Introduction
In recent years the western art world has shown a specific interest in discovering and charting the global nature of contemporary art. In 2015 the globalization of the Pop art of the 1960s and the 1970s and most recently the Surrealist art before and after World War II have been highlighted as interesting topics for exhibitions to art institutions like for example the Tate Modern in the United Kingdom. The problem is that when discussing the transition of specific European movements to other parts of the world the time limit is usually restricted to that same time period. The main objective of this essay is therefore to question this chase for charting the global nature of such movements and to instead start digging from local developments; in this case contemporary Chinese art and its interactions with the art of the French surrealist artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Instead of charting global Surrealism just before or after World War II, this essay is interested in discussing currents of Surrealism that occurred some 40 years after the core group of Paris-based surrealists (including Marcel Duchamp and André Breton) were awaiting their exit visas to escape from war-torn Europe. The goal is to understand how Surrealism in general and Duchamp in particular have been used and translated into the Chinese context and what the

---

1 This essay is a pre-study for a coming article on the topic of "Global Surrealism."
3 A call for papers for a closed-door idea symposium on the topic of "Global Surrealism" was recently announced on the Humanities-Net Discussion List for Art History. This symposium is to be held in November 2016 at the Art Institute of Chicago together with curators from the Tate Modern (UK). The papers are to contribute with ideas around the planning of a coming exhibition with the same title. This is to be compared with another similar astonishing example of 2015 and Tate Modern's exhibition titled The World Goes Pop. The exhibition could easily have been the first to colourfully palette local pop art expressions of the world. However, it was eventually restricted to displaying only the development of the western conception of pop art during the 1960s and the 1970s, a period of time when China was in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, closed to the world and could not have developed this kind of art. For more info on the exhibition The World Goes Pop see the catalogue: Jessica Morgan, Flavia Figeri and David Crowley, The World Goes Pop (London: Tate Modern), 2015.
cultural transition from Europe and the US has come to mean for artists in China.

I will here specifically argue that artistic expressions did not “go global,” at least not at the same time, and that globalization rather means that we are invited to get a glimpse of many locally-flavoured expressions that we otherwise would not have access to. I will here try to prove that it is exactly through the eyes of artists with backgrounds in other cultures that the essence of Duchamp and Surrealism may give new perspectives and nuances to the impacts of his artistry up until today. By here examining and discussing how Chinese artists have been in dialogue with the artist since the 1980s, I will argue that the debate can become fully-fledged, despite being delayed by 40 years; a minor issue in the larger context, at least for us who are interested in Duchamp’s artistry and its continuous impact on artists all over the world, including the author’s own home country, Sweden.

*The heritage of Duchamp*

As a point of departure I take the recent developments in Sweden. Marcel Duchamp was the main focus of a three-day symposium at Moderna Museet/the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm, from April 28 to April 30 in 2015 in which his artistry was investigated from many different angles. Duchamp and his relationship to Sweden has been a relevant and vibrant topic since the 1960s when the art critic/curator Ulf Linde created a copy on-site of the work *La mariée mis à nu par ses célibataires, même/The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* also referred to as *Le Grand Verre/The Large Glass* in the former building of Moderna Museet at Skeppsholmen. Linde made use of some simple reproductions when constructing his replica. In September 1961, when Duchamp visited Stockholm and Moderna Museet, he was startled and said he had never thought about how *Le Grand Verre* would look without its cracks; the original had been damaged and charred during a transport in the 1920s. Thereafter Duchamp unexpectedly signed Linde’s replica with the words “Pour copie conforme Marcel Duchamp Stockholm, 1961/Certified true copy Marcel Duchamp Stockholm, 1961.”

---


Since then several of the signed Stockholm replicas have been lent out to numerous museums all over the western art world. It is obvious that Duchamp's artistry still provokes new ideas and shows today. Among them are, for example, the recent exhibition *Marcel Duchamp. La Peinture, Même* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2015, and *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp* at the Philadelphia Museum of Arts in 2013; two exhibitions that were especially highlighted to describe the ongoing international interest in Duchamp at the Moderna Museet symposium.

