

‘Mapping’ China’s Art Industry: The Role of Cultural Relations in Understanding China’s Contemporary Realities

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Abstract

Originating as an ancient art form, Chinese calligraphy is known as the chief of all traditional arts in China and is now deeply ingrained in the fabric of Chinese society. In the current artistic context of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), calligraphy has, at times, merged with contemporary art forms to reflect the dynamic changes and realities of the country. This paper explores the works of Chinese contemporary artist, writer, curator, and educator Qiu Zhijie, who boasts a diverse portfolio encompassing sculpture, painting, printmaking, video, photography, and performance and can be dubbed a contemporary Chinese artist entangled in global discourses. With his work having been exhibited across the globe, few have shed light on his “Maps” series of landscape paintings that approach topics including religion, mythology, politics, and society to chart complex relationships. Specific works in this series have focused on mapping the current reality of China’s art market and shifting environment. It is through the analysis of such works that this paper creates links to international relations, specifically cultural diplomacy and cultural relations on a global scale. Indeed, Qiu’s maps have the unique potential of not only showcasing the intricate relationship between calligraphy and contemporary Chinese art forms but also acting as mediums for improving international society’s understanding of current-day China.

Keywords: art market; Chinese calligraphy; contemporary art; cultural relations; symbolism in art