This exhibition deals with a fundamental issue in contemporary Chinese art: the interrelationship between photography and painting. It is fundamental because few oil painters and photographers in post-Cultural Revolution China can escape this interrelationship, which has influenced and even subverted their art in different ways and on multiple levels. From the 1960s through the 1980s, photography provided painting with a sanctioned reality to depict (although this content of this reality changed greatly over time), while most "experimental photographers" (shiyuan shuying) of the 1980s and early 2000s were first trained as painters or graphic artists. How do painting and photography interact with each other? In today's Chinese art? To Chen Danqing, one of the artists featured in this exhibition, "copying photographs in art" is not to imitate other people's language, like playing musical compositions, copying is itself a language. The other five artists each answer the question differently, but all have problematized the painting/photography relationship in their works. In this way, these artists—three photographers and two oil painters—demonstrate how this relationship has become a shared focus of their artistic experimentation. To understand the experimental nature of their works, however, we need to briefly reflect upon the connections between painting and photography in Chinese art since the 1960s.

"Painting from photos" became a legitimate artistic practice during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when numerous paintings—portraits of Mao Zedong and his wife Jiang Qing, heroic images of the revolutionary masses, and narrative pictures of the Party's glorious history—were copied or re-created from photographs (fig. 1). This was not because there was a shortage of live models, but because officially sanctioned photography provided an "authentic reality" for artists to re-present. Paintings based on such photographs took on the authority of the model's; and painters who adopted such models could worry less about possible political criticism. Although it was not customary that official photographs were already heavily edited and idealized (by choosing special angles and lighting, and by using the editing techniques known as xuban—"repairing a negative"), painting could transform such propagandist materials into art by further appropriating them (through adding color, enlarging the dimensions, and combining multiple photographic images in a single pictorial composition). During this crucial period in modern Chinese history, therefore, photography and painting together constituted the basic technology of a symbolic art: their difference depended on varying degrees of idealization. Consequently, painters began to collect photographic reproductions—mostly newspaper clippings and plates removed from magazines—as sources for their paintings.

This situation underwent a significant change in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a new generation of oil painters rejected the symbolic art of the Cultural Revolution and tried to resurrect a "genuine realism" freed from official ideology. Chinese art critics commonly consider Chen Danqing's Tibetan Series (Kzang zhuba) — his graduation work from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1981 — representative of this new art. Significantly, the contrast they make between Chen's painting series and propaganda art is also the contrast they find between two different kinds of photographers: if a propaganda painter idealized an already idealized official photo, the Tibetan Series is akin to a collection of anonymous, informal snapshots (and indeed Chen used such photos in painting the series: fig. 2). It was also around this time—from the 1970s to 1980s—that a large number of painters began to take photos for both personal and professional purposes. The pictures they took differed markedly from official photographs in both style and content. Used as sources for painting, however, these images continued to be treated as reality itself.

Many well-known examples of so-called "native soul art" (xiangtu meishi) of the 1980s, such as Luo Zhongli's Father (fig. 3), can be reinvented in this light as resulting from a "switch" in the photographer's model of photographic events. The next such "switch" occurred a decade later, in the early 1990s, when an upcoming "new generation" of artists (zhengneng) further rejected romanticizing ordinary people such as Chen Danqing's early Tibetan and Luo Zhongli's larger-than-life peasants, but developed a penchant for representing fragmentary and trivial urban life. Attracted by meaningless scenes surrounding them, they portrayed beautifications with exaggerated leaks, lonely men and women in a sitting car on a train, or gypsys jumping mindlessly on a train (fig. 4). These skilled realist painters, the brightest products of Chinese art academies at the time, continued to derive inspiration and images from photographs.