In this context it should be specifically noted that the debate on Duchamp's influence in the world is usually a western debate that is heavily restricted to the European and North American spheres, as illustrated above. Even so, Surrealism, Marcel Duchamp and his artistry has had an enormous impact also on arts in other parts of the world, including contemporary China, however as mentioned perhaps not following the same time trajectory, e.g. before World War II or just after. Even so the local art development in China has to some been regarded to be situated in a time outside the realm of the contemporary as late as the early 2000s.⁶

The fact that the contemporary would apply to China and that Duchamp could have consequences in the country should however not be viewed as “extraordinary nor surprising.”⁷ Even so, it was only just recently, in 2013, that the first exhibition on Duchamp and his impact on the development of contemporary Chinese art in China was held in Beijing.⁸ Also this started to be discussed in the directory of most exhibitions on contemporary Chinese art; at least those exhibitions curated by experts in the field as late as 2015.⁹ Good examples are the exhibition catalogues of Ai Weiwei’s retrospective shows at the Royal Academy of Arts in London and the Helsinki Arts Museum in 2015, in which Duchamp’s importance to Ai Weiwei’s development was discussed in depth. Lars Nittve, the museum director and adviser for the M+ Museum of Visual Culture in Hong Kong, in turn recently pinpointed Marcel Duchamp as “a powerful framework for understanding the human condition within a society [Chinese society]…"

---

⁸ Naumann and Tancock, ibid.
⁹ When I worked on my doctoral thesis 2005–2013 my observation that Duchamp has had a huge impact on Chinese art and artists was still rather controversial.
transforming at a speed never seen before in history."\textsuperscript{10}

This citation not only closes the circle between two renowned Swedish museum experts operating internationally but in different decades, the art critic/curator Ulf Linde and the museum director/curator Lars Nittve, both icons of Moderna Museet in Stockholm; this also puts focus on the local Chinese development of contemporary art. I will argue that this development has changed the prerequisite for the arts in China since the early 2000s; addressing issues of how it is to be human rather than directing people towards the official view. Even so, in the last three years, censorship is again restricting the freedom of expression for artists under the leadership of Xi Jinping.\textsuperscript{11} This of course forms the concept of what contemporary art is in the Chinese context. Even so the subjective position of the concept of contemporary art is usually identified as European or Western.\textsuperscript{12}

**Western ownership of the concept of contemporary art**

There still seems to be a delay in acknowledging China’s later entry into the contemporary and conceptual art traditions, especially by western scholars who are predominantly focusing their research interests on European and North American art history. An obvious example of this “ownership” is the above-mentioned symposium on Duchamp in Stockholm in 2015, organized by Moderna Museet at which renowned international scholars of the western sphere were invited to discuss the continuous impact of Duchamp’s artistry in the western art world. Although focusing on Duchamp and Sweden, the symposium was at least to us with a broader academic interest in the contemporary, a rather disappointing event since it only seemed to echo and recycle much of what is already known. Duchamp’s influence on the arts outside the realm of Europe and North America was left in shadow and not a single word of this was mentioned despite the fact that the first grand Duchamp exhibition in China was on show at the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Arts in Beijing from April 26 to June 16 in 2013, during the same period of time as the earlier mentioned exhibition at the Philadelphia La


Museum of Arts in the United States.

Another example of this western institutional “ownership” can be spotted in the present call for a convening session on “Global Surrealism” and the impact of Marcel Duchamp on global expressions of Surrealism by the Art Institute of Chicago and the Tate Modern to be held in Chicago in the Fall of 2016; this time with a time restriction to the period before World War II or just after; thus missing out a whole spectrum of existing local developments and conceptions of Surrealism and Duchamp positioned outside the scope of the call; thus lacking nuances of international art of the non-western sphere.

To elaborate further this essay will discuss contemporary Chinese art as an internationalised local construct. China’s later entry onto the contemporary art scene does not make it less valid to the discussion on internationalised contemporary art expressions. For this reason the main objective of this essay is to make some amendments; to broaden the perspective and shed some light on specific overlooked issues regarding the debate on how we should understand globalization and art in general and the artistry of Marcel Duchamp and Surrealism in particular at a greater depth. I will argue that things did not “go global”, at least not at the same time, and that globalization rather means that we are invited to get a glimpse of many locally-flavoured expressions that we otherwise would not have access to. My point is that it is uninteresting to restrict the discussion to specific time settings. Instead, the discourse needs to be much more permissive. It may prove to be exactly through the eyes of artists with backgrounds in other cultures that the essence of Duchamp and Surrealism are even more intriguingly argued. This essay will now introduce the first grand Duchamp exhibition in China and discuss how the French artist has influenced contemporary Chinese art since the mid-1980s.

