

# Newsweek

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## BEYOND THE DANILOFF AFFAIR

# Is the Summit in Peril?

### Dim Stars Over China

The group of 31 Chinese artists called themselves *Xing Xing*, or Stars—a name that betokened not celebrity but glimmerings of light—and for two years they blazed across China's relatively drab art world. After the group's painters and sculptors boldly displayed their modernist works on the sidewalks outside Peking's National Gallery in 1979, officials allowed Stars to stage two shows later that year and in 1980, both of which drew enthusiastic crowds. The flush of artistic freedom was short-lived. Peking refused to grant Stars further exhibitions, and the group disintegrated as some members abandoned their art, others moved abroad and one, Li Shuang, was sentenced to two years in a labor camp for living with her

French fiancé in Peking's foreign-diplomatic compound.

Their hopes rekindled by Deng Xiaoping's revival of the Maoist call to "let a hundred flowers bloom," Stars tried to stage a new show in China last month. Sculptor Wang Keping and painter Li, who now live in France, rounded up eight of their Stars comrades and found a Peking art-gallery manager who was willing to show their works—for a hefty fee. But a party official from Peking's Fine Arts Association banned the exhibit. "China likes to propagandize about its new open policy," says Wang. "Now we know it isn't true."

The artists believe Peking feared stirring memories of Stars' defiant 1979 street show rather than the works themselves, which members

say pose no threat to the government. Most of Stars' work—whose imagery ranges from landscapes to nudes, the styles from realism to abstractionism and pop art—is not overtly political. But some pieces are undeniably disconcerting, such as painter Ai Wei Wei's Andy Warhol-style triptych of Mao Tse-tung, in

which one image is showered with black streaks. Mao is also crudely reincarnated in Wang's "Idol," his face pouch-like and bloated.

**Limited access:** Peking has recently granted some new freedoms to its avant-garde artists, but many still complain of limited access to galleries and art schools, most of which are controlled by aging conservatives. Some artists have staged unofficial exhibits at places as diverse as Peking's Concert Hall and ancient observatory. Many Chinese artists hope that the appointment early this year of novelist Wang Meng as culture minister will usher in an era of increased artistic freedom. The treatment of Stars, however, suggests that in China's art world, politics remain firmly in control.

Disconcerting: Wang's 'Idol'



PAULA CHIN with  
CARROLL BOGERT in Peking and  
PASCAL PRIVAT in New York