In all these cases, photography's participation in a painting's creation was never openly acknowledged. Rather, photography inserted an invisible layer between a realistic painting and reality, secretly replacing the latter. To unambiguously acknowledge photography's role as the direct source of pictorial representation, as Chen Danqing did in the early 1990s through a new series of oil paintings (fig. 5), thus represents an important breakthrough in conceptualizing realistic painting. Each composition in this series consists of two or three panels with radically different themes: what connect them into a single work are the artist's intuitive reactions to the divergent source materials, mostly printed images he found randomly in magazines and newspapers. In the case of his painting Expressions he wrote: "In the autumn of 1990 I happened to cast my eyes on a photograph of a flamenco dancer in an old magazine when I was in a French bookstore on Fifth Avenue. The urgent and desperate expressions on the dancer's face startled me. In a flash, I recalled a photograph published in Life magazine a year ago, which showed Belgrino's band playing in a·dying demonstrator hit by gunfire [in the June Fourth Movement]. I made an instantaneous decision to copy both pictures and put them together. This set of copies became my first diplyt called Expressions. Commenting on this and other Images in the series, I wrote these words in 1995: What do we find here? The 1989 massacre of pro-democratic students in Tiananmen Square must have re-connected Danqing to the Chinese scenes. But he was mature enough to know that this connection was established by media. Media is reality; images constitute a visual world. Images make him laugh and cry, love and hate. Images connect with images, logically or arbitrarily, on the..."
Chen Danqing's new approach toward popular photography matches Hong Lei's attitude toward classical painting. After graduating from the Nanjing Art Academy, Hong Lei entered Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Art in 1993. Although he later abandoned the brush for the camera, his academic training prepared him to develop a persistent engagement with traditional art. Most of his works since 1996 have been based on Song court paintings - the most exquisite ever produced in Chinese history. More specifically, he has 'translated' these images into contemporary artistic expressions through two kinds of appropriation: While the original masterpieces on silk are transformed into mechanically produced photographic prints, the delicately painted images are replaced by real figures, animals and objects. But both kinds of appropriation serve to intensify his feeling about the original work - often a melancholy mood with a tragic underpinning.

Two of his photographs dating from 1997, for example, derive inspiration from Song bird-and-flower painting. To escale the 'mortal beauty' he found in the original, however, he staged dead birds lying in verandas in the Forbidden City, entangled with blood-stained jade and turquoise necklaces (fig. 6). A year later he created After 'Sakyamuni Coming Out of the Mountain' by Liang K'ai of the Song Dynasty, a work with an even closer relationship to a particular classical painting (fig. 1). Turning the painted landscape into a stage set and substituting a real figure for the image of Sakyamuni, the photograph both acknowledges and reinterprets its model. Using Chen Danqing's metaphor, here Hong Lei works like a musician in interpreting a piece of classical music. As Chen writes: "A player cannot change the notes, beat and rhythm of the original music at will. Follow the score obediently - Beethoven demands on his manuscript. Yet we are presented with a large selection of performance versions of his music to choose from." 6

However, this logic is reversed in Liu Zheng's Four Great Beauties, included in this exhibition. Instead of imitating well-known paintings, Liu has created these large, dramatic photographs as grand oil paintings in a classical tradition. The different orientations of the two photographers may be partly due to their different educational backgrounds: unlike Hong Lei, Liu Zheng never studied in a privileged art school but was trained as an engineer in a college of science and technology, majoring in optics. After graduation he worked for a newspaper as a photojournalist, before becoming a freelance experimental artist. To him, classical art remains remote and mysterious, and the dialogue he has developed with bygone masters (both master photographers and painters) is more about negotiation than deconstruction.