_Duchamp and/or/in China at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art_  
Marcel Duchamp’s influence on Chinese artists has, as implied, been going on for decades by now. The first large Duchamp exhibition in China entitled _Duchamp and/or/in China_ was staged in Beijing at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art at 798 in 2013. In the West this show is apparently less known, or so it seems, since it was totally discredited when discussing the international interest in Duchamp at the above mentioned symposium in Stockholm.
The 2013 Ullens' show was curated by the American Duchamp expert and gallery owner Francis Naumann, and was partly based on his personal Duchamp collection, together with the British Duchamp expert, John Tancock who in the 1970s worked with the Duchamp collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Arts. Tancock has since the 1990s also been active on the Chinese art scene. He has watched the conceptual art scene expand from single experiments of individual artists to a higher concentration of internationalisation and a broader market orientation.13 Tancock's China experience most certainly enabled him to easily track down artists whose conceptual works are in an obvious dialogue with Duchamp's artistry for the Ullens' show in Beijing. Accordingly, the exhibition displayed works produced from the mid-1980s and onwards by fifteen Chinese artists juxtaposed with original works produced by Duchamp himself. The difference between how European/North American and Chinese artists may assimilate art created by Duchamp is strong because of the diverging time settings and cultures in which these artists operate. Although the Ullens' show was a first grand step towards including China in the sphere of places where Duchamp has had a great impact, the exhibition catalogue texts regarding the Chinese works are disturbingly meagre. In the next a selection of Chinese works will be discussed in more depth.

Duchamp according to Huang Yongping and Ai Weiwei

The Xiamen dada artist Huang Yongping (b.1954) was one of the first Chinese artists to openly address an inspiration from Marcel Duchamp.14 In the preface to the Chinese exhibition catalogue Duchamp and/or/in China, Huang's reflection on Duchamp's art is cited as follows:

I got to know Duchamp via this photocopy in Chinese and some other materials I came across by chance here and there. I consider this kind of “fragmentation” to be more reliable than “completeness,” I never think that it is a problem that I cannot really understand Duchamp because I don’t speak French. What is important is not discovering the real face of Duchamp, but what I actually get out of him. I always benefit from all sorts of “misunderstandings” and “distortions.”15

13 Naumann and Tancock, op. cit., pp. 9–10.
15 Francis Naumann and John Tancock, Duchamp and/or/in China (Beijing: Houliang chuban gongsi, 2013), p. 6.
The citation above proves that new artistic ideas may be introduced into China exactly through accidental and fragmented meetings with famous artists and their works. It is therefore quite rare for Chinese artists to know the whole oeuvre of a foreign artist. Instead it is what s/he as an individual artist can get out of a single work, even from a reproduction in a book, that is of interest and not a deeper knowledge of the entire artistry. Since the understanding of a work is based on the reference frame and situation of the Chinese artist, it is possible to assume that Chinese artists are more exempt from the normative European interpretation discourse and are therefore freer to experiment on their own.

The artist Huang Yongping was further one of five artists who was drawn to Dadaism and participated in the exhibition *Xiamen Dada* that was staged in Xiamen from September 28 to October 5 in 1986. The name of the exhibition clearly reveals that it was constructed in line with the western Dadaism movement (of which Duchamp was the main architect) in the sense that it was an anti-art movement; in China however, this opposes the until recently political affinities of art and according to my understanding instead dictates anew an intellectual literati art.\(^{16}\) Although the exhibition invoked the name Dada as an anti-establishment art, it revealed an interesting twist in China, namely, that Chinese artists were quite unwilling to be anonymous. Instead they refer to their own works with their personal names, most probably as a means to break with the ideal of the more anonymous artist during the Mao era.\(^{17}\)

After having moved to France in 1989, Huang Yongping was keen to experiment with Duchamp's invention of the ready-made.\(^{18}\) His work *Thousand-Armed Guanyin* as presented in Figure 1 for example, built on the idea of Duchamp's first ready-made entitled *Égouttoir/Bottle Rack* (1914–64), and was initially constructed for Skulptur Projekte Münster, Germany, in 1997 but was greatly enlarged for the 9\(^{th}\) Shanghai Biennale at The Power Station of Arts, in Shanghai in 2012. Huang transformed his idea of the Bottle Rack into an abstract representation, a sculpture, of the thousand-armed Guanyin, the bodhisattva of mercy, who according to the legend was given 1000 arms to help those in need.\(^{19}\) The many arms of Huang’s sculpture resembles broken mannequin arms (perhaps also a play with the title of

---


\(^{18}\) Lü, op. cit., 554-558.

\(^{19}\) Naumann and Tancock, op. cit., 76-77.
Duchamp’s work *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1915-64) which hold different ritual objects in their hands that are not attributed to the bodhisattva of mercy but rather to consumerism and mass consumption. This invites to a contemplation on imported ideologies and objects, and with that, evoking existential questions, something which seems to be typical for Huang Yongping’s appreciation of Duchamp.

