

HUANG YONG PING

Chinese Hand Laundry

中國手洗衣店

Field of Waste

CHEN ZHEN

垃圾場

May 6 through August 7, 1994 | Organized by France Morin, Senior Curator

"Beat the drum on the East and listen for noise on the West"

— One of the 36 Chinese Military Strategies

Huang Yong Ping and Chen Zhen are Chinese-born artists living in Paris who share deep spiritual and metaphysical roots in Taoist thought and employ Western avant garde art strategies to explore such contemporary concerns as the interplay of nature and the artificial; tradition versus progress; and history and ideology in a worldwide consumerist society.

The installations in the main gallery of the Museum culminate a month's work-residence in New York. The project is specific not only to the gallery space but also to The New Museum's location near New York's Chinatown and the sweatshops of the downtown garment district. Huang and Chen are fascinated with the myth of New York as an ethnic mosaic and its reality as one of the world's most intense concentrations of wealth and poverty, materialism and spirituality, cultural interaction and ideological strife, immigration and racism—issues both artists have dealt with in previous work.

For the artists, this is an unprecedented occasion for dialogue; for visitors it is a unique opportunity to reflect on the histories of Chinese immigration in New York by Chinese artists whose own personal histories are bound up with issues of migration, transience, and assimilation.

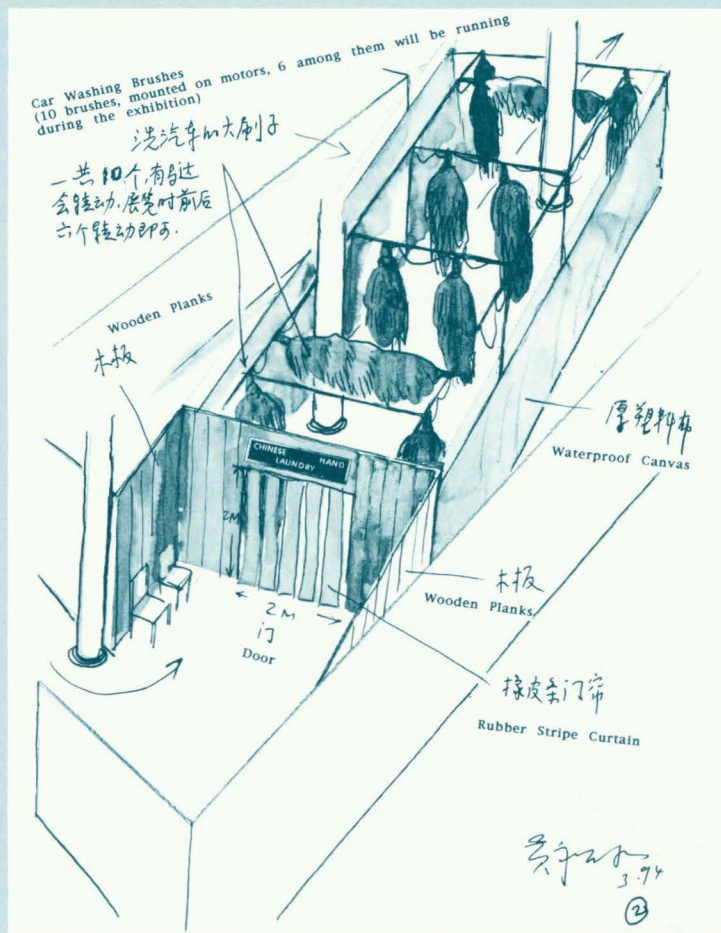
Each artist has realized a new, site-specific project. The works are positioned according to the principle of the Chinese chessboard. Each of the two "players" has his own long narrow space within the rectangular space of the Museum with the central space shared

by both—opponents and collaborators in the same game, a game renowned for its use of strategy. In this particular chess game the visitors become the pieces. Going through the works they are positioned and strategically directed in a taolike path, the path one must follow to be in harmony with the natural order.

The visitor first encounters Huang Yong Ping's shopfront facade of wooden planks erected across the entrance to the gallery. At the center of the facade is a doorway hung with a curtain of vertical strips of rubber. Above the door is a vintage sign—"Chinese Hand Laundry"—which Huang observed during a visit to the Chinatown History Museum in New York in the summer of 1993. The sign evokes the conflicting associations of the racial stereotyping of early Chinese immigrants to the U.S. and the affirmative symbol of Chinese immigrants' ability to survive independently in the United States.

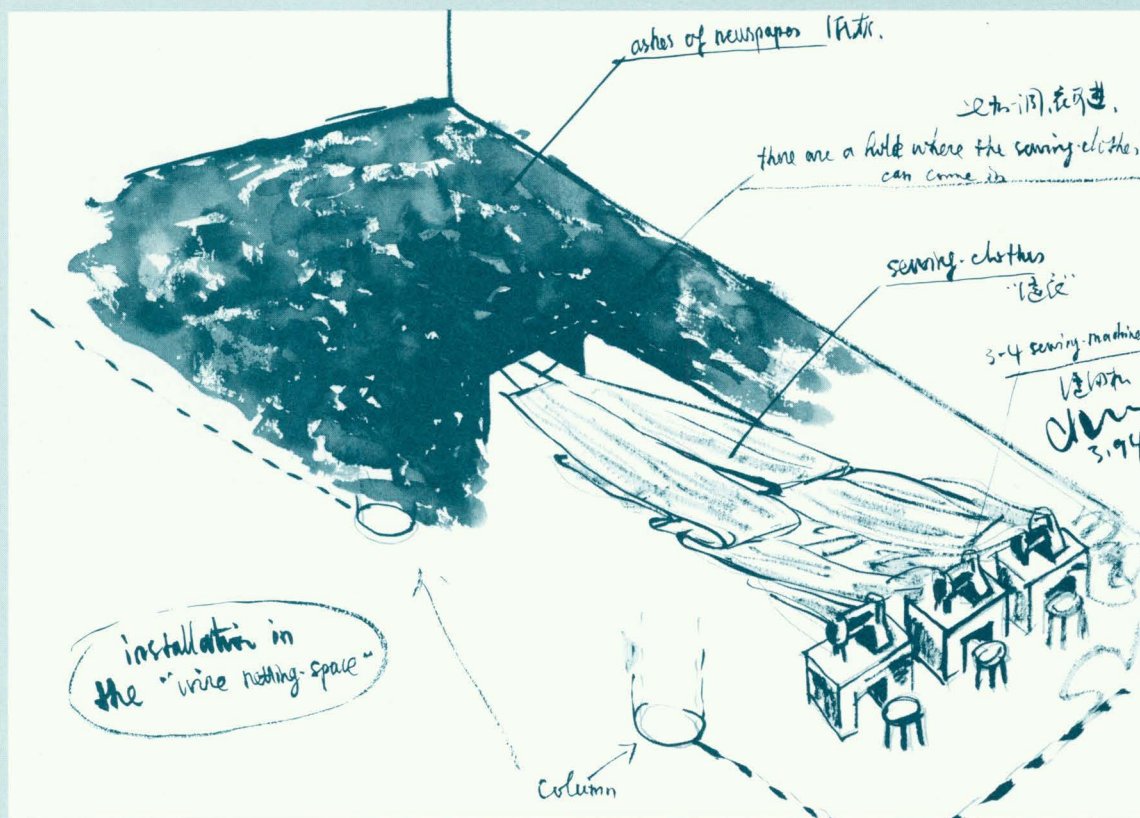
Huang Yong Ping, *Chinese Hand Laundry*, 1994, site-specific project.

Drawing courtesy of the artist.



Using a "found object" to liken a museum of contemporary art to a laundry is the kind of punning tactic that Huang relishes. The sign also refers to Huang's previous work in which the literal washing of newspapers and books by pulping them is the equivalent of "washing" culture and history, an allusion to the "launder-

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Chen Zhen, *Field of Waste*, 1994,
site-specific project.
Drawing courtesy of the artist.

ing" of colonial and immigrant histories by institutional spaces like museums, but a device which is also rooted in the Taoist notion that art is transient while human life is eternal.

Passing through the doorway, however, the visitor is in for a surprise. This "Chinese Hand Laundry" fulfills the Chinese proverb of "selling dog meat under the sign of a sheep's head"—that is, a case of deceptive advertising. Behind the curtain strips, the visitor has entered an automatic car wash—a canvas-sided, 30-foot-long tunnel to be negotiated past motorized brushes turning overhead and on both sides. Instead of seeing things washed by hand, visitors find themselves being "washed" by machinery. Confined in the narrow space, the viewer is forced to dodge the huge, spinning nylon brushes, trapped within an alien disorienting environment, propelled by a will not their own.

The "cleansed" visitor leaves Huang Yong Ping's environment only to find him/herself confronting the prisonlike steel barrier of Chen Zhen's *Field of Waste*. To one side are bundled New York newspapers in English and Chinese

while, in the opposite corner, are heaped sacks stuffed with assorted items of clothing reminiscent of immigrants' belongings. Passing through a gateway in the steel fence, the visitor encounters an arresting vista. From three sewing machines stretch trains of fabric forming a multicolored carpet which disappears into a veritable mountain of ash at the far end of the gallery. On closer inspection, the fabric is seen to be a roughly stitched melange of thousands of articles of clothing of all kinds, interwoven with Chinese and U.S. flags. The material was gathered by Chen during his month in New York—two tons of newspapers and five cubic meters of clothing.

For the artist, China and the U.S. represent the most radical opposition in terms of culture, tradition, political economy, and technological development. The juxtaposition of these two extremes—through the metaphor of the fabric patchwork—is representative of the new world order. Chen juxtaposes and combines two processes to produce a field of symbiotic and coexisting identities—the recur-

rent destructiveness and consequent renewal through revolution in Chinese history (burning) and the means by which hundreds of thousands of Chinese immigrants have managed to survive abroad (manufacturing clothing). The work enshrines an ancient holistic view of reality in which matter and spirit, "nature," humankind, and manufactured objects exist in a constantly recycling continuum. Indeed, in Taoist thought, burning and the resultant ashes are not symbolic of death, as they are in the West, but of purification and transformation.

From the moment the visitor first steps into the *Chinese Hand Laundry* to the final contemplation of the *Field of Waste*, the viewer encounters two basic elements of transformation—water and fire—and like the material in the installation itself, is recycled, processed, and transformed.

Huang Yong Ping
Chen Zhen
France Morin, Senior Curator

ATSUSHI NISHIJIMA

Mondrian Ping-Pong

May 6 through August 7, 1994

Presented as part of *CityCircus* in conjunction with *Rolywholyover: A Circus*, for museum by John Cage, at the Guggenheim Museum, SoHo, April 23 through July 31, 1994.

Atsushi Nishijima is a composer and visual artist from Kyoto, Japan, who uses sound as a found material for sculptures and installations that transform the familiar into the unexpected. In some works, Nishijima fabricates curious electronic devices to convert cassette recordings, AM and FM radio broadcasts, or satellite transmissions into information that in turn powers other instruments, equipment, or even fluorescent lights. The city, for Nishijima, is a gigantic synthesizer from which he draws out sounds and, breaking them down, delivers them into new manifestations and arrangements.

Other works emphasize the idea that sound is inherent in all objects and environments. Attentive inquiry of various kinds—knocking on a wooden flute as well as blowing into it, for example—can release an unsuspected richness of information about the nature of an object, its history, and its surroundings. Nishijima's aim is to create works alert not to his own or even the viewer's intentions, but rather to the particulars of a given situation. In all his work, Nishijima undertakes to engage with the world in this inquiring and nonhabitual way, and encourages viewers to adopt a similar posture.



Installed in The New Museum's Window on Broadway, Nishijima's *Mondrian Ping-Pong* is an interactive installation in which visitors are invited to play Ping-Pong on a specially constructed table. The underside is painted in the manner of a painting by Piet Mondrian, the modern Dutch painter whose geometric compositions of primary colors, black, and white were conceived according to principles of "dynamic equilibrium," or balanced asymmetry. The table's underside varies in thickness with the panes of primary colors, a discrepancy unseen by the players above. This creates dead spots that unexpectedly alter the bounce of the ball and also alter the sound. About the piece, Nishijima writes:

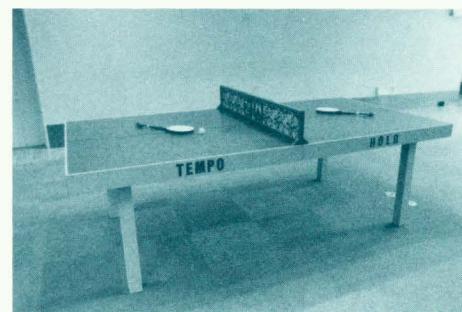
If a sound repeats it becomes music. This table is not made for attack-and-vie-for-points Ping-Pong. It is to play music by volleying back and forth, back and forth. The dead spots insure that a dulled awareness does not set in under the conditioned reaction and lethargy of easy repetition.

Wired for amplification and accessible through the lobby to museum visitors and to passers by—who are welcome to act as spectators, performers, or both—*Mondrian Ping-Pong* transforms a game of competition into cooperative composition.

Nishijima's work situates itself effortlessly within the aesthetic sensibility of the composer John Cage, who employed chance operations and rule-governed improvisation as a means of disengaging both intention and habitual

patterns of attention in order to allow unpremeditated possibilities inherent within situations to emerge.

Above and left:
Atsushi Nishijima, *Mondrian Ping-Pong* (version 1), 1993.
Photos courtesy of the artist.



The correspondence in their work turns on the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, which holds that all things are the Buddha and thus worthy of attention, and that all sentient beings can attain enlightenment through alertness, intuition, and meditation.

Yet Nishijima's *Mondrian Ping-Pong* specifically cites not Cage, but Mondrian, whose ideas of the rhythm of dynamic equilibrium, of the simultaneous independence and integration of opposing elements, and of the gradual absorption of art into its material environment are playfully enacted here. In his twenties Cage was in fact devoted to the work of Mondrian and like him considered art valuable insofar as it affected one's perceptions in a fundamental way. For Mondrian, as for Cage after him, art was also both a model and a means of achieving a kind of social utopia.

Living and working in Japan, Nishijima is less conditioned than a Western artist or scholar would be by conventional readings of Western art history. This aesthetic intervention on his part, susceptible to indeterminate effects of crossing Eastern and Western traditions of thought, provides the startling incitement to consider far-reaching affinities between the work of these two very different figures in the history of the Western avant garde. An unexpected ground of commonality opens between the ancient precepts and practices of Zen and avant garde movements of the twentieth century. Here the work of art appears to function as a form of practice—at once social and meditative—unfastening the mesh of habit and letting loose from a given situation unanticipated information and potential.

Laura Trippi, Curator

CINDY TOWER

Westward Expansion Inwards

May 6 through August 7, 1994

Cindy Tower has adopted what she calls a “raw and rugged” painting style, a style typical of rustic folk genres of the Western United States, to address experience often at odds with the sense and sensibility of fine art. Her colors are tawdry, her technique rough, and her subjects can be common to the point of cliché, while the exuberant abundance of her installations crowds the bounds of propriety. On discarded objects and materials, Tower paints landscapes and portraits, but above all she paints trees. These are not generic or imaginary trees, but portraits of trees from nature, individual trees. A dense tangle of personal and collective narratives, *Westward Expansion Inwards* is also an inquiry into complexities and contradictions that underlie ideas of American individualism and the frontier.

In the history of American thought, the West represents a conflictual and often romantic encounter with the concept of the land. The West as frontier is resource, raw material, acreage to be timbered, tilled, populated, and mined. But as wilderness the West has also come to symbolize deliverance from the corruption of civil society. Landscape painters helped to consolidate the distinctive image of American land as, in Thomas Cole’s words, “primeval forests, virgin lakes and water falls.” By the latter half of the nineteenth century, painters and photographers travelled to the West, promulgating a vision of the West as a realm of scenic wonders and spiritual regeneration. Gradually the concept of the Western wilderness as a sacred preserve began to take hold.

Combining wall-size photomurals with a multitude of closely gathered *Tree Paintings*

and *Forest* groupings, an idiosyncratic family tree, and painted wood pile sculptures, Tower’s *Westward Expansion Inwards* is an eccentric re-working of the Transcendentalist notion of wilderness expounded by Thoreau:

Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World. Every tree sends its fibers forth in search of the Wild.

Where the West as frontier relies on the idea of rugged individualism in the domination of nature, Tower’s installation emphasizes that the West as sign and source of preservation isn’t simply a stand of trees, but more importantly a state of mind that is in part profoundly inner-oriented. As her proposal wryly states: “Unlike most Americans, I’m interested in Westward expansion, but inwards.”

