

July 10, 2015



*Seasons of Life: Summer, 2015* Gunpowder on canvas, 259 × 648cm Collection of the artist

蔡國強展：**歸去來**  
Cai Guo-Qiang:  
There and Back Again

## ***Cai Guo-Qiang : There and Back Again***

11 July – 18 October, 2015

### **Yokohama Museum of Art**

3-4-1, Minatomirai, Nishi-ku Yokohama,

220-0012 Japan

<http://yokohama.art.museum>

Yokohama Museum of Art presents New York-based artist Cai Guo-Qiang's (b.1957, Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China) first large-scale solo exhibition in Japan since 2008. Drawing its title from Tao Yuanming's famous poem "The Return," this solo exhibition evokes a homecoming to Japan—where Cai's artistic path first took shape. The exhibition includes newly commissioned large-scale gunpowder paintings on paper and canvas.

For this exhibition, Cai produced his largest gunpowder painting to date, *Nighttime Sakura*. Measuring 8 × 24 meters in size, it is installed in the entrance hall of the museum and depicts the Japanese popular motif of the cherry blossom.

In *Seasons of Life*, a series of gunpowder paintings on canvas, Cai returned to experimenting with daytime fireworks, which he first took up in the 1990s while residing in Japan. The series is inspired by the work of *shunga* artist Tsukioka Settei and depicts the transition in the seasons and the love life of a couple.

The exhibition also includes *Morning Glory*, an elegant installation suspended from the gallery ceiling. To create this work, the artist invited students from the Yokohama College of Art and Design to model several hundred Japanese morning glories out of clay made from local soil.

*There and Back Again* marks the launch of *Art Island*, an online art and educational game platform conceived by Cai with the long-term goal of fostering creativity, mutual understanding and peace in the East Asian region. With this game, children will be able to create, collaborate and exchange ideas within the game's virtual workshops. The *Fireworks Workshop* and *Robot Workshop* in particular are based respectively on Cai's signature medium and iconic travelling exhibition *Peasant da Vincis*. As the game continues to develop, prominent artists, designers and architects from East Asia will be invited to create additional workshops for *Art Island*.

In addition to these new commissions, *Head On* (2006), a large scale installation of ninety-nine life size replicas of wolves, and *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter* (2014), a four panel gunpowder on porcelain installation, are exhibited for the first time in Japan.

### Exhibition Catalog

Title : *Cai Guo-Qiang: There and Back Again*

Date of Issue: July 24, 2015

Published by: Mochuise, Inc.

Size : A4

Price : ¥2,800 (tax included)

The exhibition catalog includes images of the creation process and installation views of the exhibition as well as the Japanese edition of *Ninety-Nine Tales: Curious Stories from My Journey through the Real and Unseen Worlds*; short autobiographical essays originally written in Chinese by Cai. The catalog will be sale July 24th at the museum shop, and will also be available at general bookstores and online shops in Japan.



Cai Guo-Qiang after ignition of *Seasons of Life: Fall*, Yokohama Museum of Art, 2015. Photo by KAMIYAMA Yosuke

## **Cai Guo-Qiang: There and Back Again**

**Eriko OSAKA** (Director, Yokohama Museum of Art)

\*Text from the Exhibition Catalog

Cai Guo-Qiang — It was around 1988 that I started hearing this name mentioned from time to time. I believe that it was on the occasion of “Museum City Tenjin, '90,” an exhibition that was held in downtown Fukuoka in 1990, that I first saw his work. But it was his solo exhibition in the following year, “Primeval Fireball— Project for Projects” at P3 art and environment in Yotsuya, Tokyo, that made a lasting impression on me.

There, in the dimly lit gallery, I saw seven gunpowder drawings in the form of folding screens, displayed radially and centered on an axis, as if to indicate the energy diffusing outwards from where the explosion had first occurred. Under the lighting, the drawings seemed to compress and unwind the atmosphere of the gallery space.

The body of works and the traces of firework explosions connote—like the Chinese word for the Big Bang *yuan chu huo qiu*—the genesis of the universe and the birth of human life. This rendered the work undeniably compelling.