Another example of Huang’s is the work *Two-minute wash cycle* of 1987 in which he placed a classical Chinese art history book and a western art history book into a washing machine and washed them for two minutes, thus ironically commenting on the speed in which new art expressions were created in the China of the Open Door policy. After the crack-down of the student demonstrations at Tiananmen in 1989, Huang Yongping moved to Paris where he is still working as an artist.20

Figure 1: ‘Thousand-armed-Guanyin’ by Huang Yongping at “Skulptur Projekte” in Münster, Germany on 30 August, 1997. © Falkenreich

Art influenced by Duchamp in China of the 1990s, in its turn, is usually traced to the renowned Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) who saw and interacted with Duchamp’s works in real life in the US of the 1980s, as discussed below.

Ai Weiwei and Duchamp

Ai Weiwei’s interest in Duchamp took off from another starting point. When Ai returned to Beijing in 1993 after a ten-year self-imposed exile in New York, he brought with him the idea of Duchamp as a humanistic muse. He started to create art along with his interest in Duchamp as a person and an artist now with the Chinese culture as a springboard. Inspired by Jasper John’s portrait of Duchamp, Ai in turn created a profile of Duchamp’s face by a coat hanger filled with sunflower seeds. In a figurative way Ai allowed ideas from the East and the West to meet within the profile of a coat hanger.21 This artistic idea of an ideological and inspiring new meeting becomes even clearer when considering both Marcel Duchamp’s and Ai Weiwei’s preference for ironic word play. In an interview with the curator Tim Marlow for the Ai Weiwei retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in the Fall of 2015, Ai was asked if it would be possible to trace his specific interest in “the authentic” and “the fake” to his encounter with Duchamp’s works in New York in the 1980s. Ai answered:

I think Duchamp is the most, if not the only, influential figure in my so-called art practice. We all benefit from what he has done: as a person and a mind, he is very influential on all artists. There's no doubt about that.

[...] it was around 1983, when I got to New York, that I was introduced to Duchamp by reading Jasper Johns. I felt he was such a fascinating character; very witty, almost like an oriental thinker or a chess player, and so admirable. So I made a homage to him, using a coat hanger to make a profile of his face.22

The admiration for the artist and persona Duchamp and his ready-mades, via Jasper Johns, can be viewed in Ai’s artistry on multiple levels. Ai Weiwei’s Chinese style literati preference for (political) puns seems to have matched and indeed merged with Duchamp’s concepts of witty word play; introducing the idea that Ai found a true soul mate in Duchamp’s Surrealism. Further, Duchamp was an ardent chess player and for longer periods of time he stopped working with art and instead spent all his time playing chess. This rhymes well with the traditional Chinese literati artist who was to master musical instruments, chess, calligraphy and painting/qín qì shū huà 琴棋書畫 and may in turn have evoked the literati spirit in Ai. His

---

21 Naumann and Tancock, op. cit., pp. 50-51.
specific interest in strategy (via the game of chess) seems to have inspired his symbolic activism, e.g. to practically check-mate China’s Communist Party. This has been especially explored in his various projects on the corruption scandal around the construction of poor school buildings causing the death of many children in the Wenchuan Earthquake in 2008; works that got him imprisoned for 81 days and almost killed.23

By way of laying bare the absurdity of weak and superficial structures in the system and to cage the undefined he has paved a new way for art activism in China. Although some might think there is an inflation in the representation of Ai Weiwei in the global art world today, it is only when one visits one of his shows that one may get a grip of what he is trying to do; something which one must in the end admire him for. Even so, China’s art world is huge and offers a colourful palette of artists and their works, of which some are inspired by Duchamp’s Surrealism in yet other ways than those discussed above. In the following I will narrow down the discussion to a few specific works by Duchamp that have caught the attention of Chinese artists more frequently than other works and what they may imply.

Chinese dialogues with Duchamp

When studying the works presented in the directory of the Chinese Duchamp exhibition, a specific interest in the works Fountaine/Fountain (1917), Le Grand Verre/The Large Glass (1915-1923) and Duchamp’s last work Étant donnés: 1° la chute d’eau, 2° le gaz d’éclairage/Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas (1946-66) can be spotted.

The ready-made Fountaine of 1917 was made from a urinal of the kind constructed for standing urinating men. The new Society for Independent Artists in New York, moulded after the Paris Salon des Indépendents, was the target of irony for Duchamp who didn’t like the organisation and submitted his work under the pseudonym of R. Mutt. “Without doubt, it was a mirage of standing urinating men and other spicy possibilities that arose before the eyes of the society’s hanging committee when confronted by it.”24 Duchamp had bought the urinal and placed it in an erotic position so that it would stand “erect” and signed it with the signature R. Mutt (a play with the name of the company where he bought it from J.L. Mott Iron

---

23 Erja Pusa and Heli Harni (eds), Ai Weiwei@Helsinki (exhibition catalogue), (Helsinki: HAM, 2015), p. 35.
Works in New York). It seems very likely that Duchamp’s erected piece was the initial inspirational source for Ai Weiwei’s 1986 conceptual work Safe Sex; a ready-made consisting of a black rain coat on a hanger with the added detail of a loosely hanging condom sticking out implying a possible “erect” status of a safe-sex “spokesperson.” From the way Safe Sex is constructed it seems to be welcoming spicy possibilities and safe playful eroticism at a time when the world was confronted with the traumatic consequences of un-safe sex; e.g. AIDS.