Employing an obsessively additive approach to refurbishing found materials, Tower’s inward expansion evinces a keen and gendered ambivalence. The work advances the cause of domestic, feminine, and folksy genres as it undercuts the mythic dimension of the Western legend and deposes the masculine lead. At the same time, the sheer mass and intensity of the accumulation tilts toward the



Cindy Tower, black and white photo mural from *Westward Expansion Inwards*, 1994.
Photo by Franz Rindlisbacher.

maniacal, a fanatic stockpiling that recalls the *horreur du vide* of overstuffed Victorian interiors while suggesting overproduction, overpopulation, and exploitation of the environment.

Westward Expansion Inwards transforms the gallery into a thick forest in which two eco-systems are superimposed. A Connecticut deciduous woods indicates the main branch of the artist’s family, while a ghostly stand of redwoods summons the Western retreat of Tower’s great-great grandfather Galen Clark, who along with John Muir and Fredric Law Olmstead helped to found Yosemite National Park. Past overlaps with present as natural forest gives way to highway pilings and painted debris, and Tower’s own history becomes entwined with that of her great-great grandfather. The portrait of the late nineteenth-century itinerant naturalist and woodsman throws the image of the late twentieth-century painter into strange relief. If the installation attests to the passing of primeval wilderness areas, conceding that a domesticated, fabricated external wilderness is now a given, it also embraces the terrors and tranquilities of wildness as a figure for consciousness on the frontier of an unknown era of civil society.

Laura Trippi, Curator

SUSAN UNTERBERG

Close Ties

May 6 through August 7, 1994

On first impression, *Close Ties* looks idyllic. A video monitor, surrounded by large black-and-white photographs, shows pairs of men and women appearing and disappearing, absorbed in a lyrical, sensuous, arabesque of sound and movement. The video images are in slow motion, out of sync with a sound track on which male and female voices alternate. The men and women approach each other in slow motion, circle in a brief, graceful dance whose suggestive ciphers fill the spaces between them with tension. Is it the tension of desire or avoidance, longing or loss?

What is revealed about these couples doesn't seem to be what they intended to reveal. The men express their pleasure and approval of the perfect partner, one who can meet all their needs, but their movements belie their words. Shy and diffident, they seem to edge away from contact, or accept it with the caveat of a turned back; even their glances avoid those of their partners.

The women voice unconditional love, even admit to feeling "too much" of it. They describe the men in terms of their own "female" qualities—creativity, sensitivity, and good taste. To them, he's "funny, sweet, sensitive, creative, compassionate, romantic, sentimental, good hearted, like me." Yet despite their open and sometimes aggressive affection, their movements seem both melancholy and dependent.

Who are these people? Lovers? Friends? Relatives? I'm struck by the familiarity of their contradictory sentiments. Of course! They are mothers and sons, engaged in what many consider to be the most highly charged and ambivalent relationship of all.

Freud suggested that a woman is more likely to love her son than her husband.¹ And sociologist Nancy Chodorow, in her analysis of how society constructs the act of mothering, emphasizes that the child sees the mother as continuous with itself and as having no separate interests, unlike the distanced and differentiated father. Indeed, the son's attachment to the mother during the early years is said to be so intense and so exclusive that it is characterized as sexual.² And it is mother and son incest that has been the most consistently taboo relationship in every culture, and the one which, according to poet and essayist Adrienne Rich, "has received the most obsessive attention in the literature men have written."³

Close Ties is part of photographer Susan Unterberg's long-term exploration of the psychological complexities of intimate relationships, especially familial ones. Her investigation began with a series of double-stacked portraits of mothers and daughters, then fathers and sons, whose matter-of-factness was at odds with the emotionally charged, ambivalent, and often disturbing relationships revealed by the camera. The subjects here also seem unaware of the attraction, denial, and anxiety suggested in the work itself. One son portrays his mother as unconditionally, unambivalently loving and well behaved—in his words, "just excellent, just the best person I could think of. She's perfect... she cooks, she cleans, she doesn't give me any problems, she's great." Another says: "She represents everything a woman should be, and what men expect in women." But darker undercurrents of anxiety and restraint trouble the slow circling of mothers and sons: "she looks frightened," admits one man. This tangled nest of feelings can also result in resentment, defiance or, taken to an extreme, the blind rage that causes matricide.

But, above all, it is ambivalence which characterizes the mother-son relationship. This ambivalence expresses itself in what the writer



Jane Gallop calls an "erotics of engagement, a sexuality that is not in the object, but in the encounter,"⁴ here underscored by Unterberg's technique of blurring the image in the still photographs and slowing down the movement in the video from real time. Although it appears to be impulsive, French photography critic and theorist Raymond Bellour sees the blur as self-consciously emphasizing the artifice of the photograph, its existence as art rather than as the recording of a neutral and objective reality.⁵ In Unterberg's work, blurring allows the image to exist in an indeterminate space which echoes and supports the central ambivalence of the mother-son relationship.

While Unterberg has said that she wants to underscore the troubled and problematic nature of her subjects' interactions, *Close Ties* remains so elusive and poetic as to escape any fixed interpretation, even the artist's. Like the behavior of mothers and sons themselves, the piece is poised at the intersection of the visual and verbal representations which shape our ideas of gender and role, a crossroad from which changes in future relationships—at least between men and women—are most likely to issue.

Marcia Tucker, Director

see footnotes on back panel

The New Museum
OF CONTEMPORARY ART

583 Broadway in SoHo
between Prince and Houston Streets
New York, New York 10012
(212) 219-1222.

HOURS:

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and
Sunday 12-6 p.m.
Saturday 12-8 p.m. (6-8 p.m. free)
Closed Monday and Tuesday.

ADMISSION:

\$3.50 general; \$2.50 artists, students, seniors;
members and children under 12 free.

DIRECTIONS:

Subway: Lexington Ave. line (#6) to Spring
St. or Bleecker St.; Broadway line (N/R)
to Prince St.; 8th Ave. line (A/C/E) to
Spring St.; and 6th Ave. line (B/D/Q/F)
to Broadway/ Lafayette.
Bus: #1/5/6/21 to Houston St. or Broadway.

GROUP VISIT INFORMATION:

Guided group visits are available at
The New Museum for adults and students
grades 7 through 12. Please call
(212) 614-6650.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

Saturday Afternoon Gallery Talks

2 p.m. Free with Museum admission

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|----------|-------------------------------------|
| May 7 | Huang Yong Ping and Chen Zhen |
| May 14 | France Morin, Senior Curator |
| May 21 | Alice Yang, Curator & Art Historian |
| June 4 | John Kuo Wei Tchen, Historian |
| June 18 | Monica Chau, Curator & Artist |
| July 9 | John Kuo Wei Tchen |
| July 23 | Zhang Hongtu, Artist |
| August 6 | Alice Yang |

HUANG YONG PING
Chinese Hand Laundry



CHEN ZHEN
Field of Waste

May 6 through August 7, 1994

Organized by France Morin,
Senior Curator

- Footnotes from Susan Unterberg essay:
1. Quoted in Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p. 203.
 2. Op. cit., pp. 194, 106.
 3. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), originally published in 1976, p. 186.
 4. Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 138.
 5. Raymond Bellour, "The Phantom's Due," in *Discourse*, 16 (Winter 1993-94), p. 164.

ON VIEW PROGRAM

Workspace Gallery

Close Ties

Susan Unterberg

May 6 through August 7, 1994

Organized by Marcia Tucker, Director

New Work Gallery

Westward Expansion Inwards

Cindy Tower

May 6 through August 7, 1994

Organized by Laura Trippi, Curator

Window on Broadway

Mondrian Ping-Pong

Atsushi Nishijima

May 6 through August 7, 1994

Organized by Laura Trippi, Curator

MEMBERSHIP EVENTS:

Please call the Membership Department
(212) 219-1222 for information.

Huang Yong Ping's *Chinese Hand Laundry* and Chen Zhen's *Field of Waste* are made possible by L'AFAA (L'Association Française d'Action Artistique), the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Continuing Education for French Aboard Department, the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York, and Frank and Michael Spinner at Spinner Industries, Inc. Generous support was also provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and by members of the Director's Council of The New Museum of Contemporary Art. Special thanks to the Chinatown History Museum. The film documentary, *Dialogues* (working title), was funded and directed by Lana Pih Jokel.

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