

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

杨天娜访谈

访问：王小燕 日期：2008年1月19日 时间：约12分钟 地点：广州 博尔赫斯当代艺术机构

(There is English translation of the interview in the later part of this document.)

中央美术学院留学

问：你哪一年到北京读书？为什么选择去北京？

杨：我是85年底去北京的。我当时才二十多岁，对中国的想象也算是比较天真的。我的兴趣第一就是学中文，第二是学书法。

问：当年外国学生可以到北京以外的城市留学吗？

杨：是的，我当时有考虑其他城市，但最后我还是决定去文化中心北京学习，我当时认为在那里可能性最多。当时留学，必须先上语言学院，但是我对语言学院不太感兴趣，那里外国人太多，而我当时就希望跟中国人接触和交流。另外我想在中国学艺术、学书法，所以我当时努力申请中央美术学院。

问：刚到北京的时候，学习气氛怎样？

杨：我是86年底到中央美术学院的。我觉得中央美院非常开放，气氛很轻松。留学生和中国学生之间没有任何限制，他们可以来我的房间，我可以去他们的房间，我们也一起上课。艺术家也是很积极的，就是每个人准备一些小活动。

问：常跟你接触的艺术家有谁呢？

杨：我当时跟侯瀚如来往很多。我的同学也有刘小东、朱加等等这一帮人，但我主要接触的是学理论的像侯瀚如、孔长安、王小箭和朱青生，还有溪建军和以后杨诩苍。

问：侯瀚如是你同班同学？

杨：他是同校而已，我同班同学有翁菱，李旭还有冷林。

广东的印象

问：读书时有去中国其他地方？像广东？

杨：是，我去过广东。应该说我经常逃课，到处旅游，所以我基本上走遍了一次中国，去了很多地方。

问：觉得北京和其他城市的气氛有差别吗？

杨：那当然不一样。北京是文化中心，相当开放，作为外国人很舒服，中国人也不太注意你。但当你一到外地去，你就引起别人的注意。

问：第一趟到广州的时候，感觉怎样？

杨：当时我不是很喜欢广州，主要是因为八十年代的广东基本上没办法说普通话，得说广东话。现在就不一样了。回头来看，我觉得这种地域性逐渐的减弱和消失是很可惜的。

问：那你怎么在广东转悠呢？

杨：语言上我还是说普通话，没有别的办法。从气氛来说，八十年代的广东也是很轻松的，也是很开放的。

问：你在广东能感受香港的影响吗？

杨：我唯一看见的影响，是一些广东美院的香港来的留学生。其他影响我当时没有注意到。但我在广州呆的时间每次太短，每次只有四五天。

问：你是什么时候认识杨诩苍的？

杨：我是87年7月份认识他的。

问：在什么场合呢？

杨：是侯瀚如请我去他的家乡，广州。87年的暑假他请我去他的家乡。到了广州他要介绍一位非常有意思的艺术家给我，他说一定要带我去看他的工作室。那我就陪他去了。一不小心就到了杨诩苍的工作室，然而故事就开始了。

中国当代艺术、艺术家、艺术刊物

问：当时你和侯瀚如谈得最多的是什么？

杨：我们什么都聊，当然也谈艺术和中国当代艺术的问题。当时在中国当代艺术刚刚诞生了，所以大部分的人就希望跟我们外国留学生聊聊着方面的问题，认识这一方面的话题。有活动的话他们也会请我们去看。侯瀚如也比较喜欢音乐，他会带一些当代和摇滚音乐家到美院看我们。瀚如本人一直表示希望出国。他并不是唯一的人。我八十年代认识的艺术家和朋友基本上都希望出国。

问：你认为他们想要出国的原因是什么？

杨：我想他们还是感到[在中国]很压抑的。当然我刚说过气氛很开放，交流也相当自由，可他们还是在体系里面。我想在体系里面的，没有经历过体系外面的感觉。他们又好奇又压抑，因为还管怎么样，还是有某种限制。而且，即使85、86年是比较开放的，87年又开始紧张起来。原来89年在中国美术馆的《中国现代艺术展》本来计划在87年开展的，但87年气氛太紧张了，所以要往后退。我想知识分子和艺术家是很敏感的，他们感觉到这种紧张气氛和压力。

