



Biography

Born in 1949, near Beijing, Wang Keping is one of the founders of contemporary Chinese art, mainly due to the key role he played during the cultural revolution in China, in the 1970s, which led to him leaving for France in 1984. Since then, he has developed a masterful body of work, which explores all that wood can offer and is considered, internationally, to be one of the most important contributions made to contemporary sculpture.

His wooden works testify the artist's ongoing commitment to exploring the medium as well as to his relationship with sculpture, a bond that is simultaneously humble, intimate, and spiritual and that he defines thus: "I am a sculptor and I sand with my hands." By mastering traditional carving techniques, according to an approach that is timeless and transcends any notion of style, Wang Keping manages to capture the quintessence of his subjects with a wide array of themes : female busts, couples, embraces, animal hybrids...

Wang Keping emerged on the art scene in 1979, by founding the dissident group known today as "Xing Xing" (literally "Stars"), with now-established artists including Ai Wei Wei, Ma Desheng, and Huang Rui. This avant-garde movement rejected the Socialist Realism imposed by the Communist Party, and staged their first exhibition/manifesto on the railings of the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. There, Wang Keping showed a sculpture that would become emblematic of the resistance to the aesthetic canons advocated by the government: Silence, which depicts a one-eyed face, distorted by a howling mouth choked with a cylinder. As the personification of censorship, this pioneering work foretold the inescapable future of this artistic manifestation, which would quickly be shut down by the authorities. Soon after, on the 30th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, they launched a movement campaigning for artistic freedom. Though the government attempted to quash these demonstrations, the impact of the event outstripped the repressive environment, with the international press immediately relaying this very public position-taking. This is considered today as one of the origins of the affirmation of contemporary Chinese art. In fact, The New York Times chose Wang Keping's sculpture for the cover of their October 19 issue.

A second exhibition, a year later, at the National Art Museum of Beijing, sealed the fate of the Stars Art Group's main protagonists. The event triggered unprecedented

popular infatuation, to which the government responded in the form of a general repression, marking the end of the Beijing Spring and leading to the exile of most of the movement's founding members.

Upon arriving in France, in 1984, Wang Keping distanced himself from the political engagement of his early years, and progressively turned toward a more universal form of art, mostly based on the carving of wood, a living material whose expressive powers he constantly reveals. His work embraces and sublimates the properties of the wood the artist selects, in an aesthetic and spiritual quest inspired by Taoist philosophy, by the ancient statuary of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), but also by the popular art of rural China. In effect, it is from the veins, the knots, and the grooves, the more or less uneven surfaces of the pieces of wood, that the artist derives the essential forms of his subjects. Each section of wood is thus carefully chosen and respected in its entirety. This primordial relationship with nature, as first source of inspiration and formal matrix, also manifests itself in the care with which Wang Keping treats the surface of his works. In fact, to achieve the sculptures' smooth, soft, compulsively touchable "skin," Wang Keping follows a number of steps: the sculptures are first polished so as to erase all traces left by tools and to leave visible only the relief innate to the material, after which they are meticulously burnt with a blowtorch, thus acquiring a final nuance unique to each sculpture. This treatment accentuates the sensual dimension conveyed by the suggestive lines and the generous curves of the works, which, in their harmony, are bearers of truth.

It is no surprise that his very pure art, realized in the solitude of his studio, is often compared to the works of historic artists like Auguste Rodin, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, and, especially, Constantin Brancusi—an affiliation that Wang Keping is proud of, at a time when work requiring this amount of patience and made by the artist's own hand is becoming all the more rare.

Wang Keping was born in 1949, near Beijing (China). He lives and works outside Paris (France).

Wang Keping's French and international career has been marked by important institutional solo exhibitions. In 1989, the Asia University Museum of Modern Art in Taichung (Taiwan) staged his first monographic exhibition; after which his work was presented, in 1990, at the Chinese Modern Art Center in Osaka (Japan); then, in 1993, at the Aidekman Art Center in Boston (USA); in 1994, at the Museum für Kunsthandwerk in Frankfurt (Germany); in 1997, at the HKUST Center for Arts in Hong Kong (China) and the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen (China); in 2008, at the Musée d'art asiatique in Nice (France); in 2010, at the Musée Zadkine in Paris (France); and in 2013, at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Arts (UCCA) in Beijing (China).

Wang Keping was also invited to participate in numerous group exhibitions of note, many of which underline the importance of his work in the context of modern and contemporary Chinese art, including, currently, Here/Elsewhere: The Sample of Overseas Chinese Art at the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen (China); Turning Point: 40 Years of Chinese Contemporary Art at the Long Museum and the inaugural

exhibition at the PowerLong Museum in Shanghai (China); and, in 2016, An/other Avant-Garde, China-Japan-Korea at the Biennial of Busan (South Korea) along with M+ Sigg Collection. Four Decades of Chinese Contemporary Art at the M+ in Hong Kong (China).

A monumental bronze sculpture by Wang Keping is displayed in the gardens of the Fondation Carmignac in Porquerolles, whose inaugural exhibition, Sea of Desire, opened in 2017.

In 2016, Wang Keping was also invited to exhibit his monumental sculptures at the Centre d'Art et de Nature du Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire (France).

Wang Keping also took part in the following historic exhibitions: in 1983, Painting the Chinese Dream, Chinese Art 30 Years after the Revolution at the Brooklyn Museum (USA); in 1996, Face à l'Histoire at the Centre Pompidou, in Paris (France); in 1998, Vision 2000: Chinesische Gemälde und Skulpturen der Gegenwart at the Linden-Museum, in Stuttgart (Germany); in 1999, At the New Century, 1979-1999 China Contemporary Art Works at the Modern Art Museum in Chengdu (China) and Les Champs de la sculpture on the Champs-Élysées in Paris (France); in 2001, Modern Chinese Art, The Khoan and Michael Sullivan Collection at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (United Kingdom); in 2005, Mahjong - Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg at the Kunstmuseum in Bern (Switzerland); in 2007, China Onward, The Estella Collection, Chinese Contemporary Art 1996-2006 at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, in Copenhagen (Denmark); in 2008, Origin Point, The Stars 30 Years at the Today Art Museum in Beijing (China) and China Gold, Art contemporain chinois at the Musée Maillol, in Paris (France); in 2011, Blooming in the Shadows, Unofficial Chinese Art, 1974-1985 at the China Institute in New York (USA), and Artistes Chinois à Paris at the Musée Cernuschi, in Paris (France); in 2013, Light Before Dawn, Unofficial Chinese Art 1974-1985 at the Asia Society, in Hong Kong (China).

Wang Keping's works are held by important, internationally renowned private and public collections, including, in France, at the Centre Pompidou and the Musée Cernuschi (Paris), the Centre d'Art et de Nature du Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, the Château de la Celle-Saint-Cloud (ministry of foreign affairs), in the collections of the city of Paris and those of the Département de Seine-Saint-Denis; in the United Kingdom, at the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford); in the USA, at the Aidekman Art Center (Boston); in China, at the M+ Museum (Hong Kong) and the He Xiangning Art Museum (Shenzhen); in Taiwan, at the Museum of Modern Art (Taichung); in Japan, at the Museum of Asian Contemporary Art (Osaka); and in South Korea, at the Olympic Sculpture Park (Seoul).

Wang Keping was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2015.