Meanings of ‘Ink’ in Contemporary Chinese Art

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(Christie’s Education, London)

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Abstract Within the last decade, ‘ink’ has emerged as a distinct category of practice in contemporary Chinese art. A rash of exhibitions at renowned institutions—e.g., Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2014)—repackage ‘ink’ as the old in the new, the new in the old. The proposed M+ museums in Hong Kong convened the conference ‘Histories and Individual Practices of Contemporary Ink Art’ (2012) parallel to amassing its collection, led by its Curator of Contemporary Chinese Ink. The art market has likewise appropriated ‘ink’ as a separate sale category. This paper develops ideas first presented in a 2013 Tate Modern conference on 'Negotiating histories: Traditions in Modern and Contemporary Asia-Pacific Art' to focus on the turn towards 'ink' as a framework for the making, interpretation and exhibition of contemporary Chinese art. 'Ink' has undergone a radical repositioning to move beyond its medium—to oil painting, mixed media, installations and performance. How does ‘ink’ relate to received structures of analysis, such as chronological periodisation (e.g., tradition v. modernity), social structure (e.g. literati v. professional) and national identity? In addition to introducing prominent and upcoming contemporary artists working in 'ink', the discussion will focus on the critical discourse around ink and the role of various agents—artists, dealers, auctioneers, museums, government—who have contributed to it.

Nixi Cura is Programme Director of the Arts of China Programme at Christie’s Education, London. She read East Asian Studies at Yale University, then specialised in Chinese painting and Buddhist art, with a minor in Romanesque art, at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. PhD in progress, her current research interests include Qing art, especially during the Qianlong reign (1736-1795), collecting and antiquarian practices in the Qing, Republican and Manchukuo periods, and contemporary Chinese visual culture. Nixi serves concurrently as Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow and co-founded the Arts of China Consortium.

All seminars take place on Wednesdays (unless otherwise arranged) at 5pm in rooms 8 & 9 in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Tea will be served at the same venue at 4:45pm. All are welcome!