Regardless of such differences, however, the issue that Liu Zheng deals with in his art is close to those of Chen Danqing and Hong Lei. A persistent theme of his work is again the erasure of distinction between images and reality: and photography allows him to articulate such erasure into an individual art style. 7 His monumental series My Countrymen (Gueren), conventionally known as The Chinese 8, for example, consists of one hundred photographs and links real people to dying, death, and posthumous mutation on the one hand and fantastic or macabre figurations of the body on the other. In Liu Zheng's own words, these images are installed in the series because they are "simultaneously real and surreal, both here and not here." 9

My Countrymen is one part of a tripartite visual epic, which Liu Zheng has been working on for several years. The other two parts are Three Realms (Sanjia) and Revolution (Geming). Three Realms, in turn, consists of "Myth," "People," and "History," each forming a semi-independent series on its own. The Four Great Beauties belongs to the last series and is centered on Yang Yuhua, Xi Shi, Wang Zhaojun, and Diao Chan - four famous femmes folles in Chinese history. Pictorially, the four compositions resemble other photographs he has made for the Three Realms, such as two 1997 pictures in the 'Myth' section that restage two Peking opera plays, Legend of the White Snake (Bashi zhu, fig. 8) and The Monkey King Defeats the White-Boned Demon (Tianzi), both 1997 (fig. 9). Like these earlier works, the Four Great Beauties derive their subject from timeless fables in traditional Chinese literature and use live models to construct large, complex tableaux. Thematic, however, they shift from mythology to human drama, in which love turns into despair and lust prompts court intrigue and murder. Ambitious in conception and rich in tonal variation, these painterly photographs do not reconstruct history, but exist familiar stories through images.

In creating the Four Great Beauties Liu Zheng took on multiple roles, first staging four tableaux of a historical drama and then transforming them into photographic images. The oil painter Shi Chong has developed a similar tactic, but has treated it as forging a "second reality," or art itself. 10

In the process of employing figurative forms to represent a "second reality," I try to incorporate the creative process and concepts of installation and performance, creating what I call "artifical artistic copies." The incorporation of these concepts and techniques, as well as the employment of a super-realistic pictorial style, not only increases the amount of visual information in a two-dimensional painting, but also injects the spirit of the avant-garde into easel painting. 11

Putting this idea into practice, Shi Chong has produced each of
business enterprises and the state. The post-1980 generation has seen a shift towards more individualistic and introspective themes in art. Despite this, the collective memory and the historical events remain a significant part of the cultural landscape.

Their works often incorporate elements of the past, such as historical records and personal memories, to create a dialogue between the present and the past. This approach reflects the ongoing struggle to reconcile the effects of the Cultural Revolution and the Cultural Revolution on the arts and culture in China. The post-1980 generation's works are characterized by a certain nostalgia for the past, a desire to understand and come to terms with the events of the Cultural Revolution. This is reflected in their use of historical images, personal stories, and collective memory.

Going one step further, some experimental photographers take the vulnerability of photographic images - and hence the impermanence of the history and memory that they represent and preserve - as their central theme. A series of photos by Song Xue, for example, explores the nature of photographs and the ways in which they function to record and preserve the past. This approach challenges the notion that photographs are a reliable source of historical documentation, and instead highlights the fragility and transience of the photographic record.

In conclusion, the post-1980 generation's work in photography and sculpture represents a significant departure from the more activist and confrontational art of the post-1980 generation. Their works are characterized by a more introspective and contemplative approach, which allows for a deeper exploration of the past and the present, and the relationship between the two.
Beijing Youth Daily, at which he has worked as an editor since 1988. Similar to his newspaper Great Wall series, these installations aimed to destroy media-constructed reality or mythology. The relationship between experimental art and the popular 'old photo craze' is a complex issue, which I hope to discuss more fully in a future study. For now, the examples given below provide a context for understanding work by Han Lei in this exhibition. Han Lei's photographs are interspersed in nature because they gain meaning from referring to historical photos. A comparison between his Hunchback Bridge (Luqiao qiao) (fig. 14) and the old photo in fig. 13 (which captures a glimpse of old Beijing around 1900) demonstrates how he derives format, style, taste, and mood from historical photography. The bridge - a famous Qing dynasty architectural structure in the Summer Palace - appears as an image resurrected from the past, gloomy and desolate. The circular frame, seldom used by contemporary photographers, heightens the image's identity as a self-conscious 'art photo' of a retro type; and the tonal effect gives the picture an aged feel. It would be mistaken, however, to appreciate this work in a purely stylistic sense, because Han Lei's purpose is not simply to make an 'old looking' photograph. Rather, he conceived the photograph as a memory-image. He has been quoted as saying: 'Memory is itself a kind of image. What I have attempted is to turn such images in my mind into pictures in reality.' The 'aged look' of his photographs thus signifies the artist's personal connection with the past. They externalize his internalized historical sensibility and visual experience, transforming conventional old photos into contemporary, individual expressions.