Another early example of a Chinese dialogue with Duchamp’s Fountain is Wu Shanzhuang’s and Inga Svala Thorsdottir’s assault on the replica of Duchamp’s Fountain at Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1992, as presented in Figure 2. The couple’s performance was entitled An Appreciation. Wu Shanzhuang was part of the 1980s art movement called the New Wave. In the early 1990s when visiting Europe, he met the Icelandic artist in Reykjavik. It is unclear whether it was through Thorsdottir that Wu encountered the artistry of Duchamp or if the artist was influenced by him in the past. Be that as it may; Thorsdottir had long desired to do what the urinal requires, namely to urinate in the Moderna Museet replica of Fountain. However, since she thought that it could be easily be mistaken for a feminist work, she let Wu, who was appalled by the idea, have the honour. The performance An Appreciation was carefully planned but was carried out without the involvement of the staff at Moderna Museet. According to Thorsdottir and Wu, their work, however, is well known by the museum staff. It is also mentioned in the exhibition catalogue of the Ullens’ show in Beijing.25

Figure 2: ‘An Appreciation’ by Inga Svala Thorsdottir and Wu Shanzhuang, 1992. © Thorsdottir and Wu.

25 E-mail contact with the author 2015-05-08.
The implication of the couple’s performance seems to go back to the surreal idea of taking a public bathroom urinal to be a work of art in the fine arts museum setting. Following Duchamp’s idea of the ready-made as an anti-art, their performance questions the status of a work of art and what it is that makes a renowned artist. Wu and Thorsdottir later used the documentary photographs of the performance to develop their idea further. They produced a fake United Colors of Benetton poster as a contribution to the debate on Benetton’s controversial billboard advertisements since the 1980s. Like Benetton’s multiracial advertisement campaigns, Wu and Thorsdottir’s cultural cross-over performance implies that they, like Duchamp, question what kind of art/artists can be exhibited at prestigious western modern art museums. With Wu and Thorsdottir’s performance, the at the time fledgling contemporary Chinese art scene, still very much on the doorstep to the western art world, in other words found its way also to Sweden and Moderna Museet, in a small but important scale. Although perhaps not a great piece of art, this performance could indeed have been the natural link of the Stockholm symposium to discuss new angles of Duchamp from a wider international and world perspective; indeed representing absurdity, but was not added to the agenda.

The idea of urinating in Duchamp’s Fountaine has also attracted the interest of other contemporary Chinese artists. For example, Cai Yuan and Xi Jianjun, UK residents since the 1980s, made a video work entitled Two Artists Piss on Duchamp’s Urinal in 2000. The work was performed at the newly inaugurated fine arts museum Tate Modern, of which Lars Nittve was then director. The piece initially seems to resemble the above-discussed work An Appreciation at Moderna Museet, but when looking closer it rather

---

7 Interesting to the discussion of the urinal is the existence of the Cantonese Shekwan pottery of the later nineteenth or the early twentieth century. Some examples of Shekwan urinals are in the form of reclining westerners with their knees tucked up to their chests. Their right arm props up their head and their left hand perches on their waists, with the arched arms cleverly serving as the handle of the vessel. The figures’ trousers are tucked into the riding boots. Not only are the foreigners turned into servants, but they also appear to be happy in carrying out their tasks. Michel Lee states that the potters of Shekwan were symbolically lowering the status of the westerner, making the foreign conquerors after the Opium Wars to serve those they had conquered. By combining that with associations of foreigners with wealth and riches, the Shekwan potters were able to process the image of the foreigner into an ironically auspicious symbol of wealth and power. It was indeed the Shekwan potters’ way of subduing the “foreign devils.” See Michel Lee, “Subduing the ‘Foreign Devils’ in Shekwan Ceramics,” in Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society 74 (2011), pp. 35-45.
merges the ideas of storing and releasing qi/spirit to invoke new spirit.\textsuperscript{28} In a way this work also touches on eroticism and issues of sexuality, since it involves the release of specific liquids, by which the growth of a new spirit of the arts is implied by also introducing contemporary Chinese artists to the western art scene.

