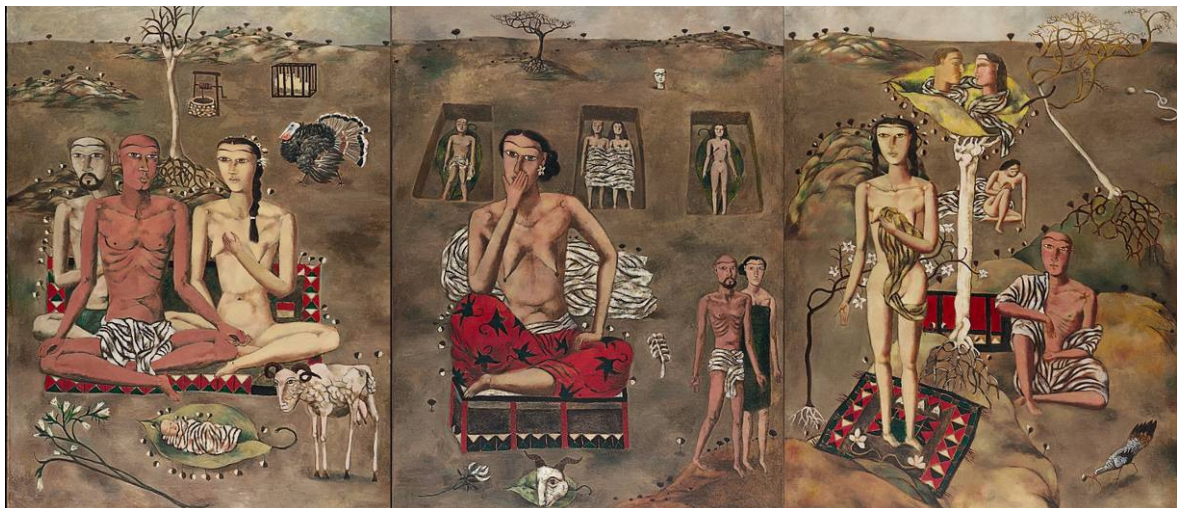


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Sotheby's Hong Kong To Offer Masterworks From THE ULLENS COLLECTION – THE NASCENCE OF AVANT GARDE CHINA

106 Monumental Early Works by Eminent Contemporary Chinese Artists



Zhang Xiaogang's (b. 1958) *Forever Lasting Love* (Triptych) (Est. HK\$25 – 30 million / US\$3.2 – 3.8 million)

Hong Kong, 9 February 2011 Sotheby's Hong Kong is pleased to announce the sale of an important private collection of contemporary Chinese Art on 3 April: *The Ullens Collection – The Nascence of Avant Garde China*, offering 106 masterpieces from the legendary Collection, which are expected to bring a total of **HK\$100 million to HK\$130 million / US\$12.7 million to 16.7 million***. One of the most important and comprehensive assemblages of contemporary Chinese art created to date, this encyclopaedic Collection signifies not only the birth and evolution of the Chinese avant-garde, but also the vision and passion of Baron Guy Ullens, a renowned art collector from Belgium. Bringing together this group of monumental museum-quality early works rarely seen publicly since their acquisition and created over the late 1980s and the early 1990s by the most prominent contemporary Chinese artists, this unprecedented offering will be sold in an exclusive an Evening Sale, an honour reserved only for the most prestigious collections.

Incomparable in scale, diversity and depth, *The Ullens Collection* spans a range of periods (from the 1980s to the 2000s), schools and movements (such as Political Pop and Cynical Realism) as well as media (from oil painting, sculpture, photography, installation to contemporary ink painting). It is anchored by numerous pivotal works of

enormous historical value, including key works first shown in landmark exhibitions such as the China/Avant-Garde Exhibition (1989), which marked the dawn of contemporary art in China. Works offered in the sale are emblematic of the seminal period of contemporary Chinese art in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Highlighted in the sale, among others, are Zhang Xiaogang's triptych *Forever Lasting Love* (Triptych) (Est. HK\$25 – 30 million / US\$3.2 – 3.8 million), Mao Xuhui's *Paternalism Series No. 3* (Est. HK\$400,000 – 500,000 / US\$51,000 – 64,000, pictured above) and Zhang Peili's *Series "X?" No. 3* (Est. HK\$1.5 – 2.5 million / US\$190,000 – 320,000), all recognised icons of the legendary 1989 China/Avant-Garde Exhibition and widely considered to be some of the most important contemporary Chinese works of art ever produced.



