



MAK

Advance Press Release

CHINESE WHISPERS: Recent Art from the Sigg Collection

Press Conference	Tuesday, 29 January 2019, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 29 January 2019, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK Exhibition Hall MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	30 January – 26 May 2019
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

A comprehensive picture of contemporary Chinese art and its aesthetic as well as iconographic references will be presented by the MAK in the exhibition *CHINESE WHISPERS: Recent Art from the Sigg Collection*. The pioneer and collector Uli Sigg (* 1946) has been following the development of contemporary art in China since the late 1970s. In the mid-1990s, he started putting together the world's most representative collection of Chinese art. Cultural and sociopolitical values form the frame of reference of the MAK exhibition, which aims at challenging and broadening the Western perspective with more than 100 works from the Sigg Collection, among others by prominent artists such as Ai Weiwei, Cao Fei, Duan Jianyu, Feng Mengbo, or He Xiangyu.

A business journalist, entrepreneur, and Swiss ambassador to China, North Korea, and Mongolia (1995–1998), Uli Sigg had the chance to take a look behind the scenes of the enormous social and economic developments dedicated to both tradition and the future, as China's vision of a new Silk Road shows. As a collector Sigg is particularly interested in works that result from an intensive dialogue with the artists. He furthered several international careers such as Ai Weiwei's. In 2012, Sigg donated the bulk of his collection in the form of the M+ Sigg Collection to the newly founded M+ Museum for visual culture, part of the West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong, which was designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron.

CHINESE WHISPERS: Recent Art from the Sigg Collection will focus on objects from Uli Sigg's Swiss private collection, which he has continuously expanded. With techniques such as calligraphy, painting, photography, sculpture, installation, and video, the presented objects open up a wide spectrum of works ranging from traditional analog to digital production. The title *CHINESE WHISPERS* refers to the eponymous children's game in which messages are whispered secretly from one person to the next and distorted in content and meaning by the permanent repetition. This idea of

communication, of reproduction and distortion regarding the exchange with China reflects the atmosphere of the exhibition, which was already shown simultaneously at the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Zentrum Paul Klee with the same name in 2016 and which was adapted for the presentation at the MAK in dialogue with Uli Sigg.

Chinese contemporary art is a phenomenon without parallel. Even after the Cultural Revolution, the effects of Socialist Realism and restrictions due to censorship remain noticeable. Nonetheless, contemporary art in China has experienced a drastic change of direction since the increasing political openness in the 1980s. In no time a new generation of Chinese artists have picked up modern trends from the West. The contents can often be seen as a reaction towards the political and social situation of the time.

The People's Republic of China today is regarded as the world's economic powerhouse, pursuing global political goals. Given its hybrid capability, Chinese communism has adopted global capitalism, and within the time frame of one generation our perspective of China as well as the Pacific region has shifted. This development is addressed, for example, by the installation *Rêve Chinois* (2017) developed by Miao Ying, which shows the link between the marketing of political ideology and the advertising of luxury goods in an ironic way. The controversial role of the individual in this rapidly growing society, feminist aspects of the revolution, and the dissolution of private space can be experienced in quite a number of works in *CHINESE WHISPERS*.

Traditionally, cultural projects in China are not always linked to individual authorship but are often created collectively. There is great interest in acquiring patterns and systems as well as adapting exemplary models. East and West have ambivalent perceptions of original, copy, interpretation, and fraud. Also, with regard to history, beginning and ending do not play a role, it is the movement that counts. The artist Shao Fan, for example, deals with the re-appropriation of history and in *King Chair* (1997) combines elements of a piece of furniture from the Ming dynasty with contemporary design language. Ai Weiwei (* 1957) also examines the line between visual art and design in the reflection of history, for example, in his installation *Descending Light with A Missing Circle* (2017), which was specifically commissioned by the Sigg Collection and which captures the concept of the work *Descending Light* (2007). A luster made of red glass beads which has apparently fallen to the floor points to the decay of modern society.

In the MAK exhibition, the works from the Sigg Collection will enter into a dialog with a corresponding selection of historical objects of the MAK Asia Collection from China. Since its founding more than 150 years ago, the MAK has placed one of the focal points of the museum on Asian arts and crafts from China, Japan, and Korea. As early as around 1900, the museum was able to document the zeniths of Asian cultures. In 1907,

a large part of the collection of the Trade Museum, which had been founded for economic-political reasons, went to today's MAK. Comprising more than 25 000 objects, the MAK Asia Collection is one of the most important collections of Asian art in Europe, thus providing a broad discursive platform for the presentation of the Sigg Collection.

Among the artists contributing to the exhibition *CHINESE WHISPERS: Recent Art from the Sigg Collection* are: Aaajiao, Ai Weiwei, Cao Fei, Cao Yu, Chi Lei, Chu Yun, Duan Jianyu, Feng Mengbo, He Xiangyu, Jun Yang, Li Xi, Liu Chuang, Liu Ding, Liu Wei, Ma Ke, Miao Ying, Ming Wong, Ni Youyu, Peili Zhang, Song Dong, Song Ta, Shao Fan, Shen Shaomin, Shen Xuezhe, and Wang Jin.

An exhibition by the MAK in dialogue with the collector Uli Sigg and in cooperation with the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Zentrum Paul Klee

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](https://www.mak.at/en/press)

Press Data

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Curator	Bärbel Vischer, Curator, MAK Contemporary Art Collection
Publication	<i>Chinese Whispers. Recent Art of the Sigg und M+ Sigg Collections</i> , ed. by Kathleen Bühler, Kunstmuseum Bern, Zentrum Paul Klee, and MAK, Vienna, German/English, 368 pages, Prestel Verlag, 2016
Supporting Program	In preparation
MAK Admission	€ 12 / Reduced € 9 / Family Ticket € 15 Tuesdays from 6-10 p.m.: Admission € 5 Free admission for children and teens under 19
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