This new significance of Han Lei's photographs explains a particular feature of his works in this exhibition. Whether representing figures or landscape, the images are deliberately ambiguous and incomplete: the mountains seem to be vanishing from view, and a portrait refuses to stay within the picture frame. Frequently the prints seem overexposed or discolored; their awkwardness distances the images not only from reality but also from 'real' old photographs.

The photographs in this exhibition are examples of Chinese conceptual photography, which became a major trend in contemporary Chinese art around the mid-90s. Unlike the experimental photographers who have mainly established their alternative position negatively by disavowing themselves from mainstream photography, experimental photographers have actively interacted with other art forms including painting, sculpture, performance, installation, site-specific art, advertisement, and photography itself, transforming pre-existing images into photographic representations. Similarly, the seeming realistic paintings in this exhibition actually subvert the notion of a realistic representation being a direct pictorial transference of reality. To this end, all artists in the show have carried out experiments to interact with pre-existing images. No longer interested in capturing meaningful moments or images in life, they have instead focused on the manner or vocabulary of artistic expression. It is such experiments, plus their supra-technical form and their visual forms, that make these works exciting and absorbing.

2. For example, there appears a 'photography fever' among students in the Central Academy of Fine Arts., see ibid.
3. For a discussion of Wu Hung's painting, see Wu Hung, Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century, (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, 1999), 142-47.
8. These two transitions imply very different understanding of the series and the artists self-identity. This is tract the second English title. I have discussed this issue in a forthcoming article, 'Identities in Experimental Chinese Art.'
10. For an Introduction to Shi Chong's art and theory, see Wu Hung, Transience, 98-99.
13. Private communication.
14. I have discussed this issue in a lecture entitled "The Old Photo Fever in '90s China," delivered at the conference from Paris to Photography held at the University of Chicago in April, 2003.
17. Gu Zheng, "Han Lei de shenli: Yougan han lei shi yu zhengzhong ye" (Han Lei's paradox: Hypothesis on Han Lei's Photography), in Han Lei Moxing (Han Lei's Alienation) (Shanghai: Auro Gelli, 2003), 18-15, quotation from 10.
19. This attitude is clearly demonstrated in the introduction to the first issue of New Photo.
20. Toland continues: "...from... 
交叉
中国当代摄影及油画艺术展

从1980年代初到90年代初，中国摄影和油画艺术进入了一个新的发展阶段。这一时期，摄影和油画艺术家们开始尝试新的艺术表达方式，探索新的艺术语言，以期在国际艺术界中取得更多的发展机会。在这个过程中，摄影和油画艺术的交叉发展成为了一个重要的趋势。

摄影与油画的交叉发展
在1980年代初，摄影和油画的交叉发展开始显现出来。这一时期，摄影和油画艺术家们开始尝试将摄影和油画的艺术语言结合在一起，创造出一种新的艺术表达方式。这种艺术表达方式的特点是，他既有摄影的纪实性，又有油画的写意性，既有摄影的开放性，又有油画的封闭性。这种艺术表达方式的出现，使得摄影和油画的交叉发展成为了一个重要的趋势。

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在一个多世纪以前，西方艺术家开始用摄影照片来描绘过去的革命时代。四川嘉定王玉于1901年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1911年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1921年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1931年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1941年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1951年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1961年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1971年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1981年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。十年之后，四川嘉定王玉于1991年所写的《西方传教史》中，详述了这一艺术运动的现状。