Cai's hometown, Quanzhou, an ancient capital of Fujian, was at the front of the conflict between Mainland China and Taiwan across the sea when he was still in elementary school. He recounts: In my town, an alarm was frequently sounded, even as we were on our way to school or in the middle of class. As soon as the sound was heard, everyone hid. Chinese and Taiwanese fighter planes would be flying through the sky and the smoky line of their trails would be mixed with the smoky lines of bombardment from the ground. Soon after that, the Cultural Revolution erupted and I grew up amid cruel despotism in the relationships between humans and culture, and among humans themselves. These experiences were preliminary to my recognition of the relationship between humans and humankind, and art and civilization.<sup>1</sup>

Gunpowder is one of the four great inventions of ancient China that has long been used for ammunition and destruction. Cai sublimated the destructive and brutal gunpowder into art by applying his own creativity and aesthetics with a cosmological outlook.

In this exhibition, the seven folding screens were four works from the *Project for Extraterrestrials Series*: No.6 *Big foot's Footprints* ; No.7 *Rebuilding the Berlin Wall* ; No.8 *Reviving the Ancient Signal Towers* ; and No.9 *Fetus Movement II*. Two works from *Project for Humankind* series were also included: No. 2 *A Certain Lunar Eclipse*; and No.3 *Inverted Pyramid on Moon*. One gunpowder drawing from *The Vague Border at the Edge of Time/Space Project* was also part of the installation. In space, planets and stars are both born and die out of explosions. Explosions are, therefore, the cause of genesis and annihilation. Cai's gunpowder drawings explore the relationship between the immense, chaotic cosmos that stretches out beyond our imagination and the microscopic universe that is within ourselves, from a visible as well as invisible point of view. Each of the drawings were a conceptual model for Cai's future projects, as indicated in the subtitle of this exhibition the “Projects for Projects.” since the Meiji Restoration, Japan has always chased Western culture, and they have cared very much about how the West regards them. At the time, when I was in Japan, I therefore set in motion the series *Project for Extraterrestrials* which goal was to stand in the universe from the extraterrestrial's perspective to look at humankind and for an instance, forget about questions of East versus West. <sup>2</sup>

Cai arrived in Japan with his wife Hong Hong in December 1986. The following nine years or so that he spent in Japan can be considered as his formative years as an artist, during which he deliberated in a foreign environment, while reassessing his artistic concepts, developing, and executing his ideas. It goes without saying that Cai's unflinching will and his ability to put his ideas into action are his inherent qualities. Surrounding him, more than a few people were inspired by his extraordinary artworks and his original ideas.

From his early years in Japan, when he was struggling to adjust to this foreign country and speak its language, Cai found support among his acquaintances in the local community and in artistic circles. In his surroundings were people mostly of his generation, intrigued by his engaging communication skills and his sincere and openminded character. As is the case with any unconventional art, private and personal support came before public funding. But his network of support expanded in a short span of time, and just like the instant explosion of the gunpowder once the fuse is ignited, public museums in Japan started offering exhibition opportunities.

Cai was already using gunpowder for his artworks in China, before arriving in Japan. Shortly after his arrival, he had to wrestle with the legal restrictions that were more severe in Japan than in China, and test artworks with a small amount of gunpowder gathered from toy fireworks. His encounter with the late critic Takami Akihiko in 1987 and the beginning of his collaboration with a pyrotechnician helped push his gunpowder drawings and projects to the next level. <sup>3</sup>

The development culminated into the aforementioned solo exhibition at P3 art and environment, and in 1993, he realized his large-scale outdoor project, *to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10* in Jiayu Pass, China, which was promoted by Serizawa Takashi and his team. <sup>4</sup>

The years 1994 to 1995 signify the next turning point in Cai's career. His exhibitions and projects were held at Shiseido Gallery, Kyoto City Hall, Iwaki City Art Museum, Art Tower Mito, Setagaya Art Museum, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Watari-um as well as other galleries in Japan and abroad. Since his very first solo exhibition in Tokyo in 1987, he resided in Tokyo, Iwaki, and Toride, until 1995 when he left for the United States.

In the meantime, demand for showing his work increased rapidly, and within a decade, he had left his trace, not only in the Japanese contemporary art scene, but also in the international art scene.

