

WANG | YOUSHEN

王友身个展 | Wang Youshen Solo Exhibition

王 | WANG

美国明尼阿波利斯大学 Regis 艺术空间

Regis Center at the University of Minnesota, USA

May 21 - June 21, 2013



方案草图

Project Plan

### 展览题目

王

### 展览地点

美国明尼阿波利斯大学 Regis 艺术空间

### 展览材料

照片、水、显影盘、夹子、图钉、线等。

### 关于“王”

1. 个展“王”的概念源自我的姓氏，据官方最新统计，王姓是中国第一大姓，有9500万人，占全国人口总数的21%。“王”是亲缘、族群、文脉的关系链。
2. 是展示“清洗系列”作品。一是要陈述清洗“王”们的现场，二是想呈现我的图片“方法论”。
3. 被清洗的图像来源：一方面是我自存的照片和素材，它选取了自1989至今的20余年来，我及朋友、我报记者拍摄的各类照片和我收集的各时期各国各类媒体的图像素材；另一方面可选自明尼阿波利斯当地的志愿者（明大学生或影像中心会员）提供的各类图片。
4. 清洗工作可在北京先期进行，主体部分在当地制作。
5. 清洗图片的尺寸和数量不限，可根据图像质量及展场空间进行调整。

王友身，2013

### Exhibition Title

WANG

### Exhibition Venue

Regis Center at the University of Minnesota, USA

### Exhibition Materials

Photo, Water, Developing trays, Clips, Thumbtacks and Threads, etc.

### About “WANG”

1. The concept of the exhibition is derived from my family name Wang which is also the most common last name shared by 95,000,000 people in the country or is the last name of 21% of the country's total population, according to the most recent official statistics. “Wang” connects kinship, ethnic groups and the cultural context.
2. The purpose of showing the “*Washing Series*” is to, on one hand, describe the scene of various “Wangs” being washed, and on the other, to demonstrate the “methodology” of the creation of my images.
3. The photos to be washed come from two sources: firstly, photos and materials of my own collection which is composed of the photos shot by myself, my friends, correspondents of the Beijing Youth Daily since 1989, and picture materials I have collected from all kinds of media of various countries in different periods. Secondly, various photos or pictures provided by Minneapolis local volunteers (students of the university or members of the photo center, etc).
4. The initial washing job started in Beijing first, and main washing process will be finished in Minneapolis.
5. There is no limit on the dimension and number of the photos to be washed. We can do further adjustment according to the exhibition space and resolution of pictures.

Wang Youshen, 2013



王·清洗

1989—2013

照片、水、显影盘、夹子、图钉、线等

尺寸可变

*WANG • Washing*

1989 - 2013

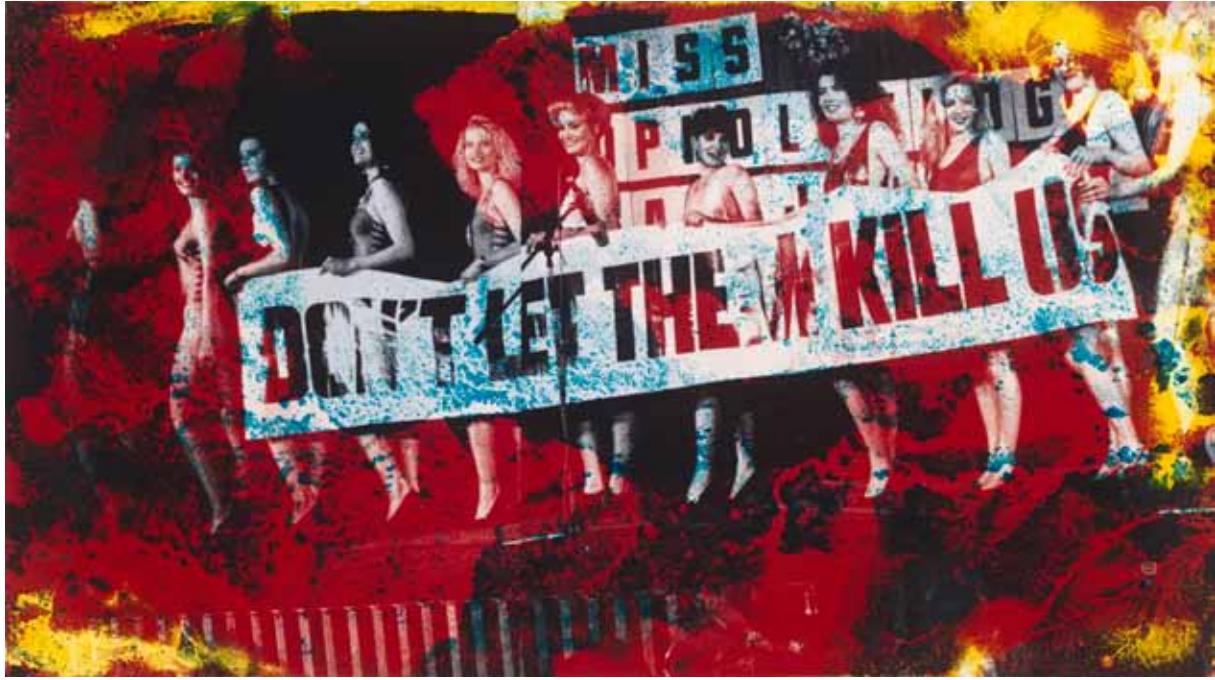
Photo, Water, Developing trays, Clips, Thumbtacks and Threads, etc.

