# CAI GUO-QIANG
**Gunpowder Art**

**Symposium Programme**

24th of October 2019, Lecture Theatre, Ashmolean Museum

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<td>12.30 - 13.00</td>
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| 13.00 - 13.15 | **Welcome & Introduction**  
Curator of Chinese Art and Exhibition Curator |
| 13.15 - 13.30 | Screening of *Cai Guo-Qiang: Rewind*                                |
| 13.30 – 14.00 | **Context and Influence in Cai Guo-Qiang's Work**  
Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art, Guangzhou, Vice Director and Senior Curator |
| 14.00 – 14.30 | **Volatile Matter: Politics and Pyrotechnics in the Work of Cai Guo-Qiang**  
University of Manchester, Presidential Academic Fellow in the History of Chinese Art |
| 14.30 – 15.00 | **Cai Guo-Qiang and the Depths of Spectacle**  
University of Oxford, Associate Professor of English |
| | COFFEE BREAK                                                     |
| 15.30 – 15.45 | **Second Panel: Cai Guo-Qiang from Multiple Perspectives**               |
| 15.45 – 16.00 | **Yi 羿 - Myth: Shooting the Suns**  
Ashmolean Museum, Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting |
| 16.00 – 16.15 | **Cai Guo-Qiang: In Search of El Greco**  
Ruskin School of Art, DPhil Candidate |
| 16.15 – 16.30 | **In the Volcano: Cai Guo-Qiang and Pompeii**  
Independent Curator |
| 16.30 – 17.00 | Artist Remarks and Discussion                                          |
| 17.15 – 19.00 | **PRIVATE VIEW of the Exhibition**                                    |
**CAI GUO-QIANG**

**Gunpowder Art**

**Abstracts and Biographies**

**Context and Influence in Cai Guo-Qiang's work**

David Elliott, Vice Director of the Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art in Guangzhou

Beginning with the context of Shanghai in the late 1970s-early '80s where Cai Guo-Qiang studied, I will consider briefly the early influences on his work including that of Russian/Soviet art as well those of his contemporaries and the prevailing cultural discourse in the city. I shall then consider - again briefly - the periodicity of Cai Guo-Qiang's artistic production to date: from painting, to explosion events, to explosion drawings, to installations, to gunpowder paintings.

David Elliott is a British art historian, curator, writer and teacher who has directed museums in Oxford (MoMA 1976–1996, where he presented Cai Guo-Qiang's work for the first time in the UK in 1993), Stockholm (Moderna Museet, 1996–2001), Tokyo (Mori Art Museum, founding director 2001–2006), and Istanbul (Museum of Modern Art, 2007). He is currently Vice Director and Senior Curator of the Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art (RMCA) in Guangzhou.

He has been the artistic director of major biennales in Sydney (2010), Kyiv (2012), Moscow (2014) and Belgrade (2016) and has taught Art History/Museum Studies at the University of Oxford (1986–96), National University of the Arts, Tokyo (2002–06), Humboldt University, Berlin (Rudolf Arnheim Professor in the History of Art 2008), and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2008–2016).

**Volatile Matter: Politics and Pyrotechnics in the Work of Cai Guo-Qiang**

Ros Homes, University of Manchester, Presidential Academic Fellow in the History of Chinese Art

This talk explores the cultural role of gunpowder in Cai Guo-Qiang's work from a variety of art historical perspectives. While Cai has used and reused a wide range of materials throughout his career, from porcelain to plexiglass and arrows to oil paint, gunpowder remains at the core of his multifarious practice. Examining the artist’s long-term commitment to this volatile material, the talk traces the cultural and artistic connotations which have been ascribed to Cai’s ‘gunpowder works.’ Despite the artist’s consistent reference to destruction as a key methodology of his practice, in contrast to its centrality in the critical reception of his works, the paper argues that Cai’s explosive artworks might more productively be understood in relation to their interpretive ambiguity. For even when gunpowder is detonated on silk, porcelain, and handmade paper, the artist’s carefully choreographed combustions not only de-stabilize these symbolically loaded materials but also leave equivocal afterimages in their wake. Establishing how Cai plays with the inherent versatility of gunpowder as a means to both suspend and question certain aspects of his own artistic identity, the talk traces the clashes of power, culture and identity engendered by global spaces of encounter.

