get to their rooms, we just met at the exhibition hall with all of their graduate works hanging. It was very interesting and I like it very much. I asked Geng Jianyi if he knows Georges de La Tour because of the cold light in his paintings. He said no. Zhang Peili's work had people standing with canoes. It was very well painted and I told him that. He faced difficulties though and they criticized him. I thought it could not be because it was a technically fantastic piece, but the content was not the right attitude, it was too cold. Then Geng Jianyi painted *The Second State*, and was criticized too.

(Q): It is like if you want happy, I will give you happy

(AS): Exactly, this was exactly the point. They were not that conscious about it, I would say. They were in the situation, but were not conscious about what they would do. I did not know Wu Shanzhuan and Ni Haifang, I knew them only later. Wang Guangyi and Huang Yongping had left by that time. I have heard of Huang Yongping's name, and I met Huang Guangyi with Hans in 1991, Huang Yongping I met in 1990 in Germany with Fei Dawei. It was the first time that I saw a workshop on Chinese modern art in Germany... They did it in Boll Foundation, and I met Hans Van Dijk at that time.

(Q): Is there a catalogue?

(AS): No, because it was a workshop, not an exhibition. I have the invitation paper.

(Q): Did people tape it?

(AS): I could ask. I did not take any photos at that time. I went to lots of spaces in Germany after autumn 1989 with an expose for an exhibition with a friend of mine, Jochen Noth. He was a lecturer of odds and worked part time for this project. But he was one of the first Germany refugees in China. Do you know of the 69 generation? He smashed the Heidelberg University, he was one of the leaders of the student revolt then. Then he was prosecuted and went to China. He was considered a communist, whatever that means. He was involved with student movement.

(Q): Where did he go in China?

(AS): To Beijing. They allowed him to stay and he taught German for several years in new Beijing. He introduced me to Shasha, a young woman and showed me her “Du Le” bookshop, saying that it is very interesting. Shasha was a woman who ran a real, but special bookshop in Beijing, open to public. It was around 1983-4. It was on a real street, people could walk in and out. There were always problems. They (the management) bought books that could not be sold in other places. There were Chinese language books, as well as translated copies of other foreign publications that were not allowed by the party to be sold in “normal” bookshops. So it was a combination of books that were allowed and forbidden. When you come to Berlin, you should interview Jochen Noth because he knows about that time, and even before. He knows the period of 1979-1981 very well.

(Q): What is he doing now?

(AS): He has turned to the commercial side, doing business in China. Every now and then we meet each other. Her daughter has worked in Hans Van Dijk’s office. She graduated in Sinology, and in the first year she was Hans’s helper in Beijing when he first started opening up his gallery, or rather, a private space. It was the new Amsterdam agency.

(Q): You were in the bookshop?

(AS): Yes.

(Q): Were the books already printed?

(AS): Yes, they were printed, but could not be sold.

(Q): So it was sort of like a second hand bookshop.

(AS): Absolutely.

(Q): How did she manage to get the books?

(AS): I am not really sure how she did it. She must have some *guanxi* (关系). She looked like someone from a higher class. She only knows Chinese. Perhaps you can find her through Johan.

(Q): Was she young at the time?

(AS): She was young, perhaps at the end of her twenties. I was of a similar age, 27, 28.

(Q): So Shasha was her name.

(AS): Yes. I will ask Johan, he should have some information. You should come to Berlin for the materials....

In 1989, Fei Dawei and Huang Yongping came to Boll Foundation and conducted a workshop. The national gallery would not do it because they thought there is no Chinese modern art. Even the very contemporary thought that because 1989 was just over, it was inappropriate to have anything to do with China. Germans are very straightforward with things like that. I argued it was a different thing but they did not agree. Only the House of All Culture expressed interest, saying that they had planned something like that already, and was waiting for an opportunity. I went with Johan and showed them the material, and they said they would think

over. I told them the Boll Foundation was having a workshop on Fei Dawei, and suggested them to go.

Before I left China I also met Yang Jiechang and Martina. I knew them from 1985, and also Leng Lin.

(Q): Did you meet Yang Jiechang in Guangdong?

(AS): No, never. But I met him in Central Academy in 1985. He was visiting Martina obviously. I got a job in September 1985, it was a big show on 19th Century German paintings, especially Caspar David Friedrich. There were many known pieces from the National Gallery in Berlin. Not expressionism, it was Romantic and the beginning of 19th Century. They asked me to come as a translator and to hang the paintings.

(Q): When did you leave China?

(AS): August 1986.

(Q): But in 1985 they asked you to come up from Hangzhou.

(AS): Exactly. They needed a translator because they were not pleased with the translator who did not know about the art. That was the point. So I helped hanging up the painting and to guide through the show for the next two weeks. It was absolutely wonderful. Yang Lian (楊煉), the writer, I knew from there. He came with his ex-girlfriend; it was very interesting to talk to him. Once I ate in a small eatery on the other side and saw Yang Jiechang and Martina sitting there. That's how I got to know them. I met them by chance. And then I got to know her and what she was doing. And Jiechang. We are good friends even though we do not see each other very often. She is sometimes in Heidelberg, or near Heidelberg. At that time it was interesting.