The Ullens Collection encapsulates the evolution of creative ideologies and artistic dialogues between some of the greatest artists in the most fertile period in contemporary Chinese art history. To honour this legacy, Sotheby's will create an educational exhibition in conjunction with the auction's Hong Kong preview, providing a visual overview of the development of contemporary Chinese art in the 1980s and 1990s. Highlights of the Collection will also be showcased in a series of travelling exhibitions (*please refer to Note to Editors*).

Evelyn Lin, Sotheby's Head of Contemporary Asian Art, said: "Sotheby's Hong Kong is privileged to have been entrusted with the sale of this major collection of contemporary Chinese art that offers a once-in-a-lifetime buying opportunity for discerning collectors around the world. The essence of The Ullens Collection is the visualisation of the Chinese nation's history through works of art. Since my early forays into the field of contemporary Chinese art, the eminence of this Collection, the depth of thought and the enormity of passion that belie its formation, have loomed profoundly in my mind. The opportunity to handle works of such quality and importance marks the height of my career that it will be my greatest joy to share with the international collecting community the many exceptional facets of this historic Collection."

Baron Guy Ullens commented on the sale: "I have reached the stage of my collecting journey where it is time to share some of the wealth of my collection with other collectors. This will enable me to continue to work with new and emerging artists, as has been my passion since I began this collection over twenty years ago. I am particularly excited at the group selected for this sale, as most of these works have rarely been seen publicly, and this sale will provide a unique opportunity for people to experience an extraordinary moment in the development of contemporary Chinese art."

Auction Highlights

Idealism and Passion of the 1980s

The works to be offered in this sale trace the birth of contemporary Chinese art in the 1980s, charting the political reforms that took place in China and the subsequent, sudden influx of art scholarship and theory from the West. A new generation of Chinese artists reflected on their own experiences against the prescribed doctrines of Social Realism,

then proceeded to unearth possibilities in creating various forms of art and generating a nationwide New Wave movement in art and in ideology. The first crest was the '85 Art Movement and four years later, the National Art Museum of China presented the China / Avant-Garde Exhibition (1989), which elevated the movement to its climax. Presenting works of contemporary art from the country's different regions, the Exhibition was emblematic of the idealism and passion of the generation.

Zhang Xiaogang (b. 1958) *Forever Lasting Love* (Triptych), 1988 (pictured on P.1)

Est. HK\$25 – 30 million / US\$3.2 – 3.8 million

Forever Lasting Love, which was exhibited in the China / Avant-Garde Exhibition in 1989, is the *magnum opus* from Zhang Xiaogang's early artistic career. As a key member of the Southwestern Art Research Group, Zhang and other artists from Kunming were strongly influenced by Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, prompting them to search for new artistic expression. One of their exhibition manifestos reads as follows: "Foremost is touching people's souls, rather than pleasing their eyes." The large-scale *Forever Lasting Love* depicts primitive men and women with exposed upper bodies posing in nature. A strong vitality permeates a background dominated by tawny yellow, which represents the earth, brimming with fervent praise of life. Without any ostensible religious narrative, men and women, babies, sheep, and heads trapped inside cages are juxtaposed in this triptych filled with mystical symbols. Questioning life in the most primal manner, as if conversing at a distance with Post-Impressionist master Paul Gauguin, this masterpiece crystallises the early artistic ideas of the artist.



Wang Guangyi (b. 1957) *Mao Zedong: P2*, 1988

Est. HK\$1.5 – 2 million / US\$190,000 – 260,000

During the '85 Art Movement, "Rational Painting" became a very strong artistic force; among its advocates were Wang Guangyi and Shu Qun of the Northern Art Group. In response to the sensationalism and over-zealous personality cults in the Cultural Revolution, Wang Guangyi advocated "the liquidation of the enthusiasm of humanity", applying rational, almost logical analysis in painting. Created in 1988, *Mao Zedong: P2* was one of the earliest works of Wang's *Mao Zedong* series. Superimposed onto the silhouette of Mao Zedong - the great helmsman of modern China - are bold lines in red and provocative English symbols. Solid and dotted lines representing rational thinking seemingly deconstruct the Mao image, ridding it of excessive adulation. *Mao Zedong: P2* is rooted in the same concept of lines and grids as Wang's earlier works *Black Rationality* and *Red Rationality*. *Mao Zedong: P2* is an ambitious work, and Wang's earlier triptych *Mao Zedong AC* was among the landmark pieces included in the China / Avant Garde Exhibition in 1989. The *Mao Zedong* series established the artist's position in the history of contemporary Chinese art and was a precursor to his critically-acclaimed *Great Criticism* series.