Ros Holmes is Presidential Academic Fellow in the History of Chinese Art at the University of Manchester. She specialises in modern and contemporary art and online visual culture. She is currently completing her first book, which is entitled 'The Art of Incivility: 'Rudeness' and Representation in Contemporary China'. In 2019 she co-curated the exhibition *Chinternet Ugly* at the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art (CFCCA).
Cai Guo-Qiang and the Depths of Spectacle
David Taylor, University of Oxford, Associate Professor of English

In this paper I'll suggest some of the ways in which Cai's art, and his explosion events especially, counters a tradition of critical and philosophical suspicion of spectacle that goes back (in the West) some two and a half thousand years. In order to make this claim, I'll first trace Cai's relationship to the theatre and the manner in which his art addresses questions of what performance is and does. Consideration of Cai's work through the many vectors of performance - including space, time, movement, process, materiality, and audience - will then lead me back to the matter of spectacle. Contrary to the likes of Guy Debord, for whom spectacle renders us passive, its enthralling fiction putting us at a distance from the real, Cai shows us that spectacle is (or at least can be) an epistemology: a way of knowing.

David Taylor is associate professor of English at Oxford and a tutorial fellow of St. Hugh's College. He specializes in British literature and culture from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, with particular interests in the theatre and the relations between literary and visual cultures. He is the author of Theatres of Opposition (OUP, 2012) and The Politics of Parody (Yale UP, 2018), and also the editor of The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre (OUP, 2014). In 2017 he curated the exhibition “Draw New Mischief: 250 Years of Shakespeare and Political Cartoons” for the Royal Shakespeare Company, which opened in Stratford-upon-Avon before travelling to the Barbican. He is currently working on a book about theories and practices of spectacle in the Enlightenment.

Two Gunpowder Drawings and Cai Guo-Qiang in Japan
Lena Fritsch, Ashmolean Museum, Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art

Lena Fritsch is the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Ashmolean Museum, working on exhibitions, displays and acquisitions of international art. Recent exhibitions include A.R. Penck: I Think in Pictures (2019) and Ibrahim El Salahi: A Sudanese Artist in Oxford (2018). One of her main research areas is Japanese art and photography; recent monographs include Ravens & Red Lipstick: Japanese Photography since 1945 (English version by Thames & Hudson, Japanese by Seigensha, both 2018). Before joining the Ashmolean she worked a Tate Modern, and Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum of Contemporary Art, Berlin. Fritsch holds a PhD in Art History from Bonn University, Germany, and also studied at Keio University, Tokyo.

Yi 羿 - Myth: Shooting the Suns
Paul Bevan, Ashmolean Museum, Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting

Arrows, fire, and gunpowder were all central to the art of war in pre-modern China and aspects concerning these will be briefly introduced in this talk as they relate to the art work, “Myth: Shooting the Suns” by Cai Guo-Qiang.

Paul Bevan is the Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting at the Ashmolean Museum, and has taught modern Chinese literature and history at Oxford, Cambridge and the School of Oriental and African Studies. His primary research interests concern the impact of Western art and literature on China during the Republican Period (1912-1949). His publications include A Modern Miscellany - Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei’s Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen (2018) and “Intoxicating Shanghai”– An Urban Montage: Art and Literature in Pictorial Magazines during Shanghai’s Jazz Age (forthcoming).
Cai Guo-Qiang: In Search of El Greco

Saul Nelson, Ruskin School of Art, DPhil Candidate

The talk will be considering Cai's work of that title in the exhibition in the light of affinities between his work and El Greco's, arguing that both artists pursue painting as a medium that captures the invisible.

Saul Nelson is a third-year DPhil candidate at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford. Saul works on post-war modernist art, with an emphasis on migration, and his work has been published in The Oxford Art Journal and The London Review of Books.

In the Volcano: Cai Guo-Qiang and Pompeii

Jérôme Neutres, Independent Curator

Jérôme Neutres is an independent curator, who earlier in 2019 curated the exhibition In the Volcano: Cai Guo-Qiang and Pompeii at the National Archaeological Museum, Naples. He is the former director of La Réunion des Musées Nationaux Grand Palais and former president of the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris.