



Stiftung Mercator

PRESS RELEASE

Dialogue with China about enlightenment is possible – Stiftung Mercator successfully launches independent series of salon discussions in Beijing galleries

German and Chinese participants talk of a “free and open exchange”. Works by Ai Wei Wei are presented and discussed

Beijing/Essen, 11 April 2011. Wood carving and language were the topics explored by the first two salons which were hosted by Stiftung Mercator within the framework of its “Enlightenment in Dialogue” series and took place on 9 and 10 April at private galleries in Beijing. German and Chinese participants talk of a “free and open exchange”. Works by Ai Wei Wei were also presented. The event series had been officially opened by Germany’s Federal Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle during a ceremony on 2 April.

Stiftung Mercator is staging the “Enlightenment in Dialogue” series of events as an academic accompaniment to the exhibition “The Art of the Enlightenment” in Beijing. The official forums of the series have been organized by the Foundation in partnership with the National Museum of China. In addition, it has independently initiated a series of salons on the subject, giving German and Chinese intellectuals the chance over the next 13 months to exchange views and ideas on philosophical, social and artistic aspects of the Enlightenment. The salons are designed to imitate the classic salon of the Enlightenment and to offer a forum for open discussions of art, culture and philosophy.

During the salon “Käthe Kollwitz, Lu Xun and the Wood Carving of Fang Lijun”, **Heinrich Schulze Altcapenberg**, director of the Museum of Prints and Drawings in Berlin, and **Zhang Zikang**, director of the Today Art Museum in Beijing, talked about the basic principles of wood carving in Europe and China in a discussion chaired by **Michael Kahn-Ackermann**, director of the Goethe-Institut Beijing. Although the art of woodblock printing was equally widespread in Europe and China even prior to the twentieth century, artists for many years followed different paths. This salon explored European and Chinese interactions



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in the history of woodblock printing and linked the origins of the “wood carving movement” in China to contemporary Chinese art. Using works by the artist Fang Lijun as an example, it was shown how these relate to the tradition of twentieth century wood carving. Schulze Altcappenberg also presented various works by Ai Wei Wei.

Yesterday’s salon was devoted to the topic of “Enlightenment and Language”, focusing on language as a means of disseminating the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment. The salon investigated how European and Chinese protagonists of the Enlightenment shaped the development of their mother tongues through their work. **Gerda Hassler**, director of the Institute for Romance Studies at the University of Potsdam, and **Fang Weigui**, professor of comparative literature studies at the School of Chinese Language and Literature at Beijing Normal University, spoke from their respective national perspectives on the influence of language on the Enlightenment, after which they read from texts by well-known protagonists. Chairperson Kahn-Ackermann quoted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the UN Charta as a possible example of a universal language of enlightenment. The discussion made reference to this and to the varying ways in which these texts are perceived.

Statements about the salons:

Ambassador Dr Michael Schaefer, German Embassy in Beijing

“In Germany, the exhibition ‘The Art of the Enlightenment’ has triggered a lively debate in which questions have naturally been raised about the purpose and success of a cultural project of this kind. Such questions are particularly understandable given China’s refusal to grant a visa to Tilman Spengler, who had been intensively involved in preparing the dialogue programme, and the arrest of Ai Wei Wei, who stands for enlightenment in China like very few others, even if these two events are not directly connected to the exhibition. Nonetheless, it is in the interests of an exchange aimed at enlightenment not to allow the dialogue to break down but to view it as part of a longer-term process. The first two of the ten ‘Enlightenment Salons’, which were held in two Beijing galleries on 9 and 10 April and were attended by numerous Chinese artists and intellectuals, as well as students, reflect the interest that young Chinese people have in pursuing such a discourse. I look forward to the events to come!”



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Dr Bernhard Lorentz, President of Stiftung Mercator

"By staging these salons within the framework of the 'Enlightenment in Dialogue' series, Stiftung Mercator hopes to create a forum in which German and Chinese intellectuals from different segments of society can come together. The salon idea thus reflects the guiding philosophy of Stiftung Mercator's international activities: 'Understanding one another, learning from one another and jointly overcoming challenges'. We have shown with the first two salons that an open exchange with Chinese intellectuals within the framework of "Enlightenment in Dialogue" is possible in the salons we have staged."