In the "Trans Culture" exhibition during the 46<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Cai presented his project, *Bringing to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot*. The concept of the project was to bring to Venice the Eastern perception of cosmology and life which dictates the order between heaven and humanity—those things that Marco Polo failed to bring back among the many goods he transported from the East. Quanzhou is a city of cultural intersection that flourished in antiquity as a commercial port of the Maritime Silk Road, acting as the Eastern point of departure, as described in *The Travels of Marco Polo*. <sup>5</sup> Cai sent an old, wooden junk boat carrying

Chinese herbal medicine from Quanzhou to Venice, reenacting the Maritime Silk Road. On the occasion of the exhibition, he produced drinks, mixing herbs that purify the body and soul. These were customized according to the audience's physical conditions that could purchase them. I remember taking this drink and working through this project, and how I was startled by the way it linked together Marco Polo and the artist, and transcended time and space. Gunpowder, fireworks, *feng shui*, Chinese medicine, *yin* and *yang*, life, the universe, energy, *qi*, providence, space and time—Cai's works refer to these elements of ancient culture and philosophy from China, and together they compose an overarching concept that traverses the past-present-future time scale. His works demonstrate the beauty and the force that are incomparable to any other artworks that I have encountered before.

After settling in New York as the next base for his activities, he carefully reconsidered the ideas, aesthetic forms and concepts, visual effects, and social aspects that would shape his works in order for them to be compelling to the art world. In the United States, the government and its citizens pay a lot of attention to social problems on national and international levels. This influenced me, and in addition to including matters concerning nature and the universe, I also began to focus on societal issues and on topics related to humanity. <sup>6</sup>

In the competitive environment of the New York art scene, it is not easy to continue presenting works that are original, while keeping a balanced distance from the domineering trends of the Western context. By elevating his works to transcend the simple East-West dichotomy and by commanding a distinctly versatile and compliant perspective, Cai furthered his interest in creating installations that impart multifarious social messages.

The year 2008 was Cai's *Big foot*. His large-scale retrospective exhibition, "I Want to Believe," at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York attained a record in terms of visitors for a solo artist show that year. The exhibition subsequently traveled to the National Art Museum of China. At the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he produced the fireworks entitled *Footprints of History*, which was based on the idea behind *Big foot's Footprints: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 6*.

This attracted the attention of approximately two billion people around the world. The original concept had been presented at P3 art and environment in 1991 and found was iterated in Beijing after many years. *Big foot's Footprints* symbolically traces Cai's achievements over the years for his projects that span across multiple boundaries. Cai talks about the *Big foot's Footprints*: The Extraterrestrial ignores borders, and the will of super-humanity that lives within us sometimes exercises its fundamental power and also ignores boundaries. Everywhere on earth, there is a horizon that is common to all of humanity, but beyond this horizon, however, there is a place to which we must head through the collaboration of all humankind. It is where we swiftly came from and where we will return... the horizon of the universe. <sup>7</sup>

The title of Cai's solo exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane, Australia (GOMA), "Falling Back to Earth" is *gui qu lai xi* in Chinese. Inspired by Australia's natural environment during his onsite research, he produced a large installation entitled *Heritage*, which consisted of replica of different species of animals gathered around the oasis to drink water. The After all, the thing that's interesting about art is that although it's not real it seems as though one is looking at something that captures the essence of the world. So it requires imagination. Even when dealing with very real subject matter such as social problems, there's more room for art to survive if there's a slight distance between the reality and the art. <sup>8</sup>

2015 marks twenty years since Cai left Japan in 1995. The Yokohama Museum of Art presents the exhibition "Cai Guo-Qiang: There and Back Again," taking its title from the famous classical poem *gui qu lai xi* (The Return) by the Chinese Poet, Tao Yuanming.<sup>9</sup> Tao Yuanming wrote this poem upon resignation from his position as a government official to live the life of a recluse in the countryside. It describes the liberation and the melancholy of his conviction to abide by the laws of nature and further conveys a sense of dignity in choosing this way of life. The exhibition title in Japanese and English refer to Cai returning to Japan, once his home, after his transition from Quanzhou to various cities in Japan and finally to New York, while establishing himself as an artist in his own right. It also signifies the human aspiration to a free spirit and conscience, in addition to evoking its return to an original state of living in commune with nature. Cai, who first started creating works from an extraterrestrial's perspective, has in turn shifted his eyes to humankind, nature, and society, searching on the one hand for his ideal state, and on the other enduring solitude.