Duchamp’s \textit{Fountaine} also occurs in Shi Xinning’s 2000-01 black and white oil painting with the spectacular title \textit{Duchamp Retrospective Exhibition in China} as seen in Figure 3.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image3.png}
\caption{‘Duchamp Retrospective Exhibition in China’ by Shi Xinning, 2000-01 (oil on canvas) M+ Sigg Collection, Hong Kong. By donation © Shi Xinning}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{28} Naumann and Tancock, op.cit., pp. 324-325.
The painting introduces a cautious-looking Mao Zedong, a widely smiling Lin Biao and three other men considering Fountaine as if it were a revolutionary flying saucer that had landed in the middle of the Maoist revolution. The title is as false as the fact that Mao would have ever seen or even been interested in something as absurd as Duchamp's signed and erected urinal. As we know, the art of Mao's China was supposed to serve the revolution. Here the concept seems to have been turned to its tip, indeed, in a revolutionary manner introducing the horrid idea of art for art's sake; something that would make you reflect independently. It has earlier been noted that this painting could also express a meeting of two icons/iconoclasts, Mao Zedong and Marcel Duchamp, who both in their own ways attacked settled beliefs and institutions.

The black and white colour of the painting however also hints at associations to the concept of a historical photograph. Shi's artistic practice focuses on themes related to the Cultural Revolution and this work is actually based on an original photograph featuring the Chairman's visit to an industrial product fair. The documentary touch of Shi's painting of Mao in front of the erect status of urinal in an ironic way exemplifies how Mao in this scene is acknowledged with the fact that he has been caught with his pants down. It most of all seems to lay bare his secret erotic personal life as it had become known in the chairman's personal physician Dr. Li Zhisui's book (banned in China) entitled The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Inside Story of the Man who Made Modern China which was published a few years before this painting was made. Shi's painting is structured towards the humorous instead of the negative, closely following Duchamp's sentiment, perhaps by chance. However, the hilarious seems to leave a rather insipid taste, stripteasing the icon Mao Zedong and revealing him to the public as nothing more than an ordinary man with an exclusive taste for sexual intercourse with his many young assistants. In the next paragraph, Duchamp's interest in eroticism and “striptease” and a few Chinese artists’ call to these issues will be discussed closer.

La mariée mis à nu par ses célibataire, même or Le Grand Verre
Marcel Duchamp's magnum opus La mariée mis à nu par ses célibataire, même or Le Grand Verre declares that the bride is stripped bare by her

---

29 Ibid., p. 81.
30 Mink, p. 63.
bachelors, even. The work on glass was constructed in 1915–23 from Duchamp's original ideas and sketches that were collected in what is known as La Boîte Verte/The Green Box. According to Ulf Linde who produced replicas of Le Grand Verre and wrote extensively about it, the bride or the hanging female plays one of the starring roles of the work. Paraphrasing Linde the bride is positioned in the upper half of the work. The Green Box notes intriguingly describe her as a motor with poor cylinders; she is headless. She, the bride, is however driven by the power of shyness; she is further the motor of this shyness but she also represents the shyness itself; this feminine ambiguous quality apparently making her utterly attractive to men. Furthermore, the bride excretes an essence of passion that in an osmotic way finds its way down to the bachelor's world, in the lower domains of the work. Linde's interpretation of the bride is that “she” is the sensual object, the charm that attracts both curiosity and appeal. The bride is thus the motor around which everything circles whereas the nine bachelors are the enchanted viewers of this scene about a seduction.32

Although Duchamp himself said that the work was meaningless, it is of course possible to read many things between the lines of the work. In his time Linde mainly discussed La mariée mis à nu par ses célibataire, même as a meta-work; e.g. a work about art. According to this line of thought, the artist and the viewer decide the meaning of the work together; something which was a new way to look at art at the time. However, Linde explains, initially we see the work without really seeing it. What is eventually stripped bare before us is that the seductive bride (the work of art) is being stripped bare by the bachelors (the viewer), even. It is this process of transformation; when the dead materia is turned into a work of art, the act of creation according to this way of looking at the work, inspired the même, (Even), according to Linde.33

Only discussing the work as a meta-work about art is however a bit disappointing. The metaphorical sexual terms prevalent between the lines in La mariée mis à nu par ses célibataire, même and in almost all of Duchamp's works are of specific consequence here. Linde also talked about the work in terms of “caging the undefinable,” which clearly is of relevance. Here he explicitly touches on the kind of human attraction that can only be read between the lines, the poetic, the politically incorrect, what cannot be spoken in words, something which flows through our lives without asking for higher truths, at least initially before becoming complicated, because as

---

32 Linde 1960, pp. 41-68.
33 Ibid.
Linde exclaims: “the world is lived by human beings” and it is through this kind of “eroticism” that we reach out to each other, be it as lovers or friends. With all this baggage how can one then perceive the reception of Duchamp and his *Le Grand Verre* in China?

