

# WHITE CUBE

## Hong Kong

Wang Gongxin

*Rotation*

6 September – 11 November 2017

Press preview and artist talk: 5 September at 3pm

White Cube Hong Kong is pleased to present 'Rotation', a solo exhibition by multimedia artist Wang Gongxin. **This is the first presentation of the artist's early installation works**, as well as being **Wang's first solo exhibition in Hong Kong**.

Born in 1960 in Beijing, Wang is a pioneering media artist, being one of the first in China to use digital editing. He was also, in 2001, the founder of Loft, the earliest media art centre in China. Wang began his career as a painter, but his experiences and in particular the art education he received in the US between the late 1980s and early 1990s encouraged him to broaden his artistic language, evidence of the energy and vitality within his practice.

*The Sky of Brooklyn*, created in 1995, established Wang as a leading experimental artist. The installation sets the tone for his subsequent practice, one that is humorous and modest, rooted in ideas of memory, reality, time and space, using a language that is full of tension. The subtlety with which Wang addresses constructs of cultural identity was a radical departure from the discursive trends and curatorial tastes of the 1990s. This initially served to obscure the importance of this period in **Wang's practice** within contemporary Chinese art. Revisiting these works now, **twenty years later**, **Wang's self-conscious** avoidance of easily recognisable Chinese signifiers, and his engagement with cultural references through materials and concepts, is evidence of his desire to depart from the then dominant artistic styles.

Around this time, Wang was moving away from easel painting and starting to experiment with mixed media. Video alone was not enough to satisfy his curiosity, and he began using **materials that were 'mobile', 'radiant' and 'liquid'**. **As early as 1994**, he was making site-specific kinetic installations that employ suspended or embedded lightbulbs, metal containers, ink and other fluids to play with light, movement and the environment. Moving lightbulbs animate liquids in shallow tray-like containers through illumination or direct contact, creating a tension between the liquid and the still solidity of the installation's geometry.

The kinetic installation *Unseatable* was exhibited in an artist-run space in Red Hook in Brooklyn in 1994. A red lightbulb circles over a square formation of chairs whose seats are alternately filled with black ink and white milk. The work exemplifies this transitional period **in Wang's practice**, revealing his discomfort and unease at finding himself in a new environment.

*Dialogue* (1995) again uses the transformative movement of light and shadow. The installation consists of two suspended lightbulbs that descend at alternating intervals into a pool of black ink. **The bulbs' contact** with the surface produces ripples across the stilled pool, while their descent creates **a shadow play of the audience's figures on the gallery walls**. **The movement of shadow and ink merges figures and abstract forms and suggests the ways in which exchange destabilises otherwise seemingly fixed entities**. **The installation's activation of an image through the manipulation of light and its electric source was the precursor to Wang's interest in the moving image**.

A number of small-scale installation works, including some unrealised projects from these years have a compelling materiality. For Wang, this period of experimentation was key in **transforming his modes of thought**. **It was a phase of 'qualitative' metamorphosis in his practice**. **The artist's selection of materials** in these artworks is not based on the symbolic or allegorical properties of the materials themselves, though their history is unavoidable. It was, instead, an attempt to use the arrangements of different materials and spaces, and the suspension or clearing out of existing symbolism, to propose a new mechanism for discourse.

Wang is primarily concerned with restoring the materials to their most fundamental physical properties, true to the relationships between structure and aesthetics. He strikes a **'balance' between materiality, space and time. The politics of 'criticality' and 'wariness' are the products** of these minute adjustments.

Three new works created for this exhibition, *In and Out* (2017), *Horizontal* (2017) and *Equal* (2017), are the realisation of ideas that Wang conceived in the 1990s but lacked the resources to put into practice. They demonstrate a sensitivity to textures – the play between marble and wood in *In and Out*, or wood and ink in *Horizontal* and *Equal* – and, like his other works from this period, investigate how vernacular forms invoke cultural and geographical localities. They provide an opportunity to engage with obscured histories and moments of artistic innovation, and to address the ways in which cultural norms impact individual and collective identities.

### Artist's Statement:

Looking back over my works from so many years, it is like my **own 'art history'**. As a student, I received training in the realist modelling techniques of the Soviet School; in my youth, I used Socialist Realist creative techniques and imitated the Neo-Realist styles of the West; after arriving in New York, as I hesitated to give up the two-dimensional plane, I experimented with partial abstraction, abstraction and minimalism, before eventually experimenting in three-dimensional installations of various materials. If there is gradual enlightenment here, could it perhaps be found in this gradual progression of my practice? If you ask what motivation or drive was behind it, I think that the work of the artist is driven by obsession with creativity and pursuit of a complete spiritual world.

I have the stubborn belief that shifts in the form of art through time must be closely connected to real life, social environment and existential condition of people in the present. Virtual reality, online lives and the spread of high resolution images are constantly influencing the ways we see and interpret things, and changing our interactions and ways of communicating. The rapid technological advancement of society is accompanied by people's aspiration for up-to-date spiritual needs. Nonetheless, no matter how fast and rapid change is, people who use computers must know that the best way to optimise **your system is to 'empty' and to 'reboot'**. Through *'Rotation'* at White Cube Hong Kong, I perform a self-optimisation and a **'reboot'** on my own twenty years of artistic creation!

### Contact:

For all press enquiries please contact [hongkongpress@whitecube.com](mailto:hongkongpress@whitecube.com) or Louise Oram on +852 6892 1171 and Mona Chu on +852 9276 5601

### Gallery Information:

White Cube Hong Kong  
50 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong  
T: +852 2592 2000  
Tuesday – Saturday  
11am – 7pm  
[whitecube.com](http://whitecube.com)

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