To realize this exhibition, Cai will work during eight days with students and citizen volunteers to produce gunpowder explosions and his new works in the grand gallery of the Yokohama Museum of Art. He states, "The fascinating thing about the gunpowder explosion is that I never have total control." For this exhibition, he is back in Japan, where he first developed his gunpowder drawings.

This time, he challenges himself to create gunpowder paintings. “There and Back Again” is the artist’s travel through time, exploring his origin as a painter and the point of departure for his creations. “Resilience” are the word that Cai proposes for this exhibition: he has touched down to earth and observed the conflicts and turmoil taking place in various parts of the world today. The works, with motifs referencing humanity, flora, and fauna, represent the harmony between man and nature as well as this cyclical interaction, reincarnation and the meaning of humanity.

They are bound to spark our imagination and reveal Cai’s worldview—one that sets itself apart from any other.

\*1 Cai Guo-Qiang, interviewed in “Cai Guo-Qiang + P3,” *Primeval Fireball* Tokyo: P3 art and environment, 1991, p. 30.

\*2 Cai Guo-Qiang interviewed in, “I have not changed; Still I am ‘exactly a nationalist’,” *New York Times* Chinese official site, Aug 12, 2013, accessed June 20, 2015, <http://cn.nytimes.com/culture/20130812/cc12caiguaoqiang>. Translated from Chinese to English by Béatrice Grenier.

\*3 Akihiko Takami, “Tokushu 1: Sai Kokkyo Ryu Hashiru, Zen Jikuteki Ryotei Soran,” *Bijutsu Techo*, March 1993, Vol. 51, No. 786, pp. 21-26.

\*4 For details of this project, see *Sai Kokkyo Uchu-teki Chojo Banri no Chojowo 10,000m Encho suru Purojecto*, Tokyo: Peyotl Kobo, 1994.

\*5 Quanzhou was called Zayton, and appears in “Chapter LXXXII. Of The City and Great Haven of Zayton,” *THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO*, PergamonMedia, 2015, Kindle Edition.

\*6 Cai, *New York Times*.

\*7 Cai, *Primeval Fireball*, p. 8.

\*8 Cai Guo-Qiang (dialog), “Art: The Critical Point of Creativity and Destruction Cai Guo-Qiang×Asada A kira,” *The Seventh Hiroshima Art Prize: Cai Guo Qiang*, Hiroshima: Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008, p. 41.

\*9 Tao Yuanming (365-427) is a Chinese poet from the Six Dynasty period. Besides poems, his proses such as utopian *Peach Blossom Spring* and autobiographical *Five Willows* are famous as well.

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## Exhibition Catalog

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Date of Issue: July 24, 2015

Published by: Mochuise, Inc.

Size : A4

Price : ¥2,800 (tax included)

## A Time to Return Cai Guo-Qiang

\*Artist Statement from the Exhibition Catalog

### The Origin: “There and Back Again”

In September 1995, I left Japan under the sponsorship of a grant from the Asian Cultural Council to conduct research in America. Since then, I have come back to Japan every two to three years giving lectures, receiving awards and participating in exhibitions and events. After the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, I have been returning to Japan every year. Together with my friends in Iwaki, I realized the *Project to Plant Ten Thousand Cherry Blossom Trees* and I also invited local residents to help build *SMoCA (Snake Museum of Contemporary Art)*...

I have always been connected with Japan, but the focus of my life and work has shifted since my departure. I started creating retrospective and solo exhibitions as well as other large projects in America, Europe, mainland China, and Taiwan before pursuing more in South America, Australia, and even Doha in the Middle East and the Ukraine in Eastern Europe...After working nearly everywhere around the world, I clearly sensed that it was time to come back to Japan, to return to my point of departure as a young artist.