Zhang Peili (b. 1957) *Series "X?" No. 3*, 1986

Est. HK\$1.5 – 2.5 million / US\$190,000 – 320,000

Creation of Zhang Peili's *Series "X?"* began in 1986 after the artist exhibited works on subject matters of swimming and saxophone in the '85 New Space exhibition.



The largest specimen of the series, *Series "X?" No. 3* portrays a pair of surgical rubber gloves. Utilising light brown colour in realistic brushstrokes, the artist brings out a cruel and inhuman ambience. This work was used as cover art for Issue 45, 1987, *Zhongguo Meishubao* (Fine Arts in China), the most influential art magazine of the time. Zhang believes that artists should keep a distance from their works, and that drawing and painting are not expressions of an individual's character. The surgical rubber gloves are embedded with complex symbols, they "have properties that are between matter and life, constituting a juxtaposition of the restrictions on life and the desire to be protected", just as life is filled with questions and mysteries. The ambiguity and indetermination typical of literature run through the "X?" Series, posing questions and provoking thought. A testament to Zhang's early genius, the "X?" Series was a precursor to his subsequent series of oil paintings and installations.



Geng Jianyi (b. 1962) *Two People Under a Light*, 1985

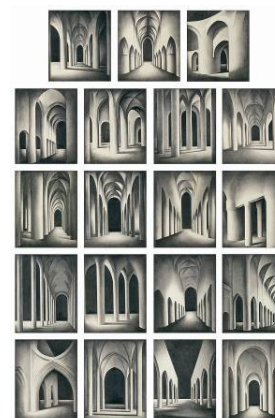
Est. HK\$1 – 1.5 million / US\$130,000 – 190,000

During the '85 Art Movement, a sensational exhibition titled '85 New Space was held in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, by the Creative Society of Zhejiang Youth, led by core members Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi, both graduates of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. Together they established the Pond Society, an important driving force of the Chinese avant-garde. In contrast to the ebullient Southwestern Art Research Group, '85 New Space was closer in spirit to the prevalent "Rational Painting" that took the art world by storm. It advocated that an exhibition should "principally be a vessel for modernity, strengthening the mode of language and suppressing expression". Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi both adopted urbanization and industrialization as subject matters, their works displaying aloofness and control that fully embodied the philosophy behind their exhibition '85 New Space. *Two People Under a Light* is Geng Jianyi's graduation project at the Academy. Grave and stern in style and markedly different from the mainstream of Chinese art at the time, the work created controversy at its unveiling and was one of the most talked-about works of the movement. A man and a woman, completely deprived of interaction, are respectively seated in the foreground and background while looking at the viewer, displaying no emotion at all, as the man's eyes are further obstructed by his glasses. In this work, stark colour contrasts accentuate the alienation that has been brought about as a result of urbanization as well as estrangement between human beings. This is among the first works of contemporary Chinese art that tackles the issue of urbanity.

Shu Qun (b. 1958) *Identity Voice - A Post Avant Garde Series*, 1994

Est. HK\$800,000- 1 million / US\$100,000 – 130,000

A core member of the Northern Art Group, Shu Qun created in the 1980s the *Absolute Principles* series. Set against a background of the universe, the series emphasises perspectives in composition and uses polygonal architectural structures as its imagery. Sterile shapes such as the cross are extended *ad infinitum*, conveying a sense of eternity and limitlessness within the confines of the canvas. A work on paper by the same title, *Identity Voice - A Post Avant Garde Series*, portrays arches in an infinite-point perspective.



Although varied in design, the 19 arches contribute to a unified sense of emptiness, bleakness, inhumanity and rationality.

Continuation and Maturity in the 1990s

Although the ardour of the 1980s cooled down after the events of 1989, contemporary Chinese artists remained resolute on their paths in this new decade. Their frequent exposure in international exhibitions throughout the 1990s attracted the world's attention to the development of contemporary Chinese art. Artists who rose in prominence in the 1990s were markedly different in temperament from those of the preceding decade.



