

## Three Generations of Chinese Modernism

The paintings of Qiu Ti appear peaceful and meditative, but their calm exterior is deceptive. Behind these lyrical paintings lies a lifelong struggle against stifling orthodoxies.

As a member of the first generation of Chinese woman artists to take up oil painting in the 1930s, Qiu Ti challenged the prevailing ink painting tradition. Introduced to French influenced Post-Impressionism during a visit to Japan, she also rejected the academic realism practiced by Western oriented Chinese painters during the pre-communist era. Instead, she embraced Modernism. She was the only member of the avant-garde group The Storm Society to win that group's prestigious award. After 1949, artists who belonged to the Storm Society were condemned as practitioner of "bourgeois formalism" and hence adversaries of the politically correct Socialist Realism of Communist regime. She died in 1958 of a heart attack brought on by the news that her husband, painter Pang Xunqin had been named a "rightist".

Each of Qiu Ti's works is thus a declaration of artistic freedom. These paintings celebrate private life and personal observation. They are full of details – a black lacquer box casually open beside a vase of roses, for instance, or pottery ornamented with Chinese patterns – which serves as a planter – which reveal the artist's desire to give the genre of Chinese face.

Meanwhile, her close study of western models results in tangible space and rounded forms that break free from the abstracted conventions of traditional ink painting. The colors she favors – flashes of deep reds, oranges and greens against a more neutral ground – reveal an effort to exploit the emotional impact of color.

A landscape from 1947, painted just before political changes made Modernism suspect, is a further departure from custom. Chinese women painters of the time rarely strayed into landscape, which was considered a male prerogative. Refusing to blinker her vision, Qiu Ti offers a glimpse of old Shanghai, a city of red roofs and intimate backyard gardens which is now gone forever.

Pang Tao, daughter of Qiu Ti, has taught painting in Beijing for over thirty years. While she worked in a realist idiom for many years, she was inspired by the relaxation of government control over artists in 1980 to experiment with new forms and materials. She furthered these interests during a year long visit to Paris in 1984.

The works in this exhibition reveal the results of these investigations. In these paintings, Chinese bronzes serve as the catalyst for a range of stylistic innovations. In some paintings, the familiar contour of the bronze almost disappears beneath a welter of

expressive brushstrokes and vibrant colors. Figure and ground meld while richly painted expanses of deep blue and black draw the eye into a mysterious, metaphysical space.

In other paintings, the Chinese bronze provides the raw material for a painstaking analysis of form. Here, the outline of the bronze is shattered and then carefully reassembled into a field of intricately interlocked planes of muted gray, black and yellow. The rhythmic alternations of the precisely delineated color planes give these compositions an almost musical quality.

In yet other works, shards of brilliant color create a mosaic effect as they sweep over the surface of the painting. Their swelling trajectories seem to transform the bronze into a living entity.

Drawing on approaches to abstraction drawn from Cubism, Abstract Expressionism and Constructivism, Pang Tao creates formal compositions inspired by one of the most ancient Chinese art forms. Balancing old and new, tradition and innovation, and abstraction and representation, she carries on her mother's search for a Modernism that expresses a Chinese spirit.

Lin Yan, daughter of Pang Tao and granddaughter of Qui Ti, situates her artistic practice in a metaphoric space between China and the West. A graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, she pursued graduate art studies in Paris and Pennsylvania before settling in New York. Her work takes the family preoccupation with Modernism in a new direction.

From a Western perspective, her work appears to be a female response to the mute aggression of certain varieties of Western minimalism. Instead of corten steel and iron, she creates constructions from wood and canvas painted a deep, mesmerizing black. The surfaces of her works contain nearly invisible marks and imprints which are only visible in the raking light. As a result, they have a delicacy that owes more to the restrained spirituality of Ad Reinhardt than to the brute materiality of Richard Serra.

An Asian perspective adds another layer of meaning. Lin Yan notes that this body of work was inspired by a 1994 visit to her native Beijing. After a nine year absence, she found the city almost unrecognizable. High rises and modern office buildings were replacing the traditional houses of her childhood. She began creating black paintings as a kind of elegy to the city she remembered. The industrial references in these works - the chains, hooks, metallic pipes bursting through the painting's surface - suggest the violence of the transition. Other forms recall roof shingles and beams from the old Beijing. Meanwhile, the color black makes reference to the rich ink strokes of the traditional Chinese painting. It creates a mysterious depth, while also

introducing a funerary note. Extending the elegiac connotations, the subtle raised images and patterns on the black canvases are based on traditional architectural ornament. Several drawings here, based on her grandmother's compositions, use various shades of black to pull a disappearing legacy out of the shadows.

Thus, Lin Yan melds her multiple influences to reshape the minimalist vocabulary to her own purposes. By self-consciously simplifying her means of expression, she produces a poetry that transcends the bounds of East and West.