At that time, life was difficult and there was a very limited budget to make art; yet I was fearless, brimming with thoughts and ideas, and a desire for destruction. Before coming to Japan in the end of 1986, I already started exploring the properties of gunpowder in my drawings in Quanzhou. Yet it was in Japan that I began to formally exhibit in museums as an artist, establishing a dialogue with society through art. Now I yearn to go back to the land whose culture I was once familiar with, to immerse myself in the vision and state of mind of my younger self, as well as the methodology with which I viewed the world. I am eager to retrieve what has been lost and perhaps rekindle what has disappeared along the way.

Never had I expected that soon after having the desire to come back, invitations for a series of events and activities in Japan came my way, including the possibility to create a solo exhibition at the Yokohama Museum of Art and the Echigo-Tsumari Satoyama Museum of Contemporary Art. This was an opportunity for me to stay in Japan for an extended period and interact with the local museums and volunteers as well as with the media and friends. I am back here again! The exhibition at Yokohama Museum of Art is entitled 《歸去來》, *gui qu lai*, or “There and Back Again”. My exhibition in Brisbane in 2013 was named 《歸去來兮》, *gui qu lai xi*, with the poetic English translation “Falling Back to Earth.” At first, concern was raised that the two Chinese titles seemed too close; yet eventually we all agreed that no other title could better capture the theme and significance of the exhibition 《歸去來》 *gui qu lai* is also the topic of this exhibition: a novice artist’s journey of returning to his original point of departure, in pursuit of retrieving a more modest state of mind and temperament.

### The Dream of Painting

Okakura Tenshin was a Yokohama-born thinker and art scholar active during a time when Japan was undergoing a period of rapid modernization during the Meiji Restoration. While Japan was beginning to follow Western ideals of modernism, Okakura Tenshin established the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, which emphasized Eastern thought and ideals, and advocated the contribution of Asian societal values to the modern world. Under his influence, a great number of artists took to creating Japanese paintings, becoming less obsessed with lines and brushwork than with color. Drawing from the hazy brushwork and dim colors characteristic of Impressionist painting and combining a decorative style attentive to surface and patterns, these painters created artworks that conveyed sentiments toward the seasons, flowers and plants, with a

typical Eastern philosophy of nature. I have long had the methodology of “absorbing nourishment from local culture” and inspired by an exploration of paintings in Okakura’s time, I decided to approach the exhibition with a subject of “painting.” Thinking back on my childhood dream of becoming an artist, it was more a dream of being a painter, one that aspires to communicate with the history of painting and the old masters. Later in my practice of contemporary art, I created installations and explosion events, which were far away from two-dimensional planes. I found solace in continuously creating gunpowder drawings, which made up for the loss of my childhood dream. This exhibition gave me an opportunity to concentrate on painting.

I decided to draw from the composition and theme of flowers and plants, which is particular to Japanese painting. I also contemplated the particular mindset and life style in Eastern culture in search of a contemporary painting language and methodology.

### **Color, *Shunga* and Eroticism**

In the past, I often created gunpowder drawing on paper or canvas before developing it into an explosion event. This time it was the other way around—I brought the color effects and materials of daytime fireworks to the canvases.

I remember that soon after my initial arrival in Japan, I had already tried applying daytime fireworks materials on canvases. The main reason why I did not carry on with this process was due to the fact that the gunpowder’s explosion was already powerful enough to strike me emotionally, and I felt this alone would require time to explore. The variety of color was of lesser interest to me. After my first daytime explosion event *Black Rainbow* (Valencia, 2005), I continued creating similar events such as *Black Fireworks* (Hiroshima, 2008), *Black Ceremony* (Doha, 2011), which was my first attempt at color fireworks, and *Elegy* (Shanghai, 2014), a three-chapter color explosion event. These experiences inspired me emotionally, and better prepared me technically. Nighttime fireworks rely on light effects, which are ephemeral. Daytime fireworks, on the other hand, rely on smoke, which lingers and varies in shape according to air currents. They freely spread across the sky, like watercolor or ink paintings...The color and sentiments behind daytime fireworks rightly suit the theme of *shunga*, or erotic paintings.

The theme of lust and *shunga* has long been on my mind. In 2012 in Denmark, the first country in the world to legalize pornography, I had the idea of creating a pornthemed exhibition, which would discuss Chinese erotic paintings and Japanese *shunga*. I planned to create a series of large-scale gunpowder drawings and even to produce a short pornographic film. Regrettably, the plan fell through.