*Striptease à la Duchamp in China*

The Chinese dialogue with *Le Grand Verre* is a chapter in itself. However it can be noted that Chinese artists, despite being a considerable distance from the original, have observed exactly what Ulf Linde in his time had missed; namely that the original looked old, with its glass broken. This would reveal the Chinese eye for details and graphics that can only be explained through the written Chinese language which needs an eagle’s eye and an owl’s memory to accomplish. The Chinese artist Xu Bing (b. 1955) has described the Chinese interest in symbols as part of the learning process when memorizing Chinese characters.

In Wang Xingwei’s oil painting *Poor Old Hamilton* from 1996, *Le Grand Verre* in its broken appearance figures together with the British artist Richard Hamilton, who is sitting in a wheelchair. In 1966 Hamilton also constructed a replica of *Le Grand Verre*, now at Tate Gallery in London, from studies of Duchamp’s notes in *La Boîte Verte* which he had come into contact with already in 1952. Perhaps the result from these studies of Duchamp eventually led to Hamilton’s creation of one of the first works that came to be designated Pop Art; namely the piece entitled *Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?* of 1956. As presented in the catalogue text, in Wang’s Xingwei’s oil painting, Hamilton, from his position in the wheelchair, looks on while a figure reminiscent of Wang Xingwei himself reprimands a small child for having broken the lower domains of Hamilton’s replica. Marcel Duchamp in his time had accepted the cracks when his work was charred in the 1920s, whereas here it is implied that the artist Richard Hamilton looks appalled. According to my view the Chinese painting also implies that the small child has extinguished the apparatus of the “chocolate grinder” from the scene, calling to mind

---

34 Linde 1960, pp. 41-68.
36 Nittve, op. cit., p. 6.
37 It can be noted that Hamilton’s pop work in turn has been reconceptualised by Yu Youhan, in the West known for his political pop paintings of Mao Zedong. See Paul Gladston, *Yu Youhan* (Shanghai: 3030Press, 2015).
Duchamp’s idea that great art can indeed be made by chance.

To elaborate further, Wang Xingwei’s work may thus be a work about (contemporary Chinese) art, a commentary on this art’s road into being through the accidental influx of new ideas in the mid-1990s. It may also be a commentary on the restrictive political climate of China in the 1990s, especially after the crackdowns at Tiananmen Square in June 1989 that contributed to larger restrictions on freedom of expression that naturally leads to artistic self-censorship in art. To be able to participate in exhibitions, Chinese artists must be aware of what they can and cannot exhibit. Most artists know the limits and are very good at producing art in accordance with this balancing act. Even so, the limits for what is counted as radical or extreme in individual works of art fluctuate. In Wang’s painting, the small child is being reprimanded for his/her aggressive/creative act to the work (extinguishing the chocolate grinder, e.g. symbolically the machine of self-relief through masturbation). It may be subtly implied that Chinese artists are left suffering in the lower domains and cannot even reach the highest levels of their own satisfaction because when art is too direct and too openly critical, the police close exhibitions, confiscate works of art, and interrogate and reprimand artists. In China, the hidden erotic theme of Le Grand Verre as a love machine that runs throughout Duchamp’s work seems to be a bit less articulated and used differently; indeed isolation and suffering are in focus here. If Duchamp in his time were interested in articulating corporeal sensuality, the focus of this Chinese work would be to strip bare what art is restricted to being in China, e.g. holding back or controlling the passion of expressing oneself freely.

Zhao Zhao’s (Ai Weiwei’s former assistant) oil painting of 2012, without title, is of final interest here since it is in clear dialogue with both Le Grand Verre and Duchamp’s last major work Étant donnés: 1° la chute d’eau, 2° le gaz d’éclairage/Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas (1946-66). Étant donnés was created by Duchamp in great secrecy during a twenty-year period on-site at the Philadelphia Museum of Arts. The work is said to be about overt sexuality in contrast to Le Grand Verre which is about hidden sexuality/sensuality/eroticism. Étant donnés is in turn a diorama in which we through a peep-hole in a door see the body of a deceased nude woman.