Variable Dimensions

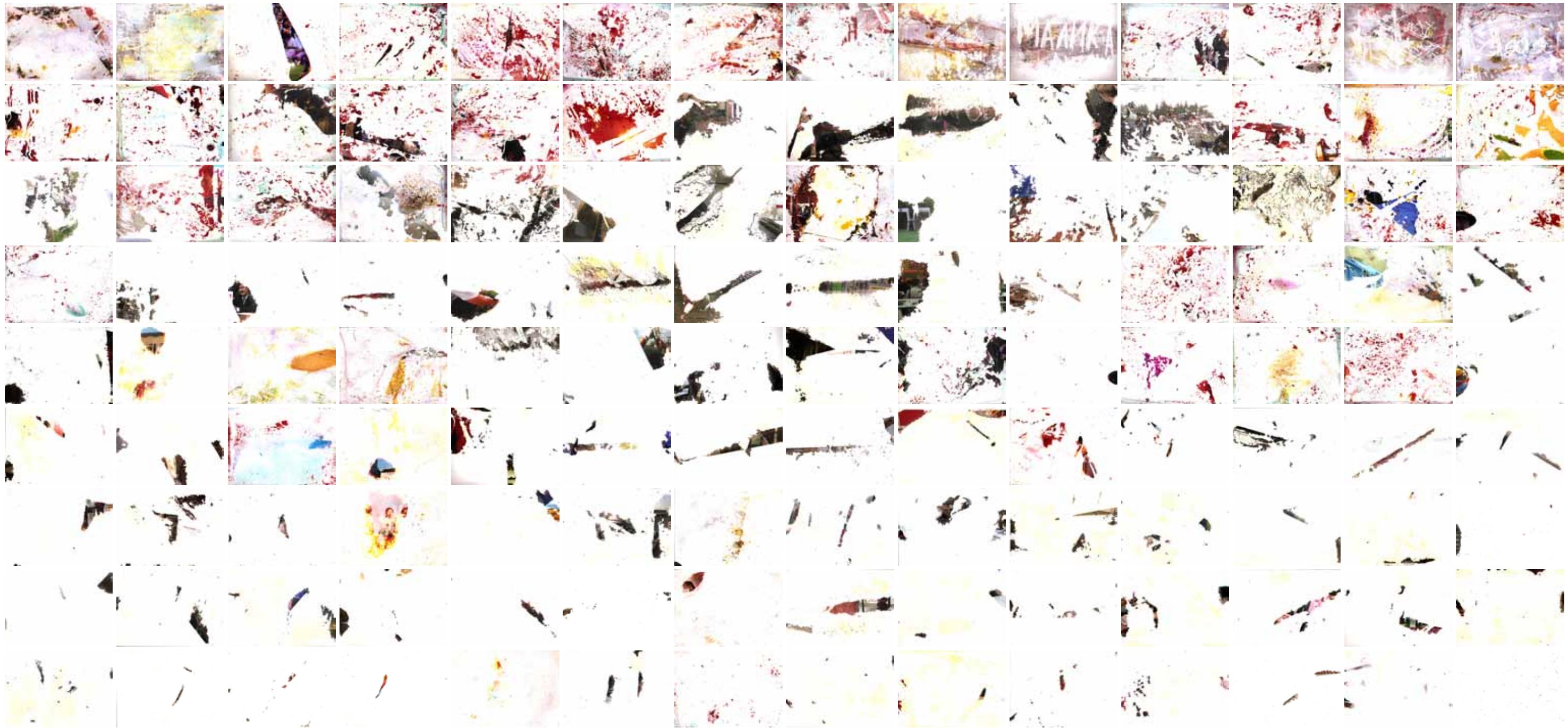












his most unique and most distinctive conceptual style in dealing with imagery information. In his concept, image carries certain amount of information, but the capacity of the information within the image can be enhanced or distorted through the chemical process such as image formation and image deformation (wash away). Later on, he added the “space for washing” – the darkroom as a three-dimensional element to his art. With the use of the “space for washing” Wang Youshen clearly conveys the “anti-war” subject matter through the series of *Washing • Datong Mass Graves, 1941* in a 1995 “New Asian Art Show” in Japan focused on Chinese, Korean and Japanese artists. His play of paradoxical procedures of image formation and image being washed away on those historical pictures discussed the complexity of memory and oblivion of history. In recent years, he has increasingly used both news photos and private photos to explore various subjects of importance. These subjects cover from family consciousness to the relationships between nature and cities, and from the recognition of individual’s social identity to the function of potential pressure of behavior and mentality by the information era. All these show the concerns of Chinese conceptual art on issues of society, humanity and history. Those issues have been well demonstrated with his unique conceptual way in works of the Washing Series such as *Washing • Y2K* and *Washing • Landscapes*.



我奶奶去世前后 / 1989-2007  
*Before and After My Grandmother Passed Away / 1989 – 2007*



清洗 • 新闻水 / 2007  
*Washing • News Water / 2007*



清洗 • 1941 大同万人坑 / 1995  
*Washing • Datong Mass Graves, 1941 / 1995*

## Information Energy of Conceptual Art

### Huang Zhuan

To Wang Youshen, media work is his job and his way of creation. As early as in the “China Avant-Garde Exhibition” in 1989, in his collaborative works with Yang Jun entitled “✓” he used press photo images – the media’s basic visual information carrier as the subject. In order to create the piece named *Man’s Advertisement*, he set up his camera on a tripod and took tons of “time-lap” shots of one minute interval at Wang Fujing commercial district, one of the most famous shopping center in China. He randomly captured images of people who accidentally bumped into the frame. He then enlarged hundreds of those photos and made a collage of them, painted a huge “✓” sign on top of it and finally covered the images with a real court notice. While such characteristics of intensive social criticism are not commonly seen in Youshen’s later works, the practice of finding the huge information power embedded in images continues to define his art. Wang’s gift for penetrating the depth of photograph images has made him one of China’s most successful artists.

