



## Living in “hyper-screen”: images and contemporary Chinese art

**Bérangère Amblard**  
(IETT, Lyon)

The younger generation of artists in China - that Barbara Pollack qualifies both of “post-internet” and “post-passport” generation - grew up in a context of modernisation and opening of the country<sup>1</sup>. Those artists’ childhood took place against the background of tremendous economic, social, political, and cultural transformations - new consumption patterns, massive population displacements to newly developed urban centres, the emergence of a materialistic consumer culture, or the advent of digital technologies.

They were witnesses to the skyscrapers sprouting like mushrooms, to the superhighways gradually encircling them, to the appearance of the logos of global brands such as Apple, McDonalds or Starbucks stamping every street corner. Those changes of scenery shaped spaces that were soon to be saturated with images. In early 2008, with 221 million users, China became the world’s biggest Internet user, going past the USA. The screens rapidly made their way into the restaurant rooms, the subway trains, the elevator walls, the advertising billboards, into people’s homes and in their hands.

The artworks made by this young generation of Chinese artists are products of the new globalized and image-saturated China. Contrary to previous generations of artists - whose works still engage with the Maoist era and the scars that it left - they deal with the concerns of their conditions of existence. This paper focuses on several artists who base their artistic practices on images which are all at the same time the medium, the subject, the content and the material of their artworks. It further argues that the unbelievable pace at which the transformations occurred - and are still occurring - in the country had an impact on their experience of reality; and introduces the concept of the “hyper-screen” as a possible way of apprehending their artworks. These artists’ works both convey a sense that reality is not a fixed, stable state of being, and the difficulty to apprehend and grasp it. They picture a fragmented world, charged and composed with the images that sculpt it. Cao Fei 曹斐 created a whole virtual world made out of synthesis images. Chen Wei 陈维 creates carefully staged pictures that blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. Yang Yongliang 杨泳梁 captures photographs that document the reality of Shanghai’s changing cityscape, that he later accumulates into pho-

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Pollack, *Brand New Art from China, A Generation on the Rise*, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2018

to shop-created imitations of traditional landscape paintings. For the artistic duo Tamen 他们 and for artist Xu Zhen 徐震, internet and its vast trove of images is close to Ali Baba's cave, a place where they wander about looking for the next image to integrate in one of their artworks.

## **KEYWORDS**

**Young generation,  
Digital technologies,  
Chinese artists,  
Hyper-screen**