

Portrait of a Chinese artist



Wong and his favourite sculpture. — AP picture.

Peking, Nov 27.
In 1966, Wong Keping, then a confident, self-righteous red guard, invaded a church and threw out all the Bibles.

He burned Western magazines and happily denounced decadent Western art.

Today, he is one of 30 young artists displaying their avant-garde and Western-style work in a former imperial courtyard.

Wong's own wooden sculptures are among the most brazen denunciations of the cultural revolution in which he took part.

"Ten years ago I would

have burned paintings like these and smashed statues like my own," he said as he looked about the exhibit being staged in gilded galleries beside a frozen lake.

The "Stars" exhibition features once-forbidden topics such as nudes, abstracts and things of aesthetic rather than political content.

An estimated 10,000 people have seen it in the first four days.

It represents a hard-won victory for the youthful artists who paraded in Peking on October 1 to protest against police interference in a show that was set up without official approval.

This time, the police have stood by warily but without interfering.

The 30-year-old Wong's own works are bitter and political, such as "The Silence," a vast, totem-like head with a blacked-out eye and corked mouth.

China Sees First West Modern Art

BEIJING (UPI) — Beijing's underground artists after a year-long battle Sunday staged the first show of Western-style modern art in China — nudes, pop art and all — with official blessing.

The renegade artists had marched in a massive street demonstration Oct. 1 shouting "we want artistic freedom" after they had been frustrated by authorities in attempts to present their works.

They celebrated victory when their contemporary paintings, drawings and sculpture — a revolution in culture in China — went on display with Communist Party and government aid in an exhibition hall in Bei Hai Park, one of the most prestigious parks of the capital.

One exhibitor, sculptor Wang Keping, blue Mao cap jauntily set on the back of his head,

grinned in excitement as he watched the crowds examining with pleasure, astonishment or disgust the array of nudes and his "pop art" wood sculptures, the first unveiled in this 4,000-year-old city.

"This show will have a stimulating influence on Beijing," he said.

"We are so pleased that in the Beijing city government were some leaders who supported us."

Wang and dozens of other amateur artists not belonging to the official state-paid artists group had been refused permission to stage a show because they created Western-style modern art and not the traditional landscapes, goldfish, flowers, animals and people in the centuries-old Chinese style.

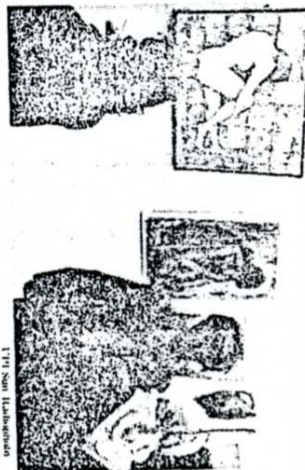
The rebels in defiance hung

an unauthorized show in September on a street next to the Beux Arts Museum. Police drove them away.

On Oct. 1, the 20th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Revolution the underground artists gathered at "democracy wall," authorized center of protest, and then marched to the city hall, waving protest signs about democracy.

The city government finally promised the artists a show. A poster at "democracy wall" Friday announced the victory.

Beijing's underground artists stage China's first Western-style modern art show with official blessing from the city government and Communist Party. The artists had been refused permission to show and finally staged a protest march to the city hall Oct. 1. The show includes many nudes, startling in this puritan society.



"These people can see but are forbidden to look.

"They have mouths but are forbidden to speak.

"This is what happened to the grassroots in China," he explained.

Another wooden mask has blank eye sockets, a nose without nostrils, no mouth and a sheared-off head with no room for brains.

Wong calls it a satire of bureaucrats.

"Most of the men on top are okay and the masses are okay but the men in the middle are those who obstruct progress," he said.

One sculpture depicts Chiang Ching, widow of Chairman Mao and leader of the "Scorched Earth Arts Campaign" in the cultural revolution, in the shape of a rifle.

Another is a screaming figure with a little red book of Mao's sayings in one hand and a knife in the other.

"I believe art should not be made to serve politics and politics should ensure full artistic development," Wong said.

He and other artists agree that China's creative atmosphere has lost some of its propaganda content but absolute freedom remains only a goal.

Wong, a scriptwriter for the Government radio, aspired to be a playwright but found his efforts ignored.

Admittedly knowing little about art, he turned nevertheless to sculpture, which he says "is a more concrete message."

He said that as a child, the son of a party member and writer in Tianjin, he liked to carve figures and designs on seals.

A.P.

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