(Q): So that was 1985. We consider them very close friends to the archive.

(AS): I met Hans for the first time in this foundation workshop.

(Q): What was the name of this foundation?

(AS): Heinrich Böll. He's a German writer. And the Green Party has this foundation. Ni Haifang got one of the first scholarships from the foundation in 1993 to stay in Germany. It is a very famous foundation in Berlin.

Hans asked the society if he could make a show. He was very disappointed. He said he lived in Nanjing from 1986-9, and would like to make a show but they did not want it, which makes him very depressed. It fit so well. I did not know at that point it was so good. I didn't collect Meishu magazine all the time, but never regularly like a collector or an archive. But Hans did. It was what he liked to do. I like to talk with artists, go to shows, take pictures and make documentation. He did not like to talk much. So it was a perfect match. I suggested we work together and they agreed when they saw him. It was all unofficial. There was an official protest by the Chinese Embassy against this exhibition. With official notes, but they could not do anything. We were unofficially releasing things, it was more dangerous to unofficially have things in than out.

(Q): Do you have any documentation on that show?

(AS): I have the entire documentation, Hans and me. We have 20 files with information on artists that we showed and did not show. They applied, and we have all of the notes.

(Q): When you were organizing this exhibition, Hans was living in Beijing?

(AS): No, he was living in Eindhoven. He came over for the project. He got a contract from House of World Cultures, which was not very well paid I have to say. From 1991 to April 1993, we got a contract to prepare for the exhibition. The funding came from three places. Haus der Kulturen der Welt made the first funding. Then we looked for partners – there was the Rotterdam Kunst Halle, then there was the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (David Elliot was there), then there was Odense, a place near Copenhagen. They have a huge space, but do not go by the name of a Kunst Halle.

(Q): So you were going to tour it, did it tour?

(AS): It did tour. We opened in January 1993. Two weeks before I was in court for Yu Youhan. He asked us for help because he was betrayed by an art dealer in Hamburg. I got the backing from House of World Cultures to protest against this. Hans and I were there with closed doors. After a while we got a hint from some unknown person that this art dealer was protected by the German government. It was very strange, that guy was a criminal. Two weeks before the exhibition opened we succeeded in getting five paintings, in rolls. In Hamburg I was given five Yu Youhan paintings that were stolen before. And those were the Renminbi paintings. It is really ironic.

(Q): Did you ever get the other paintings back?

(AS): No. No payment as well. I could not get in contact with the art dealer. I did not know something like that existed in Germany, but they said it was highly political. You do not want be involved in these things. I was happy to get the paintings, drive back and put them into frames right away for the exhibition opening.

(Q): This show actually toured, so these institutions provided some the startup capital needed.

(AS): This whole show cost about altogether 700,000 Marcs which is 350,000 Euros. Altogether, including the catalogue.

(Q): That is approximately USD350,000 at that time

(AS): The Bonne Museum had another show in 1996, strictly objected by China. They spend the same amount only on advertisement.

(Q): The catalogue for your show is excellent.

(AS): We tried our best. What was most difficult was bibliography, because it did not exist at all. For the most artists it did not exist at all.

(Q): Looking at this early information, if you look at the artists today and their bibliographies, a lot of this information is dropped off their bibliographies because now they do not think it is important enough. But if you look at their bibliographies, like that of Gu Wenda, he shows his early exhibitions. There is something about their mentality, on what they thought was important. I remember looking at the bibliography of Wang Guangyi, published in 1992. It was so interesting because Wang Guangyi had obviously worked with Yan Shanchun and Huang Zhuan to put together a bibliography and had all this interesting information that you never see in bibliographies anymore. All of the stuff is considered unimportant, not interesting, but it really says a lot about their lives in those days. I think this is a very important document of that period.

(AS): The House of World Cultures has different sections for literature, music, other things. At that time, all these heads of departments were very helpful. I invited a lot of literates to come, like Gu Cheng, Duo Duo, Meng Ke... The hall was packed, the atmosphere was so good. It was filled with people from the film and music sector. Tan Dun came over from New York. Another guy from Hamburg came to conduct. I coordinated the catalogue because Hans did not want to do it. I had all the pictorial materials.

(Q): It has so much information on the music, film and theatre scene. It is such a great document.

(AS): If you are looking for someone in music, I know someone who is still in Heidelberg -Barbara Mittler who is at the Asian department. She was a young student at that time and I called her from House of World Cultures, one time in Taipei, one time in Beijing. She has the biggest collection of 80s contemporary music in Europe. She is a professor in Heidelberg now. Beijing lost an entire generation of composer, including Tan Dun and also others. There must have been interesting development in teaching then in Beijing. I have always been interested in Music and I have a lot of tapes of that time because Barbara gave a lot to me. I was hoping to work with some modern composers in my own artwork.