Liu Wei (b. 1965), *Born in 1989*, 1995

Est. HK\$1.5 – 2 million / US\$190,000 – 260,000

The joint exhibition in 1992 of Liu Wei and Fang Lijun in Beijing made the names for both artists, which led to the coining of the “Cynical Realist style” by prominent art critic Li Xianting. Highly ambitious, *Born in 1989* is a rare and exceptional work by Liu Wei. Similar to other artists who emerged in the 1990s, Liu Wei abandoned grand narratives in his work as a result of political dejection, refocusing his vision to the canvas itself. Liu's brushstrokes are bold and gallant, if expressionist in style, his figures distorted but full of an unusual sense of humour. *Born in 1989* portrays three babies in pink as they step forward to the unknown future. The title, which is a *double entendre*, can be seen as a reference to politics or society, an occurrence rarely found in Liu's body of work.

Zeng Fanzhi (b. 1964). *Mask Series No.4*, 1994

Est. HK\$8-10 million / US\$1 – 1.3 million

Among the earliest works from Zeng Fanzhi's *Behind Mask Series* (later known as the *Mask Series*), *Mask Series No.4* portrays two men seated, seemingly having a conversation. Early works from the *Mask Series* are scarce in quantity, and notably different in the treatment of colours from that of later works. While more vivid colours are used in the later works, thicker and rougher brushstrokes are set against a pale earthy yellow background in the present early work. The early *Mask Series* probes deeply into the impact of modernization on society.



* Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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NOTES TO EDITOR

1) Baron Guy Ullens

Born in Belgium, Baron Guy Ullens began collecting classical Chinese paintings in the early 1980s. Soon after, he became captivated by contemporary Chinese art and began collecting works of the category in the mid 1980s. Contemporary Chinese art constitutes a fundamental part of The Ullens Collection. After Baron Ullens retired from business in 2000, he and his wife Myriam began to devote their time and energy to cultural enterprises. The Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation was established in Switzerland in 2002, sponsoring exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art in Europe and China and loaning works of art from their collection to museums to promote contemporary Chinese art. In 2007, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) was established in the heart of Beijing's 798 Art District, providing a vital exhibition platform for Chinese artists.

2) Travelling Exhibitions

12-16 February	London
9-10 March	Shanghai
12-13 March	Beijing
19-20 March	Singapore
18-22 March	New York
26-27 March	Taipei

3) Sotheby's Hong Kong Contemporary Chinese Art Records

From 2008 to 2010, Sotheby's Hong Kong has sold 25 pieces of contemporary Chinese art at over US\$1 million and established 11 world auction records for individual artists:

Date	Artist	Work	Aggregate *World auction record for the artist*
Apr 2008	Liu Xiaodong	<i>Battlefield Realism: The Eighteen Arhats</i>	HK\$61,927,500 / US\$7,949,014
Oct 2010	Zhang Xiaogang	<i>Chapter of a New Century: Birth of the People's Republic of China II</i>	HK\$52,180,000 / US\$6,689,744
Apr 2008	Zhang Xiaogang	<i>Bloodline: The Big Family No.3</i>	HK\$47,367,500 / US\$6,080,092
Apr 2010	Liu Ye	<i>Bright Road</i>	HK\$19,140,000 / US\$2,453,846
Oct 2008	Liu Ye	<i>Untitled</i>	HK\$12,980,000 / US\$1,670,656
Oct 2010	Ding Yi	<i>Appearances of Crosses - 6</i>	HK\$8,420,000 / US\$1,079,487
Apr 2008	Xu Bing	<i>The Living Word</i>	HK\$7,607,500 / US\$976,499
Oct 2010	Yu Youhan	<i>The Waving Mao</i>	HK\$6,620,000 / US\$848,718
Apr 2009	Huang Yongping	<i>Sixty-year Cycle Chariot</i>	HK\$3,380,000 / US\$432,539
Oct 2010	Li Songsong	<i>Put Down Your Whip</i>	HK\$3,140,000 / US\$402,564
Apr 2009	Sui Jianguo	<i>Legacy Mantle</i>	HK\$3,140,000 / US\$401,826

4) Sotheby's Hong Kong Spring Sales 2011 Calendar

Hong Kong Exhibition Date	Auction Date	Auctions
-----	1-3 April	Wine
1-2 April	3 April	The Ullens Collection - The Nascence of Avant Garde China
1-3 April	4 April	Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings 20th Century Chinese Art Contemporary Asian Art
1-4 April	5 April	Fine Chinese Paintings
1-5 April	6 April	Magnificent Jewels and Jadeite
1-6 April	7 April	Important Watches Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art
1-7 April	8 April	Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art

Hong Kong Exhibition and Auction Venue

Hall 5, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (New Wing)
1 Expo Drive, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