*Washing • Before and After My Grandmother Passed Away* in 1994 marks the beginning of the formation of Wang Youshen’s complete and distinctive style of image processing. In a series of photos featuring family images as the key subject matter, Youshen successfully integrates ambiguity and contradiction by utilizing two opposite chemical processes of image formation and image being washed away. This becomes

## Echo of Newspaper and Photo

### Sheng Wei

Photograph is another part in Wang Youshen's material system. Photo had been used in more of his works even way before his newspaper series, and lasted longer.

In *Newspaper • Eyesight Testing* created in 1990, photography and newspaper were related straightly. Its connection point is the similarity of photo development process and newspaper printing process. In making of a photo, the image has to be recorded on negative at first, then through image development, it is freeze-framed on photographic paper. Similarly, during newspaper production, text and image layout is transformed on film, subsequently printed on paper. During Wang Youshen's working experience in newspaper editorial office, photography is part of his job and as an art editor, almost all the photos in newspaper office need to be handled by him. Therefore, photos gradually become the same important material in his works as newspaper materials. Although he paid great attention to the documentary function and concept of photos in his early practise, in his subsequent works he chose to look for inspirations in the technical process of photo developing. Once by accident, Wang Youshen noticed that after exposure, developing and fixing images,

public utility from both conceptual and systematic aspects. Therefore, Wang Youshen's works about "media" is not a strong and direct critical art, but a combination of personal experience and public life. On one hand, working in newspaper office for years makes him familiar with everything about newspaper and photography, it forces him to think about their production and circulation mechanism from social and cultural aspects; on the other hand, he has adopted some parts of the production process as his creation concept, such as the procedure of images emerging and disappearing used in "Washing" series. Besides, in numerous works, he hides intervention and influence of public media on general public, and reconstructs the relationship between the public and society in name of art. It is also the additional meaning of his media creations.