From catalogue essay *Three Generations of Chinese Modernism*  
by Eleanor Heartney /Art in America

# 中國三代 現代主義

愛林諾爾 哈特尼 *Art in America* 和 *Art Press* 雜誌藝評家 1997 年 12 月寫于紐約

# 丘堤

的油畫沉靜、抒情，而這些畫面背後卻是她反抗陳腐、反抗保守的一生。

作為 30 年代中國第一代女性油畫家，丘堤向傳統水墨畫主流進行了挑戰。1928 年在日本留學的一年她接受了具有法蘭西文化影響的后印象主義。回國後，她沒有像其它早期中國油畫家那樣走上學院派的寫實主義道路，而是直向現代主義。1932 年她參加了中國最早的前衛藝術組織“決瀾社”，成為唯一獲得“決瀾社”獎的畫家。1949 年以後，“決瀾社”作為“資產階級形式主義”長久以來成為被批判的對象。1958 年，丘堤的心臟沒有經得起丈夫龐薰萊被劃成右派的打擊而停止了跳動。

丘堤的每一件作品都是藝術自由的宣言，贊揚着她的生活，她的發現。這些儉樸的靜物、花卉細節充實，耐人尋味。一個黑漆盒在一盆月季花旁隨意地開着，畫中帶有中國圖案的陶罐花瓶給她的靜物增添了中國的面貌。同時她對西洋油畫的三度空間與造型的深入研究，使她從水墨畫中的抽象性走出。她最喜歡的深紅、橘黃與各種綠色和中性色彩環境的對比，揭示了她在努力挖掘色彩中的感情力量。

展覽中的風景畫作於國內驅使現代派畫家轉變之前，她毫不猶豫地又闖進風景畫這個在中國歷屬男性藝術家的領域，寫生了老上海城市的一角，那現在已經不覆存在的紅房頂與親切的後花園。

# 龐濤

，丘堤的女兒，任教于北京中央美術學院 30 余年。80 年代中國政府對藝術家政策的開放使她終于有機會從多年的寫實畫風轉向對新的形式與材料的探索。1984 年她到巴黎考察訪問一年以後更加深了她創新的興趣。

這個展覽中的作品就是這些探索的結果，而啓示她形式上創新的是中國青銅器。青銅器在有的畫面上是隱藏在充滿表現力的滾動的筆觸及震顫的色彩之中。物景交融在濃鬱的深藍色與黑色之間把人們的視線引入到一個神秘與形而上的空間里。

在另外一些作品中，中國青銅器是經心營造，布局構思的依據。青銅器的外輪廓被分解後又被細心地用錯綜複雜的淺灰、黑、黃色塊組織起來。精緻地描繪出色彩交替的節奏感，使作品產生出音樂的效果。青銅器有時又在粗中有細的畫面肌理與布滿鑲嵌般的鮮艷的色塊中成爲有生命的實體。

從立體主義、抽象表現主義和結構主義吸收發展到她現在的抽象作品，龐濤創造了一個由最古老的中國藝術形式之一啓發下的構圖形式，平衡着新與舊、傳統與革新、抽象與具象，繼續着她母親表現中國精神的現代主義的追求。

# 林延

，龐濤的女兒，丘堤的外孫女，則在介于中西方之間的一個隱喻的空間里從事藝術創作。1984年畢業于北京中央美術學院油畫系以後，她又赴巴黎和美國賓西法尼亞州繼續研究生的深造，現定居紐約。她的作品把家庭中的現代主義帶到了一個新的方向。

從西方角度看，她的作品表現出一個女性對西方極簡主義某種特性的無聲的挑戰。她並沒有利用重型鋼鐵材料，而是創造出深邃迷幻的黑色畫面與木材料結合在一起的結構。作品表面保持着時隱時現的形與符號，從不同的光綫與角度看，其作品顯示出不同的效果。她的作品微妙、敏感，並不象 Richard Serra 有那麼赤裸裸的物質表現，而更多地傾向于 Ad Reinhardt 作品中有控制力的精神表現。

從東方角度來看又多了一層涵意，林延提到 QI 系列（弃、契、弃？）作品是 1994 年回到家鄉北京時得到的啓示。9 年的離別，她發現城市中高樓大廈的聳立代替了她童年時的老房子。她開始以黑色的作品爲她記憶中的城市譜寫一曲輓歌。作品里的工業材料——鐵鏈、鉤子、金屬管穿過畫面暗示着轉變時期的沖撞性。

另一些作品以瓦頂的形式喚起人們對老北京文化的回憶。同時她的黑色里含有中國傳統繪畫中豐富的筆墨味道，它創造出一種伴隨着一個葬禮音符的神秘的深度。提到她作品中輓歌的涵意還包括黑色畫面上略微凸起的傳統建築上的圖形。這裏的幾幅素描是根據她外婆的作品而作的。變化豐富黑色把正在消失的遺物從陰影中提示出來。

林延融化了她所受到的多重影響，以自己的意向賦予極簡主義新的語匯，以精簡的表現手法譜寫着一首超越了東西方界限的詩歌。