(Q): When you first came back from China, what were you doing apart from this project?

- (AS):** When I came back, my work changed quite a bit. I was brought up a painter, who then went into installation – site-specific installation, which I still do. I also work with light. I have a little booklet with me now, maybe I can show you later.
- (Q):** We would love to collect materials about you as well, it is important that we show the influence of contemporary China on western artists as well as foreign influence on Chinese artists.
- (AS):** I will give you afterwards; I would love to show you more catalogues when you come to Berlin. I am doing quite a lot, including writing about China's art. It is what I love to do, but in a more quiet way now. I also think this overview exhibition is really over, we need to do more specific things now. For example in Beijing, there is a guy whose name is Hoffman, he has been in Beijing since 1992 or 93, starting up with the jazz festival there. There is a jazz festival in Beijing since the 1990s and he invented it. He did everything --- managing and everything. And he is still in Beijing. He was a young guy at that time. He organized Cui Jian (崔健) to come to Berlin, and also the hard rock band Tang Dynasty (唐朝樂隊). There were 4,500 people in the hall of House of World Cultures the whole night until 5am in the morning.
- (Q):** What are the interesting things about this catalogue if you compare it with the catalogue that was done by Johnson Chang, which is also a very interesting, in particular the essays and categorizations which he did were sturdy and continue to resonate today. What happened to Johnson's catalogue was perhaps not what he intended. What happened is that, the Political Pop side of it became internationally well known. He grouped things, and those categories took off internationally and almost become the caricaturized form of Chinese art. People seem to have forgotten about, except for people like you and me, the other aspects of Chinese art. But from a commercial end and a superficial international perspective, those two categories are the ones that got the most attention. The way that this catalogue was presented, you did not group them specifically like Johnson, and it seems like a much less politicized view of China. What happened to Chinese art after these two exhibitions, particularly in North America and Australia, maybe the English speaking world, is that there became almost a cartoon in that everybody saw Chinese art as dissident art, or anti-communist art, political art, which in fact is not true. It hijacked the artwork to an international, or an American, or Euro-American political agenda. I find that this catalogue is very balanced, and if you read the essays in Johnson's catalogue you will discover the same; there is no word like 'dissident' anywhere in the essays. This catalogue is very balanced, very intellectual, and it seems that you were trying to do that to Chinese art.
- (AS):** We were trying to do so, but the reaction was sometimes the same. We tried to balance. Our first intention was to show more of the 80s, then we encountered budget problems, and space problems. I tried to find a second space, because there would have been in Berlin. They did not want to do it because of political reasons. We could not include that many artists as we wanted to principally, I wanted to show more of the 80s, of Gu Wenda, of Yang Jiecheng. Hans said we should not include too many Chinese artists in foreign countries (the Diaspora), so we reduced it to Yan Peiming, Huang Yongping and a guy in Holland, Zhao Renjian (趙建人). Hans really liked him so we agreed to bring him in. These were the three, and not any more. We also had Zhu Jinshi (朱金石) in Berlin, and they were very angry that we did not include them. Wang Keping was totally angry; he did not want me to visit him anymore. Yang Jiecheng was a little disappointed, Martina was disappointed, only Yan Peiming and not him. It was difficult.
- We faced a new situation suddenly, in 1989, and afterward when we went to China. It was another generation of artists like Fang Lijun, Yu Hong, Liu Xiaodong. Suddenly we were confronted with another movement which we could not ignore or avoid. You have to show these new movements too, so we had to choose. So we went to Ding Yi, Yu Youhan, and I regret not having asked Ding Yi for his earlier performance works, as well as his works on rice paper. They are all gone now, all sold.
- (Q):** Ding Yi worked on rice paper?

(AS): Wonderfully, it is a real pity. I was asked in Europe. There were two trips, one trip Hans and I did together. The second trip I stayed in the House of World Cultures because it was high time, one person had to stay there. Hans went with the chief of the visual art department and Johan to China. So I stayed and tried to manage things in Berlin. I showed some Ding Yi to some people, telling them that he worked on rice paper, and one could easily imagine he could come to these things now. And it was just a clear consequence of all his former work, which we should have collected. But Hanz and I made rule that before we leave we don't buy ourselves. No gifts, no sales. We can buy when the show is officially over. I am not a collector but I like Geng Jianyi's work very much, and I have one of his works, one of Zhao Shaorou's, all bought at Hans's place officially. This is because we want to be clean, and this was good.

It is just with Ding Yi that I regret, because I cannot show where he comes from. You should ask him about the old photos. It was very nice, like fields, like you are looking on from a plane onto the fields, but very systematical. It comes from something. You can always come with the same question from different parts of the earth, at different times, or the same time, and it's solved in another way, and maybe sometimes in a very similar way. It is not just like when someone tells Fang Lijun there is a German artist I don't like so much, and it is like this and this guy. No, that is stupid. You have to put your things away, and just look.