---


set up before a painted background. The woman is beheaded and desexed and seems somehow abused, although without a bruise on her body. The work Étant donnér merges many of Duchamp’s personal interests into one work; that is, the question about what art is, signs of eroticism, sensuality, suffering, and gender transformation (also apparent in for example his works titled Rose Sélavy/Eros c'est la vie and L.H.O.O.Q/Elle a chaud au cul, meaning She is lascivious), and the French artist’s awareness of keeping all of these specific issues alive in the arts discourse.40

In Zhao’s work, we can see painted the same reclining nude woman through a peep-hole in a wooden door.41 Zhao has in turn however placed a broken glass in front of his replica of Étant donnér. The glass has not been broken by chance but has been shot at; something which calls to mind the consequence of the nine holes in Duchamp’s work Le Grand Verre. Accordingly, the drilled nine holes in the right upper parts of the work were randomly decided by Duchamp who shot matches with a toy cannon dipped in colour towards the glass to decide their position. Linde has discussed the nine holes as important to the work for specific reasons. They are there and can therefore be discussed, but of course discussed and interpreted in many different ways.42

Zhao in his turn commissioned his small replica of Étant donnér from the Dafen Painting Village in Shenzhen who specialises in making replicas of the great masters for (mass) production and wholesale. The scene in Zhao’s work is framed with an elaborate gold frame that would fit the work of an old master, but certainly not a work (or even a replica of) Marcel Duchamp’s work; here the master rather refers to Zhao’s own master, Ai Weiwei, who specialises on discussing the balancing act between the authentic and the fake in contemporary Chinese society. Zhao’s painting was signed and dated in 2012, just after Ai Weiwei was arrested at the Beijing airport in 2011. The work without a title emphasises the speechlessness towards what happened next. Ai disappeared from the public eye and was held under detention for 81 days without official charges. At the time Ai disappeared no one knew if he was dead or alive (perhaps even executed for his dissident behaviour). Zhao’s work thus gives clear allusions to Duchamp’s work Étant donnér, of which some say that it actually illustrates Duchamp’s self-portrait of his own death; in which he is specifically concerned with handing over the spirit of his artistry, his heritage, by

---

40 Mink, op. cit., pp. 84-93.
41 Naumann and Tancock, op. cit., p. 354.
42 Linde 1960, pp. 41-68.
literally holding the gas illuminator in his/her hand to coming generations of artists.\textsuperscript{43}

This work of Zhao’s is certainly an important piece in the puzzle of understanding the artist’s large oil paintings of bullet holes in glass that were exhibited at the art gallery “Isbrytaren”/Ice Breaker, in Stockholm in April of 2015, as seen in Figure 4. One can hardly expect that a gallery would provide an art historical analysis of the works exhibited, but it is a pity that the art critic of \textit{Dagens Nyheter}/\textit{Daily News} chose the dissent line without giving an explanation and without introducing Marcel Duchamp and in extension also Ai Weiwei as the two humanistic muses of his painting project.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{zhao.jpg}
\caption{Detail of one of Zhao Zhao’s oil paintings with bullet holes at Gallery Isbrytaren, Stockholm, April 2015. Author’s photograph.}
\end{figure}

The vastness and variety of Duchamp’s influence in the world outside the realms of Europe and North America is, as has been laid bare in this essay, still relatively unexplored. It has however emerged that Duchamp’s influence outside these geographic borders is very real and worth much more attention than it has received so far. The Duchamp symposium at Moderna Museet in Stockholm concluded among many things that Duchamp is probably much more absurd than anyone can really understand. If the interest of the organisers had been laid out to widen the understanding

\textsuperscript{43} Mink, op. cit., pp. 86-93.
of Duchamp’s artistry, then its impact would certainly have increased. Hopefully the forthcoming symposium on “Global Surrealism” at the Art Institute of Chicago and Tate Modern later this year will explore Surrealism through a wider lens.

Conclusion

Contemporary art has as many local expressions as there are cultures. A glimpse through the peep-hole of the door to specific local expressions of the contemporary Chinese art world clarifies that in the hands of Chinese artists, Duchamp and Surrealism are rather direct and not particularly absurd. It is instead foremost about stripteasing absurdities, weak structures in Chinese society regarding social, economic and political development and its consequences for art and artists. According to my understanding the meeting with Marcel Duchamp seems above all to have contributed by evoking the spirit of a contemporary version of the Chinese literati artist; interested in art as subversion in both its literary and imaginary forms. Thus, rather than discussing Surrealism and Duchamp as globalised it would be more interesting to try to sort it out by investigating different themes. A new approach would most certainly introduce the plural form also to the concept of Surrealism(s) in different times and cultural spaces.

A question that arises in this broader perspective is: when will we see a truly contemporary art exhibition allowing art from all locations independent of space and time limit? It would be important to capture the breadth and width of Duchamp’s influence outside the European and North American as well as pre- and post-World War II realms to find out if it in other cultures, like the case of China, has been used as a tool of resistance to reveal weak structures and absurdities. I argue that this kind of exhibition would be a worthy task also for Moderna Museet in Stockholm, with its close historical links with Duchamp and the fine world unique Duchamp collection available in Stockholm to an even larger extent than previously done. Above all it would be a crucial addition for us who are interested in globalization in terms of tasting the flavours of local expressions, rather than continuously echoing the already known.

---

References