In the realm of traditional Japanese painting, masters such as Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958) established a canon for his successors, leaving little room for my creativity.

*Shunga* seems more intriguing to me. Artists painting in the genre of *shunga* were not regarded as professionals.

To legitimize their statuses as artists, they referenced the fact that a large number of esteemed painters in Chinese history also created erotic paintings. While traditional Japanese paintings seem to hold a central position, they are treated more as objects for appreciation. On the other hand, *shunga*, which represents the flow of life and the corresponding changes of nature, seems to be closer to contemporary art, which I feel leaves more space for a dialogue with my own practice.



### **Seasons of Life**

Within the genre of *shunga*, I was most inspired by *Handscroll of the Four Seasons*, or *Shiki gakan*, by Tsukioka Settei (1726-1786). In *Spring*, the timid and young virgin who is without a trace of pubic hair, shies away. In *Summer*, the young woman already enjoys passion. In *Autumn*, she is pregnant, free of embarrassment. In *Winter*, she is a mature woman on top of her lover... She is expressionless throughout, yet the color of her genitals changes from pink to purple. As though with the passage of time, the plants and landscape settings in different seasons echo the changes of life.

I exploded a set of four gunpowder drawings on canvas For *Seasons of Life*. The people are dressed in neutral colors, as though to mask any indication of time. Inspiration for the tattoos on the bodies comes from Japanese gambling culture or *hanafuda* and corresponds to the different seasons as well as their natural and animal temperaments. Exploded, they seem to generate layers of human desire with abandon. *Spring* is gentle and hazy: swallows call and desire is palpable as is that of a young deer. *Summer* is clearer and displays lilies, peonies; one can almost hear cheering cuckoos and the bursts of joy. *Autumn* is rendered with artistic minutiae, craft and skill. The air is crisp, chrysanthemums and morning glories bloom while the blowing grass and migrating geese represent the autumn wind. *Winter* is a land of snow, cranes dance together among the pine trees and birds, perched on feeble twigs, depend on one another.

In addition to the inspiration from *shunga* and tattoos, what surprised me most was the excitement brought about by the usage of color. The exploded scarlet reminds me of Francis Bacon's oil paintings with their wild sense of abuse. Small areas of dense and strong color drastically contrast vast areas of eternal and composed earthy color, which brings along an unexpected thrill as if a wild beast were released, one that has in turn revealed a different side of myself. I experimented with the raw power of black gunpowder and the new color materials of daytime fireworks to convey sentiments and desire, and further, the loss and aspiration of a life's journey, which for me points to a variety of new possibilities.

### **Nighttime Sakura**

*Nighttime Sakura* is the largest gunpowder drawing on paper I have ever created. The moment I entered the museum's great hall, I had the idea to create a work that would be the crux of the various elements—the columns, the steps and the skylight above—to make up for a scattered architecture. Additionally, thinking that numerous Japanese painters before me had spent their whole lives rendering sakura, I hoped to try myself, only instead of two or three centimeters in size, I was looking to explode gigantic ones. Could the fragile, moist and transparent beauty of the cherry blossom be rendered through an explosion? While a cherry blossom is ephemeral and precious, the gunpowder explosion happens in an instant yet pursues of eternity—could I make both the sakura and the explosion identical to each other in terms of their fate?

The creation process was not smooth. Regardless of the type, Japanese gunpowder always dies out quickly after a short “bang.” Its quality is high and makes little debris and barely leaves traces. It is difficult to produce large-scale smoke effects. My heart was heavy during the days of drawing-making. After its installation, although the result did not display as much subtle effects from the smoke as I had wished, its simple and constricted atmosphere might complement *Seasons of Life*. In creating *Nighttime Sakura*, I once again found myself in a difficult relationship with gunpowder. The difficulty to control it is at once its challenge and attraction, as well as the reason for my discontent, prompting me to be more committed to the making of *Seasons of Life*.

