

Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction Taipei Biennial 2012

Curator: Anselm Franke

Press Preview: 2012.09.28

Dates: 2012.09.29—2013.01.13

Venues: TFAM lobby, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floors, The Paper Mill

Address 181, Sec. 3, ZhongShan N. Rd. Taipei, Taiwan

Open Hours Tuesday—Sunday 09: 30—17: 30

Saturday 09: 30—20: 30

2012 Taipei Biennial Exhibition Theme and Participating Artists Announcement

This year marks the 8th *Taipei Biennial of International Contemporary Art*, since it first premiered in 1998. Amidst various global contemporary art biennials, Taipei Biennial is distinctive for its themes and clear precise contents. This year, Taipei Biennial 2012 is curated by the German curator Anselm Franke. Through the perspective of being situated in Asia, this biennial aims to reflect structural processes of modern history, and through an open approach via contemporary art, the quest is to probe collective historical experiences.

Thus far this year's biennial intends to feature over 40 artists or artist collectives, which includes 9 Taiwanese contemporary artists, and with over 40 proposals of artistic projects. About one-third of them are conceived specifically for this exhibition. One of the major projects included in this biennial will take the form of a series of *Mini-Museums* to be organized by various co-curators and artists. It is anticipated that the Taipei Biennial 2012 will eventually garner contributions from over 70 artists or collectives, and will be exhibited on the first three floors of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and also an external venue at the Shilin Paper Mill.

In total there will be six *Mini-Museums* presented for the Taipei Biennial 2012, and they are: ***The Museum of Rhythm, The Museum of Ante-Memorials, The Museum of the Monster That Is History, The Museum of Gourd, The Museum of the Infrastructural Unconsciousness and The Museum of Crossings***. Seven curators or groups have been invited by Anselm Franke to organize each of these distinct spaces, which feature the participations of some 20 artists with three artists from Taiwan. Anselm Franke is also the co-curator for two of these *Mini-Museums*.

While the *Mini-Museums* are self-contained spaces based on specific themes, they also influence the registers and contextual readings of the works in the exhibition surrounding them. In each *Mini-Museum*, the relationship between works of art and documents serves as the backdrop for an interrogation of

ambiguities of writing history. They are conceived as models of possible histories and narratives hidden in the interstices of official accounts. Their primary goal is to question the relation between the systemic conditions of the present and our situated-ness in a historical imaginary.

Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction

The narrative-imaginary vacuum of the present bears the imprint of the systemic monstrosity of modern history. The re-visioning of modernity and the rewriting of its master narratives constitute a trans-disciplinary project of global proportions. The Taipei Biennial 2012 departs from the crisis of the imagination that plagues global capitalist culture. It explores the need for collective horizons that withstand both the clichés of modernist development and the logic of division that haunts nationalist and identity politics in the long shadow of colonialism and imperialism.

Entitled *Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction*, the Taipei Biennial 2012 addresses the relationship between historiography and the imaginary. Fiction occupies the blind spot of history writing and documentation, as it speaks of the fundamental underside of modernity, its dialectics and paradoxes, as well as the systemic terror that lurks behind modernity's emancipatory promises.

Drawing upon a recent study titled "The Monster That is History" by Taiwanese literature historian David Der Wei Wang, the Biennial engages with the aesthetics of monstrosity. The figure of the monster is treated as a fictional, liminal figure, a symptomatic mirror of actual and imaginary relations. Wang suggests that the ancient Chinese monster *Taowu* served as an "objective correlative" of the human account of past experience. *Taowu* is furthermore identified with history as such, particularly through its vicious ability to foresee and undermine human intentions.

The Taipei Biennial 2012 will look at the aesthetic economy of monstrosity; the way the monster acts as symptomatic mirror, a liminal figure in every sense, and employs it as the point of departure for an interrogation into the role of fiction in relation to the dialectics and the monstrosity of modern history. The exhibition *Death and Life of Fiction* departs from a primal scene of Chinese modern literature: In 1906, Lu Xun (1881–1936), then a student of Western medicine in Japan, saw a slide show in Japan, in which a Chinese crowd idly watched as one of their compatriots was beheaded for spying on the Japanese army in the Russo-Japanese war. Dumbfounded by this scene of decapitation, Lu Xun, who was to become the author of the *Diary of a Madman* and *The True Story of Ah Q.*, realized that before saving Chinese people's bodies, he had first to save their souls; hence, before practicing ordinary medicine, he had first to cure the spirit of China with the medicine of literature. A slide show of decapitation triggered this crucial moment in Lu Xun's life, and thereby the direction of modern Chinese literature, its accounts of a world born of terror and violence, whose aspired rationality so often played out as systemic irrationality. It also poses a key question that underlines all discussions of modernity, namely the relation between the role of ideas, or the mental and spiritual, and the role of structure, or the systemic and mechanic dimensions of modernity.