

Peking Permits Once-Banned Exhibit of New Art

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PEKING, Oct. 19— In what appears to be an easing of the restrictions on artistic freedom, Chinese cultural officials have decided to allow an exhibit of modern painting and sculpture by 23 artists that was forbidden by the police.

Two of the artists said they were told their works would be put on display in the Peking Art Gallery about Nov. 1. "We have won this round," said Huang Rui, a 27-year-old painter who works in a leather-goods factory.

The show includes abstract canvases and nudes, both long taboo as offensive and bourgeois, while some of the sculptures, in wood, mock unfeeling, arrogant bureaucrats.

Police Called It Propaganda

The Ministry of Public Security quickly closed an informal exhibit the group put on three weeks ago on the sidewalk outside the Peking Art Gallery. The police charged that it violated a directive restricting the display of slogans and posters to designated locations. The artists answered that what they were showing was not political propaganda.

The Peking Art Association, which runs the gallery, agreed to the artists'

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Wang Keiping holds "Silenced," sculpture of a face with an eye blinded and its mouth plugged up. "Portrait of a Girl" is a departure from revolutionary art; it is a work with no political or social meaning.

China Allows Modern Art Show; Victory of Artistic Freedom Seen

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plea to take their works inside to prevent the police from seizing them. In a further demonstration of official support, two art magazines have sent reporters to the gallery to prepare articles timed for the opening, according to the artists.

They are not sure who approved the new show. Some believe the directive came from Hu Yaobang, head of the Communist Party's propaganda department and a close associate of the senior Deputy Prime Minister, Deng Xiaoping.

Meanwhile, two leading young dissidents have been put on trial, with one, Wei Jingsheng, sentenced to 15 years.

Whoever was responsible for allowing the art exhibit and whatever the reasons, the action seems to give credibility to calls for greater freedom for the arts and literature. At a recent press conference the Minister of Culture, Huang Zhen, was asked if Mao Zedong's policy of no art for art's sake still applied. Mr. Huang, himself a painter, chuckled and thrust his arm in the direction of a large traditional landscape. "I think you can produce anything," he said.

The paintings that the police tried to seize are oils, unusual in China, where the traditional taste for subtle watercolors and ink washes persists. There are some landscapes, portraits of a young woman seated, an abstract rendering of the old Summer Palace outside Peking and several nudes. They reflect no particular Western style; few artists have more than a cursory knowledge of 19th- and 20th-century Western art.

The sculpture is the work of Wang Keiping, a playwright by profession, who has produced several dozen wooden heads and figures since he began experimenting with the medium last year. They are fashioned out of bits and pieces of scrap wood, including gnarled roots, that he can scavenge around Peking, where lumber of any kind is in extremely short supply.

One of his powerful creations, a grotesque head in blond wood, is entitled, "Backbone of Society." "This is symbolic of a middle-level official," he said. "Look, his eyes are closed, he has nostrils with which to smell and his mouth remains tightly shut. This bump on his cheek represents cancer. The indifference of these officials is the cancer of our society."

Most of the artists have full-time jobs in other fields, unlike official artists, who are paid and assigned housing by the state. The group originally tried to get its works into a regular exhibit sponsored by the Peking Art Gallery next month but was turned down.

Mr. Huang Rui, the artist, said he applied for Government support but was refused. He got in trouble with the factory where he works for writing what was considered a reactionary poem in 1976 at the time of an anti-Government demonstration.

"When I asked to be allowed to work in art, they put me to work, instead in the boiler room," he related. He was so busy with his job, he said, that he did not have time to paint, so now he often cuts work and has not been paid for four months. He depends on his father, a retired engineer, for support. "All I need is enough money to buy food and paints," he said.

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