Sakura's destiny and the sentiments and desire of life touch upon the theme of a life's journey. The other two works—the gunpowder drawing on porcelain *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter* and the exploded terracotta *Morning Glory* resonate with the rhythm of nature. *Head On*, which features ninety-nine life size replicas of wolves caught in an infinite repeating cycle and doomed to crash into a glass wall symbolic of an intangible barrier... these works are one with the

natural universe, the cycle of human life and migration. They also candidly record my path, in terms of my art, life and emotional journey. The works compose *There and Back Again*, its essence and reality.

As a young and ambitious artist from the southern Chinese town of Quanzhou, I was blessed by a warm reception in Japan. There, I personally grew through setbacks and difficulties, all the while bringing along “disruption,” and leaving no peace behind. Just like the Monkey King! I remember in the 1994 year-end summary of *Yomiuri Shimbun*,\*1 there was an article entitled “The Year in Art: Europe-America Decline, Cai Guo-Qiang Active.” At the time I felt that the Japanese art world was too concerned about what the Western world thought of it, and I was interested in finding a third alternative. As such, I started *Project for Extraterrestrials*, a series that concerned itself with the contemplation of human civilization from the larger universe.

I have since settled in the West, and have travelled around the world to make art. This time, it is a retrieval of the East! I am so grateful, and I have felt a thousand emotions in turn...In my journey, roaming around the universe, the earth, nature and the world’s multifarious cultures, I recall the stars I looked up at with juvenile eyes and I reflect on the past methodologies with which I understood, thought about and represented the world to myself. This is not a simple return, nor is it an easy road. I have just started this journey.

\*1 Sugawara Norio, “*Sai Kokkyo Ga Katsuyaku, Oubei Sujjakuno <Gendai>*,” *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, Dec. 14, 1994, evening edition.

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## Exhibition Catalog

Title : *Cai Guo-Qiang: There and Back Again*

Date of Issue: July 24, 2015

Published by: Mochuise, Inc.

Size : A4

Price : ¥2,800 (tax included)

## Exhibition Artworks

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### ***Nighttime Sakura***

Gigantic cherry blossoms rising out of the light of bonfires and a horned owl, with its keen-eyed face peeking out from between the branches are depicted in this large picture. The cherry blossoms, a motif that has been used since ancient times as a symbol of the Japanese spring, here represents a parallel between the instantaneous powers and fleeting grace of the tree's blossoms and gunpowder.

In his gunpowder drawings, a unique means of expression, Cai employs two types of bases: *washi* (Japanese paper) and canvas. Through his skillful manipulation of stencils and covers, he produces images by igniting various kinds of gunpowder. For this work, made with volunteers from the general public and local colleges, Cai mixed gunpowder with realgar powder in order to create a faint yellowish hue on a large sheet of *washi* produced in Kochi Prefecture.

### ***Seasons of Life:Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter***

This four-part canvas work depicts flowers and birds representing each season along with a male and female figure engaged in an intimate act. Inspired by a hand-painted *shunga* (erotic picture) titled *Scroll of the Four Seasons*, made by the Kansai-based, late Edo Period painter Tsukioka Settei, Cai's work evokes the life of a woman, who matures from girl to woman, gives birth, and gradually grows old. Bearing a certain androgynous quality, the bodies of the men and women are arranged in such a way that the design of the flowers, corresponding to each season, resemble tattoos. Coupled with a background made up of cherry blossoms, camellias, and swallows (*Spring*); irises, peonies, and cuckoos (*Summer*); chrysanthemums, pampas grass, and wild geese (*Fall*); daffodils, plum blossoms, pines, cranes, and white-eyes (*Winter*), the work expresses the circulating life of humans within nature in an attractive manner. In this first attempt to combine traces of explosions with brilliant colors, Cai used both gunpowder and daytime fireworks.

### ***Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter***

Cai's hometown of Quanzhou provides a source of inspiration for his creative work. Dehua kilns have long been known as one of China's leading production centers for white porcelain, which is exported all over the world. Popular for their transparent, milky-white bases and elaborate workmanship, the ceramics are prized in the West, where they are referred to as "Blanc de Chine" (White from China). Cai created these paintings of birds and flowers on white porcelain in collaboration with artisans who continue to work in this traditional technique. The four panels, each consisting of 60 porcelain slabs, are decorated with seasonal sights, primarily peonies, lotuses, chrysanthemums, and plum blossoms, delicately layered on thin kaolin (clay). By sprinkling and setting off gunpowder on the fired tiles, Cai created shadows that express atmospheric changes triggered by the natural cycle of wind, rain, and light.