问：你一直喜欢当代艺术？

杨：我是一直喜欢当代艺术的。我对书法的兴趣，就是因为我当时对Hans Hartung、Marc Tobey等现代画家感兴趣，因此我很天真地想找他们的渊源。

问：八十年代美院学生对当代艺术的理解程度怎样？

杨：都不一样。有一些人理解比较多，看的东西也多一些，比如侯瀚如。他应该是第一个手上拿着Joseph Beuys的行为录像带的，这是1987年。他也自己想做一些行为艺术。另外一些人不太感兴趣当代艺术，乖乖的继续按照美院的课程读书。不过大家能去了解跟现代和当代艺术有关的资料的机会还是不少。

问：当时在中国，当代艺术的书本和资讯足够吗？

杨：什么叫足够？我觉得有的时候不够也正好。太充足的话就没有距离，就会模仿得太像。80年代的中国当代艺术家主很多通过杂志和画册了解西方艺术。杂志经常是日语的或者西文的。他们喜欢看日本的《美術手帖》(Bijutsu Techo)。里面的图虽然经常很小，说不定有时候还很模糊的，但是他们可以看得懂日文里的汉字。通过汉字对里面的内容也只能了解得一半，不一定理解得透彻。不过我觉得这种距离、这种贫乏，反而成就了他们走上自己的路。

问：你在中国留了多久？

杨：两年多。我是87年底走的，然后我88年再来了一次。

问：你会怎么比较当时中国南方和北方的艺术情况？

杨：当然不能一概而论，但我想北方的艺术家更喜欢表现自己，更想留下很有代表性的痕迹，也更加寻找一种群体的活动方式。在南方反而更加个人主义的。艺术家们更加独立行动。我觉得在中国南方也更希望从教学入手。列如说李正天的「一零五畫室」在八十年代的北京我想是不可能的。

MARTINA KÖPPEL-YANG

Interviewer: Phoebe Wong **Date:** 19 Jan 2008 **Duration:** about 12 minutes **Location:** Guangzhou, Borges Liberia Contemporary Art Institute

Q: Why did you study in Beijing in the 1980s? When did you get to Beijing?

MY: I went to Beijing at the end of 1985. I was only 20 years old at that time, so I had relatively naïve imaginations for how China would be like. My primary interest in China was to learn Chinese, the second was to learn Chinese calligraphy.

Q: Were foreign students only allowed to go to Beijing, or could they study in other cities as well? Did you choose Beijing for a reason?

MY: Right, I was given a choice at that time, but I decided to go to the central part (Beijing) in the end, because it offered more possibilities. Being a student from abroad one first had to attend the Language Institute, which was not a lot of fun. There were too many foreigners, but my primary aim was to meet and communicate with Chinese people. Further I wanted to learn art and calligraphy I therefore applied for the Central Academy of Fine Arts as soon as I could.

Q: How was the atmosphere like when you first went to Beijing? How did you feel?

MY: I arrived at the Central Academy in late 1986. I found the Central Academy very open, very relaxed. There were nearly no limits between local Chinese and foreign students. They could visit my room, and I could visit theirs, and we attended classes together. The young artists were enthusiastic, they would organize some events and happenings. The atmosphere was very open in general.

Q: Who were the artists that you hung out with?

MY: I mainly hung out with Hou Hanru at that time. Schoolmates included Liu Xiaodong and his friends like for example Zhu Jia. But the people that I came into contact most were those studying art history and theory, like Hou Hanru, Kong Chang'an, Wang Xiaojian and Zhu Qingsheng, but also Xi Jianjun and later Yang Jiechang.

Q: Was Hou in the same class as you, or were you just schoolmates?

MY: He was in the same school, whereas my classmates from the same class included Weng Ling, Li Xu and Leng Lin.

Q: You must have traveled to other places in China when you were studying, did you go to Guangdong?

MY: Yes, I did visit Guangdong. Or should I say, I skipped a lot of my classes to travel. So in principle I traveled all around China once.

Q: You traveled extensively in China in 1980s; was the atmosphere in Beijing different from or similar to that of other cities that you visited?

MY: Beijing was definitely different. It was the cultural centre, a very open one too. In Beijing back then a foreigner did not necessarily invite any attention. But if a foreigner were to travel to cities other than Beijing, you were bound to attract attention.

Q: How did you feel when you visited Guangzhou for the first time?