Professor Michael Lackner, Professor of Sinology, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg

"The revolutionary Chinese wood carving movement, which was initiated in the Shanghai of the nineteen thirties by Lu Xun, one of the most important representatives of the modern Chinese Enlightenment movement, enriches Chinese art by giving images new visual power, as can be seen in the wood carvings of Käthe Kollwitz. This influence on the Chinese art world is still evident today in the works produced by artists like Fang Lijun."

Emeritus Professor Lothar Ledderose, Institute of East Asian Art History, Heidelberg University

"In my opinion, it is right and important for this dialogue to be pursued in the forums and salons staged by Stiftung Mercator. The first forum has shown the limitations of as well as the possibilities offered by such a platform. The German side should not overestimate its ability to influence China; the only way forward, however, is through dialogue."

Professor Eberhard Sandschneider, Research Director of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and Professor of Chinese and East Asian Politics at the Free University of Berlin

"Just a few years ago, it would have been inconceivable for a salon programme on the subject of enlightenment to take place without the influence of the Chinese authorities. Dialogues must not be abandoned, especially in difficult times, if one wishes to achieve something for those affected at the local level. There is no alternative but to attempt to pursue a genuine dialogue with China."

Christine Cayol, Founder of Yishu 8

"Yishu 8, an unconventional and creative oasis in the heart of Beijing's CBD, warmly welcomes Stiftung Mercator's Events with which we share a common



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inestimable value of enlightenment through art, dialogue and cross-cultural exchanges.”

Michael Kahn-Ackermann, Director of the Goethe-Institut Beijing and Chairperson of the first two salons

“The events have confirmed what we suspected, namely that this type of direct communication is necessary, but also that it is not easy and requires a good deal of patience. We have shown today that there are some problems with understanding on the level of language, yet these were useful first steps in the right direction. I think it is a good thing that Stiftung Mercator has decided to continue the series.”

Fang Weigui, Professor of Comparative Literature Studies at the School of Chinese Language and Literature at Beijing Normal University, guest at the salon on 9 April

“I found the salon good and think that the link between academia and general education should be emphasized even more in future. Enlightenment starts with the battle against stupidity.”

About “Enlightenment in Dialogue”

To accompany the exhibition “The Art of the Enlightenment”, Stiftung Mercator is staging the “Enlightenment in Dialogue” series of events. The official forums of the series have been organized by the Foundation in partnership with the National Museum of China. In addition, it has independently initiated a series of salons on the subject, giving German and Chinese intellectuals the chance to exchange views and ideas on philosophical, social and artistic aspects of the Enlightenment. The salons are designed to imitate the classic salon of the Enlightenment and to offer a forum for open discussions of art, culture and philosophy.

Stiftung Mercator is making available a total of some 1.5 million euros for the purpose. The programme comprises five dialogue blocks which will continue for the entire duration – from spring 2011 to spring 2012 – of “The Art of the Enlightenment”, an exhibition presented by the Berlin State Museums, the Dresden State Art Collections and the Bavarian State Painting Collections in Munich, in cooperation with the National Museum of China. The exhibition has been made possible by Germany’s Federal Foreign Office and is supported by the BMW Group.



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Each official forum will consist of a public lecture and a panel discussion. Alongside the programme at the National Museum of China, Stiftung Mercator is hosting a series of salons on the subject, at various venues in Beijing, in which German and Chinese intellectuals will have the opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions on philosophical, social and artistic aspects of the Enlightenment. The series, which was designed by a group of German and Chinese experts, will describe the basic principles of the European and Chinese Enlightenment. Members of the expert group include the journalist and historian Tilman Spengler, the sociologist Wolf Lepenies and Huang Ping, professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, as well as the director of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Pan Gongkai.

www.aufklaerung-im-dialog.de

About “The Art of the Enlightenment”

On 1 April 2011, “The Art of the Enlightenment”, an exhibition presented by the Berlin State Museums, the Dresden State Art Collections and the Bavarian State Painting Collections in Munich, in cooperation with the National Museum of China, was officially opened in Beijing. This comprehensive exhibition on the art of the Enlightenment is the first international guest exhibition to be hosted by the National Museum of China, which has now reopened as the world’s largest museum building following extensive modernization and expansion. Under the joint patronage of Chinese President Hu Jintao and Germany’s Federal President Christian Wulff, the exhibition will be on show in Beijing for a period of twelve months. For more information, visit www.kunstderaufklaerung.de

If you should have any questions, please contact:

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