### ***Morning Glory***

Resembling celestial vegetation descending towards Earth, morning glory vines, adorned with flowers and leaves, are entangled and suspended in the center of the gallery. This work was specially made for this exhibition in collaboration with a group of students from Yokohama College of Art & Design. Cai ignited gunpowder on top of the students' terracotta flowers and leaves to create complex shadows with flames and smoke. Attaching the flowers and leaves to the natural wisteria vines provide a lively touch.

In the middle of the room, where *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter* is also on display, this symbolic clay work, suggests the Wu Xing, a Chinese natural philosophy designed to explain the changing cycles of all things based on the mutual influence of five elements: wood (spring), fire (summer), earth (seasonal change), metal (fall), and water (winter).

### ***Head On and Illusion II***

*Head On* and *Illusion II* were included in Cai's first solo exhibition in Germany, held at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin in 2006.

The glass wall in *Head On* is approximately the same height as the Berlin Wall (1961-1989). The abrupt dismantling of the Berlin Wall, which once divided east and west, as part of a rapidly rising civil movement, marked the end of the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. In the process of attempting to reintegrate Germany, however, it became evident that there were many other invisible walls that continued to separate people in the East and West. Cai says, "A visible wall can be easily torn down, but it is difficult to destroy an invisible one." Here, a pack of ninety-nine life-size replicas of wolves plunge towards the transparent glass wall. To the artist, the number ninety-nine suggests "continuity" and the strength to "lead the way forward without knowing what lies ahead." Finally, the wolves signify "a sense of community, heroic spirit, and bravery."

*Illusion II* is a video work documenting a performance in which Cai sets off fireworks in a small German-style house adjacent to the ruins of the former Anhalter Station, which, before being destroyed in World War II, served as the southern entrance to the city of Berlin.

## Artist Biography

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**Cai Guo-Qiang ( b.1957, Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China )**



Photo by Wen-You Cai, courtesy Cai Studio

Cai was trained in stage design at the Shanghai Theater Academy, and his work has since crossed multiple mediums within art, including drawing, installation, video and performance. While living in Japan from 1986 to 1995, he explored the properties of gunpowder in his drawings, an inquiry that eventually led to the development of his signature explosion events. Cai was awarded the Golden Lion at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, and the 20th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize in 2009, and the Praemium Imperiale in 2012. Additionally, he was also among the five artists honored with the first U.S. Department of State Medal of Arts award. He also served as Director of Visual and Special Effects for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

Among his many solo exhibitions and projects include "Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument", Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006 and his retrospective "I Want to Believe," which opened at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2008. His first-ever solo exhibition in Brazil, "Cai Guo-Qiang: Da Vincis do Povo", went on a three-city tour around the country in 2013. Traveling from Brasilia to Sao Paulo before reaching its final destination in Rio de Janeiro, it was the most visited exhibition by a living artist worldwide that year with over one million visitors. In October 2013, Cai created "One Night Stand (Aventure d'un Soir)", an explosion event for Nuit Blanche, a citywide art and culture festival organized by the city of Paris. In August 2014, his solo exhibition "Cai Guo-Qiang: The Ninth Wave" opened at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai.

His most recent exhibition "Cai Guo-Qiang: Impromptu" opened in December 2014 at Fundacion Proa in Buenos Aires. On January 24, 2015, he created "Life is a Milonga: Tango Fireworks for Argentina", which was realized at Vuelta de Rocha outside Fundacion Proa, La Boca, Buenos Aires. He currently lives and works in New York.

## Outline

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### ***Cai Guo-Qiang : There and Back Again***

Dates	July 11 (Sat.)-October 18 (Sun.), 2015
Open Hours	10:00-18:00 (admission until 17:30) *Evening hours: September 16 (Wed.), September 18 (Fri.) 10:00-20:00 (admission until 19:30)
Closed	Thursdays
Organizers	Yokohama Museum of Art, THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN
Supported by	Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Japan, The City of Yokohama, Fujian Economy and Culture Promotion Association in Japan
Special Sponsored by	Warehouse TERRADA
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