

# Calligraphy as Resource: Chinese Modern Calligraphic Art in Contemporary Context



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## *Background*

The art of calligraphy has traditionally been a highly valued part of Chinese culture. Amazingly, calligraphy remained untouched during the upheavals of the Culture Revolution. This can be attributed to the fact that it was an irrelevant practice and it was actually a favourite hobby of Mao Tse-Tung. Throughout the period of gradual modernization and internationalization, amid the faster pace of modern life and constant improvement of writing methods in particular email and the Internet, calligraphy gradually had less use as a form of daily communication.

However, the 1980s became a period of major expansion of Chinese contemporary art. First unveiled in the 1985 New Art Wave, contemporary calligraphy has been the result of twentieth century Western art and Japanese calligraphy influences and the merging of traditional Chinese culture with Western painters. Drawing inspiration from the Chinese calligraphy culture, artists began to use it in a contemporary context, beginning to develop this traditional art form into the modern age.

Despite misunderstanding and criticism by traditional calligraphists that this new artwork was too anti-traditional, this school of Chinese art has increasingly developed. Since the 1990s, contemporary calligraphy has entered a new era with the use of many different styles and medias. The continued exploration of modern calligraphy has slowly been accepted and supported as a legitimate school of art in China, as well as abroad. Calligraphy as a new school became finally noticed in 1993. In 1999, four hundred works by fifty artists were shown in *Benshu Parade: A Retrospect of Chinese Modern Calligraphy*. The British Museum has been collecting works by artists in the school of "modern calligraphy" since the 1980s and has put on a successful show of modern calligraphy in 2001.

This exhibition features fourteen representative artists from the school of modern calligraphy. Gu Gan was a co-founder in the Chinese Modern Calligraphy Art Movement and co-organized the First Exhibition in 1985. He has since taught Chinese modern calligraphy and has had exhibitions worldwide. Taught traditional calligraphy, Zhang Dawo began to experiment with the modern in 1982. He re-located to Australia in 1992 and often travels back to China from ideas and cultural exchange. Also taught traditional calligraphy, Wei Lejang turned to the modern school in the mid-1980s. He is the co-founder of an art gallery specializing in calligraphy in China and has participated in a number of important exhibitions, as well as holding his own show. Bu Leiping has been a consistent promoter of modern calligraphy and has put on several exhibitions, as well as published a book. Since participating in the First Exhibition in 1985, Yan Benghui has exhibited abroad. Much of his work has been influenced by Japanese calligraphy and he is a member of the Chinese Calligrapher's Association. Also a member of the Chinese Calligrapher's Association, Shao Yan, has had exhibitions in China and abroad, and has had many solo ones. A representative

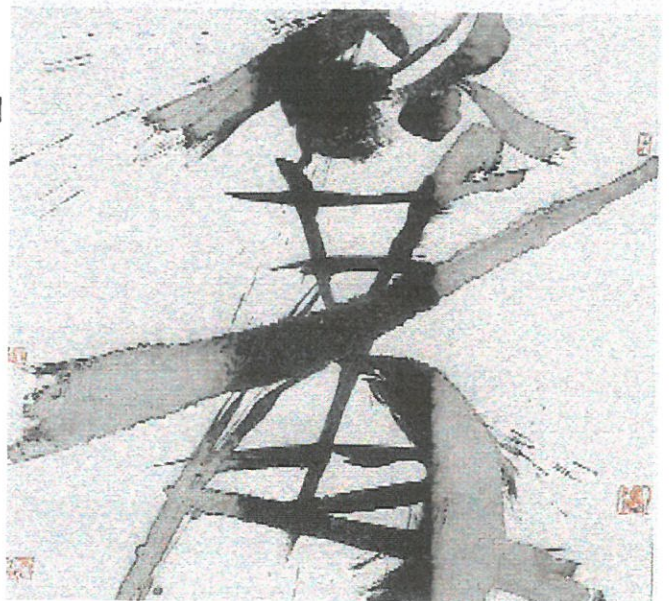


## Media Release

To celebrate the festivities of the Chinese New Year, Gallery 4a is presenting a highly anticipated exhibition on the art of calligraphy. It will include the work of fourteen artists that have travelled all the way from China to hold performances and workshops for the general public, as well as exhibit their new school of calligraphy work.

Gallery 4a will present this exhibition titled: *Calligraphy as Resource: Chinese Modern Calligraphic Art in Contemporary Context*. It will run from date to date and amazingly, will be the first exhibition solely devoted to contemporary calligraphy in Australia. This cutting-edge art movement, also called *xiandai shufa*, seeks to develop new expression derived from the art and culture of Chinese calligraphy. Inspired by Western Modern art and Japanese calligraphy, this new artistic trend appeared in China in the early 1980s

(Modern calligraphy reveals the unique encounter between modernity and tradition and how it merges together in a range of styles and media's. Many artists are finding new inspiration from traditional Chinese calligraphy for their artwork, as well as showing influence of abstract expressionism. From this, they continue to enhance the modernization and internationalization of this new art movement. Some of these artists have also been exploring links between Chinese artists practicing modern calligraphy while in Australia.)?



The artists presented in this exhibition were all born and raised in China. Many of them were among the first to be exhibited using modern calligraphy in 1985, and have since continued on to exhibitions abroad. The artists include Cai Menxia, Ge Gan, Bu Lieping, Qui Zhenzhong, Qui Zhijie, Shao Yan, Wang Dongling, Wang Nanming, Wei Ligang, Yan Binghui, Zeng Laide, Zhang Dawo, Zhang Qiang, and Zhu Quingsheng. Curated by Yang Yingshi, he was taught in traditional calligraphy but has promoted this movement. As an art critic, curator, and translator, he has published numerous articles. Also he has had some important calligraphy exhibitions and two solo ones. Later on this year, he will be attending Harvard University on full scholarship.

To follow the festivals and performances in celebration of the Chinese New Year, this exhibition will be running at the same time. At a time when Chinese culture is most celebrated in Sydney, Gallery 4A's exhibition will show the contemporary art of China today. This follows Gallery 4A's aim to promote cultural awareness and public discourse of the multiculturalism in Australia.