*(Selected Media Study—Motif and Cases, Linda Gallery, Beijing, 2012, p84-p87)*

exhibitions he has participated, including the 27th Sao Paulo Art Biennial in 2006, Wang Youshen built a darkroom in the exhibition space, showed the audience how to wash all kinds of negatives shot by himself or collected by him. The audience was welcomed to take away the washed photos as long as there was still one left in the tray to be continuously "washed". Besides, the audience could also bring their own negatives to the exhibition, and had them developed. The "Darkroom" series have experienced different results of image selection due to the difference in time and peculiarities in the realization in different countries, and the difference in time space and cultures. "Photo selection" becomes a field survey in sociology. Contrary to the "Darkroom" series, the "Sunbath" series uses the newspaper plate exposure process. He brings out the work which should have been completed in "darkrooms" to the public space, exposing it right under the sun light.

Wang Youshen does not hate photos, newspapers and mass media. As a practitioner and consumer, he is an insider to the media and has complex personal feelings and emotions about the media. Yet as a contemporary artist, he is an outsider, and he has rational thinking on media's ontology and

the cleaning procedure, to clean up the potion on the surface of photographic paper, could weaken images on photographic paper, or even make them disappear after longer wash. Thus he combined this process with the newspaper story of "Datong Mass Graves in 1941" together, and created *Washing • Datong Mass Graves, 1941* in 1995. He put the photos from the news story in a bathtub installed in the exhibition space and washed them with a shower head. Afterwards, a large "Washing" series was developed based on it, which is even extended till now.

"Washing" is a profound word with multiple meanings. It does not only imply cleaning up skulls in the "mass graves", but also represents the necessary procedure in photo production. Furthermore, it triggers thoughts about the language and entity of "photography" and "photo". In addition, in the whole history of politics in the 20th century, "washing" has a quite clear self-explanatory implication. Wang Youshen's "Washing" series therefore has an unutterable tension and stunning effect. Similarly, the "Darkroom" and "Sunbath" series are also inspired by photo and newspaper producing process. The "Darkroom" series first appeared in his solo exhibition in Australia in 1998. In many other international

## Time Generating And Vanishing

### Lu Peng

Time, image and actual venue, these are all the things that were related to reporters. When one finds his occupation becomes a natural part of his everyday life, his job awareness may influence all the aspects of him. This is the case with Wang Youshen. His act of taking documentary photographs of his grandmother for years is related to his occupation as a media worker. However, hardly anyone would care for a person who is not at all a social issue, and hardly anyone would care for a deceased when the death is seen everyday. This ordinary fact of a life was revealed by Wang Youshen: he selects photographs from his collection and displays them in a particular manner. Youshen once said, *“Before and After My Grandmother Passed Away”* emphasizes the passage of audience’s visual and intelligent perception. Apart from the images in the selection of materials, there are more necessary elements involved, such as the software, water, artificial light and natural light, etc.. I take pictures with my camera, and in the exhibition space, I would like the audience not only to see the two-dimensional pictures, but also the concept related physical transformation of images, a changed image and others, due to the use of clean water and light.”

Wang Youshen’s concept of “Washing” is explicit. It is an expression of memorable history and questioning

view the old photos of historical happenings and allowed many others to experience the so-called ideas such as “generation” and “disappearance” within his frame of a set time. Lately, he kept using existing photos, and he also tried to demonstrate the historical attributes of these photos in different phases. On top of this, he has come up with an idea of using stone reliefs to carve out the composition of the photos he has selected meticulously. Notwithstanding, different from the “no-stance” scenario in his “Darkroom” series, the artist chooses certain photos that recount historical happenings to “wash” or “freeze”. Such a reduction of the “target” is related to the artist’s experience and stance, which is a sort of notion about rewriting history. Therefore, we can also say that time is generated when photos emerge, and time is vanished when images are gone. At this point, the art of Wang Youshen exactly shows the generation and vanishing of time. It is worth noting that Wang’s deconstruction notion intrinsically bears the concept of Zen to a certain degree, and thus forms an immensely important disparity from the rhetoric and argumentative background of western artists.

*(Excerpted from Artists in Art History, Hunan Publishing House, Hunan, 2008, p248 – p275)*

in 1990s that addressed such issues as “individualism” and “meaninglessness”.

Considering Youshen’s occupation and his utilization of photos and documents, “washing” is no longer an artwork, but a social behavior which requires continuous trials and tests. From his previous works *Before and After My Grandmother Passed Away* to the present, he has been washing images over and over. The artist has always been influenced by the images that are seen everywhere, and he strives to achieve the results of “washing” just as he tries to reveal the images in his early works. This is an interesting contrast. Hence, there formed a certain ideological association among his works *Washing • Before and After My Grandmother Passed Away*, *Washing • Datong Mass Graves, 1941*, *Washing • Y2K*, and *Washing • Landscapes*.

If time has the inner quality as “essence”, this quality must have been associated with the repetitive recounting of history. In early years, Wang Youshen observed Wang Fu Jing shopping distinct in downtown Beijing where swarms of people float on a daily basis. What he utilized was the continuity of time; later, he took photos of his own grandmother in a long and tedious period of time. Time did not become Youshen’s tool until he came to

the effect of time. Photos will lose their contents as being continually washed. What will be turned out from the washing process? Where are the images originated? Can people’s judgment towards history change as indicated in Youshen’s “Washing” series? What factors determined the reliability of historical facts? Wang Youshen’s series directly express a historical theme; however, his suggestive expression to the audience is multi-folded and filled with questions. As a result, the artist has indeed given up on providing a conclusion to history, but agreed that in various stages of humankind evolution and history can be interpreted differently due to many historical and political reasons: the “essential truth” is thus completely eliminated. Different from *Before and After My Grandmother Passed Away*, the other piece entitled *Washing • Datong Mass Graves, 1941* strongly emphasizes the social and historical functions of arts, indicating the artist’s focus on major historical issues. Unlike the early work of “✓”, Wang gives up the one-way or direct questioning, and turned to show the different facets of meanings. This was an important logical change from essentialism to empiricism, and to metaphysical emptying in whole, with only the gaming meaning in sociological and political terms preserved. This was the prevalent feature of those conceptual arts

## WANG YOUSHEN

1964 Born in Beijing, China  
1988 Graduated from Central Academy of Fine Arts,  
Beijing, China  
Live and work in Beijing, China

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

1990 *Wang Youshen • Birthday Party*, Sanlitun, Beijing  
1998 *Wang Youshen • Darkroom*, Art Gallery of New  
South Wales, Sydney, Australia  
2000 *Wang Youshen • Y2K*, Artist Commune Gallery,  
Hong Kong  
2003 *Wang Youshen • Washing*, La Box Gallery, Bourges,  
France  
2004 *Wang Youshen • Washing*, ShanghART Gallery,  
Shanghai  
2007 *Wang Youshen • Washing*, Kwai Fung Hin Art  
Gallery, Hong Kong

### Selected Group Exhibitions

1986 *Beijing Young Artists Union*, National Art Museum  
of China, Beijing  
1988 *Graduate Student's Works*, Museum of Central  
Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing  
*Four Painters*, Gallery of Central Academy of Fine Arts,  
Beijing  
1989 *China Avant-garde*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing  
*China Avant-garde*, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
1990 *Lun*, Ritan Park, Beijing  
*Commemoration of the Death of a Century of Van  
Gogh*, National Culture Palace, Beijing  
*Sydney Spring Festival*, Art Gallery of New South  
Wales, Sydney, Australia