MY: I did not really like it back then, because I could not speak Putonghua in Guangzhou. No one spoke Putonghua in Guangzhou in the 1980s. Things are totally different now; and looking back? I feel it is tragic that local characteristics get gradually lost.

Q: How did you go around in Guangzhou, then?

MY: Well I spoke Putonghua, I had no choice. If I was to comment on the atmosphere in Guangdong, I would say it

was very open.

Q: Hong Kong and Guangdong have shared close relationships, could you feel any influence from Hong Kong in Guangdong back then?

MY: The only influence I observed at the time was that there were students from Hong Kong studying at the Guangdong Academy of Fine Arts. I did not live in Guangzhou; every time I stayed there only for 2 to 3 days. I guess there might have been quite some influences that I had not realized.

Q: When did you meet Yang Jiechang?

MY: I met him in July, 1987.

Q: Where and how did you meet him?

MY: Hou Hanru invited me to his hometown Guangzhou. He insisted that I visited him during the summer holidays. I agreed to pay him a visit. In Guangzhou then he wanted to introduce me to “a very interesting artist”. So I went to visit Yang Jiechang’s studio, and that’s how I met him and how the story began.

Q: When you were in Beijing you were very close to Hou Hanru. What did you guys talk about most frequently?

MY: We talked about everything, but certainly also about art and Chinese contemporary art. In China contemporary art just had come to life, so everybody was eager to discuss with us foreign students. Whenever there was an event they would invite us. Hou Hanru fancied music, too, so he would bring contemporary and rock musicians to the Academy to meet us. Hou often expressed the wish to go abroad, but he was by no means the only one to do so. Nearly all of the people I met wished to go abroad.

Q: Why do you think did they want to leave the country?

MY: I think, they were nevertheless feeling repressed. Of course, I mentioned that the atmosphere was rather open, and that we could communicate freely, but they were still within the system. Being within the system put a different feeling to it, there were still limitations. Moreover one must consider that it was even more open in 1985/1986, but by 1987 things began to tighten up again. The China/Avant-garde exhibition of 1989 was originally planned to be staged in 1987. But since the atmosphere was too tense in 1987, the show had to be postponed. Being sensitive, the intellectuals and artists felt the nervousness and pressure earlier and wished to evade.

Q: When you first arrived you were learning Chinese calligraphy, did you like contemporary art all along or did something happen to trigger your interest?

MY: I have always liked contemporary art. I was interested in calligraphy because I liked modern painting, I liked Hans Hartung and Mark Tobey for example. So in a rather naïve way I aspired to look for some of the origins.

Q: You were a foreign student who had an interest in contemporary art, so you must have known the situation outside of China quite well. Can you comment on the understanding of contemporary art among the Central Academy students in the 1980s?

MY: Their level of understanding varied. Some of them read more and knew more than the others. Take for example Hou Hanru, he was the first person to hold in his hands a video tape of a Beuys performance. This was in 1987. He also wanted to stage a performance. But others were less interested and followed the Academy’s curriculum. Yet there was a lot of information available.

Q: Our project focuses on how various artists acquired knowledge on the contemporary art scene via books and other forms of information. Were there enough books, information and knowledge of sorts in circulation in China then?

MY: How does one define ‘enough’? I think sometimes lacking is a good thing, because with an overflow of

information one loses distance and easily ends up reproducing what has been done before. In order to understand western art Chinese artists relied heavily on magazines and catalogues. These magazines were often in Western languages or Japanese. The artists were particularly fond of a publication called Bijutsu Techo. The reproductions in this journal were, however, usually very small, and sometimes even blurry. The artists could only read the Kanji, the Chinese characters, within the Japanese texts, too, and thus could not fully comprehend the content. But I think that exactly this distance, this lack, allowed them to blaze their own way.

Q: How long did you stay in China?

MY: For a little more than two years. I left in late 1987, but I visited shortly after in 1988.

Q: You knew Beijing through your time as a student there and you were introduced to Guangzhou by Hanru and Jiechang, how would you compare the situation in the north and south?

MY: I think the northern artists were keener on showing themselves off, they hoped to leave behind representative traces, and they preferred to participate in group activities, to be part of a movement. Whereas in the south artists acted more individually and preferred to act independently. I also think that in the south there were more possibilities to reform the curriculum of art education. For example, I guess it would have been difficult to find something like Li Zhengtian's Studio 105 in Beijing.