Press Release, ShanghART Gallery, Shanghai  
*What's Next*, Hong Kong City Hall, Hong Kong  
*2nd Documentary Exhibition of Fine Arts*, Hubei Art  
Museum, Wuhan, Hubei  
*85 new wave*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art,  
Beijing  
*The Supplemental History*, Guangdong Art Museum,  
Guangzhou, Guangdong  
2008 *Urban Image*, Shenzhen Art Museum, Shenzhen,  
Guangdong  
*Case studies of Artists in Art History and Art Criticism*,  
SZ Art Center, Beijing  
*Hypallage*, Hua Art Museum, Shenzhen, Guangdong  
2009 *Another scene*, ShanghART H – Space, Shanghai  
*The China Project*, Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland  
Australia  
*Yi Pai*, Today Art Museum, Beijing  
*Lianzhou International Photo Festival*, Lianzhou,  
Guangdong  
2010 *Glass Factory*, Iberia Art Center for Contemporary  
Art, Beijing  
*Personal Frontier*, IA32 Space, Beijing  
*Reshaping History*, National Convention Center, Beijing  
2011 *The Document Exhibition of Chinese Performance Art*,  
Songzhuang Art Museum, Beijing  
*Growing Up*, Shanghai World Financial Center,  
Shanghai  
2012 *Face*, MingSheng Art Museum, Shanghai  
*Cooperation Non cooperation – Erhe Double Joint Art  
Exhibition by Guan Wei + Wang Youshen*, Beijing Lotus  
Art Museum, Beijing  
*7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale*, OCT-contemporary  
art terminal, Shenzhen, Guangdong  
*Media Study – Motif and Cases*, Linda Gallery, Beijing  
2000 *Society*, Upriver Gallery, Chengdu, Sichuan  
*Taipei Biennale*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan  
2001 *Polypolis*, Kunsthaus, Hamburg, Germany  
2002 *The Art on News*, China International Exhibition  
Center, Beijing  
*Scene*, Pingyao International Photography Festival,  
Pingyao, Shanxi  
*The Guangzhou Triennial*, Guangdong Art Museum,  
Guangzhou, Guangdong  
2003 *Distance*, Guangdong Art Museum, Guangzhou,  
Guangdong  
*Dajia*, the Museum of Fudan University, Shanghai  
*Open Sky*, Duolun Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai  
2004 *Beyond Boundaries*, Shanghai Gallery of Art,  
Shanghai  
*Between Past and Future*, Smart Museum, Chicago, USA  
2004 *Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai  
2005 *The Wall*, Millennium Art Museum, Beijing  
Albright – Knox Art Gallery, University at Buffalo Art  
Galleries, Buffalo, New York, USA  
*Plato and His Seven Spirits*, OCT – contemporary art  
terminal, Beijing; Shenzhen, Guangdong  
*Zooming into Focus*, National Art Museum of China,  
Beijing  
*Conspire*, TS1 Contemporary Art Center, Beijing  
*The City's Skin*, Tap Seac Gallery, Macau; Shenzhen  
Art Museum, Shenzhen, Guangdong  
2006 *China Contemporary Art Annual Exhibition*,  
Millennium Art Museum, Beijing  
*Jianghu*, Jack Tilton Art Galleries, New York, USA  
Create History, OCT-contemporary art terminal,  
Shenzhen  
*27th Biennale of Sao Paulo*, Sao Paul, Brazil  
2007 *Sotsart*, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

1991 *New Generation Art*, The History Museum of China,  
Beijing  
1992 *Chinese new wave*, Chameleon Contemporary Art  
Space, Hobart, Australia  
*Encountering the Other (K – 18)*, Kassel, Germany  
1993 *China's New Art Post – 1989*, Hong Kong Arts  
Centre, Hong Kong  
*Mao Goes Pop*, Australian Contemporary Art Museum,  
Sydney, Australia  
*Aperto'93, 45th Venice Biennale*, Venice, Italy  
1994 *Contemporary Photography: Mainland China*, Hong  
Kong and Taiwan, Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong  
*Beijing International Com – Art Show*, The Art Museum  
of Capital Normal University, Beijing  
*Seoul International Art Festival*, National Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea  
1995 *New Asian Art*, Kilin Plaza, Osaka; Foundation Forum,  
Tokyo, Japan  
*Out of the State's Ideology*, Kampnagel K3, Hamburg,  
Germany  
1996 *Prospect, Schirn Kunsthalle*, Frankfurt, Germany  
*The First Academic Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary  
Art*, The Art Museum of Capital Normal University, Beijing  
1997 *Chinese Art of the '90*, Rudolfinum Gallery, Prague,  
Czech Republic  
*Another Long March*, Fundament Foundation, Chasse  
Kazeme, Breda, Holland  
*In and Out*, Dr.Earl Lu Gallery Lasalle Sia College of  
the Arts, Singapore; Melbourne, Sydney, Australia;  
Shenzhen, Beijing  
*Drinking Glass*, Leerdam, Holland  
1999 *The Biennale of Issy*, Paris, France  
*Installions by Asian Artists in Residence*, Mattress  
Factory Art Museum, Pittsburgh, USA

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