

# AIJING's ART and Audience——Symposium Transcript

# LOVE AIJING

**MAY 25-JUNE 29, 2014**  
Curated by **CHEN LUSHENG**

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## AIJING's ART and Audience——Symposium Transcript

29<sup>th</sup> June 3:00pm

China Art Museum, Shanghai

This symposium is intended as a reflection and summary of the exhibition Love Ai Jing based on the associated public programs, discussing how a museum interacts and communicates with the public. It is also an opportunity to share the results and impact of the public programs of this exhibition. Every guest's opinions and professional experiences shared at the symposium will be crucial for the further development of museum programming and active engagement with the public.

**Moderator:** Chen Lvsheng, Vice President of the National Museum of China

**Host:** Liu Fangfei, Renowned Television Host

Guest Speakers:

Kengo Kuma-----Architect

Ai Jing-----Artist

Pier Francesco Fumagalli-----Vice Prefect & Director of Far Eastern Studies at the Accademia Ambrosiana

Robert C. Morgan-----Editor at Asian Art News

Li Sheng-----Deputy Director of China Art Museum

**Liu Fangfei, Famous Television Host**

I am sure Chinese people are all quite familiar with Ai Jing-she is the exceptional singer in our memory. And I have witnessed her talent and grace in making art last year when she held her exhibition on “love” at the heart of Beijing: the National Museum of China next to the Tiananmen Square. I still remember that at the exhibition, many walked in with curiosity. In the end, the exhibition and Ai Jing's own transformation from singer to artist struck them with awe. A soft-spoken woman on the outside, Ai Jing has switched path with determination and elegance and has now become an artist that perceives the world from various vantage points. Everyone will have a different reaction when looking at Ai Jing's work. I think her work is oriental because of her homeland China; it is Western too because of her journeys abroad, especially her time in the United States. Her work is abstract; the color blocks inspire us to think about art. Her work is also figurative; we can see a mother figure knitting a sweater. Her work is about the past, with nostalgia

for the 70s and 80s. Her work is about the future, helping us imagine a futuristic beauty. As there are one thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes, Ai Jing's work is like a pebble that causes distinct waves in everyone's heart. I wondered what inspired her to change, and the answer seems to be the theme of the exhibition: love, love for family, love for friends, and love for life and future. It has been an honor to be part of her art journey.

### **Chen Lvsheng, Vice President of National Museum of China**

To be honest, I had my reservations about curating Ai Jing's exhibition in Shanghai. When Ai Jing had her exhibition at the National Museum of China last year, it was our space and we know it well, so we were confident about the outcome. But this one was in Shanghai. Based on what I understand about Shanghai since a young age, people are quite materialistic and arrogant here, especially towards outsiders. As a result, I had been very anxious since the opening day on May 25<sup>th</sup>. Ai Jing is an emerging artist from Northern China who has just started gaining international attention, and I was not sure how the Shanghai audience would react to her exhibition. Today's symposium is a kind of attention on Ai Jing, and I think the theme points to a fundamental question about the Chinese art world: the audience. As we all know, there are so many problems to deal with in the process of curating an exhibition. In the discussions with museums abroad, we have always emphasized on the relationship between museums and the public and a museum's responsibility to educate. Not long ago, an American organization released a ranking of the most popular museums, and the National Museum of China was ranked No. 3, after the Louvre and the Natural History Museum in New York. The basis for the ranking is the visitor numbers. In the past year, the National Museum of China received 7,400,000 visitors.

When I held my solo exhibition in Metropolitan Museum Philippines 10 years ago, I also had this chance to visit the National Museum of Philippines, and then I noticed that the museum only had 200-300 people visiting each day. They added the Saturday Free policy in order to increase the audience number during the weekend, only the audience number was still less than a thousand. For such a problem showed in front of us, we must ponder, museum, the "living room" of city culture or the "cultural image window" was built to exhibit a nation's culture, and what's the bearing of it? Beyond that, how to deal the vital problem to a museum, audience shortage. No doubt, In a very long period of time, museum and art organizations worldwide were ignoring the existence of audience during their development trends, or to put them subordinate along with education. Considerate academic, curation the supreme significance.

In today's world trend, we pay more attention to the questions what museum relevant more. Of course, we may also need to deal with the problem amongst art, artists and audience. But with AI JING's wisdom and her unique theme, her comprehensive art exhibition in Shanghai showed us one unique aspect of her idea of it all. This showed how she controlled the relationships between art and audience, art and the public in the world development trends today. To which, AI JING demonstrated a distinctive ambulatory state of exhibition by all means of variety. And it was a big differ to a vast majority of exhibitions, or 99% of them. Ultimately, the ambulatory state finally comes to an end, with the emerge between AI JING and KEN GO KUMA, which is a perfect ending I reckon. Just like the exhibition opening, full with climax and steadfast to the end. I used to write an article about the deep cultural connotation amongst AI JING's art ideas. That is she spread universal value to audience, because the theme of love, as an universal value regardless of human

race, regardless of country, regardless of nationality, even under the conditions of war will show a special care of love. So AI JING did a lot of painting, by a variety of methods, to presenting pluralistic society and diverse culture.

Therefore, during AI JING's art exhibition process, she connected her art work to audience closely by four special activities. Of course, objectively speaking, to understanding audience is what artists must do today. They once ignored the audience's excavation in the past, and not paying much attention to them. But today's artists they aware of this problem, and they needs to focus on their own art creation and audience excavation on the same time. Without the support from audience, regardless how elegant or how profound art is, great limitations would appear I guess.

Thus, Ai-Jing's art idea is a resemble to her music idea 10 or 20 years ago. Under this cultural connected relationship, she demonstrated a lot of hard core ideas from her last National Museum exhibition, but also did some great adjustment for her audience in Shanghai. Which I appreciate most and particularly was that she try to exhibit her work flow-mode with a fixed name. This is a great art curating idea that many artists nowadays or curators never had before. with this, we witnessed AI JING's various art concepts and art style. Especially she cooperated with Mr.KEN GO KUMU crossover style which generated a new space of her art. And this space is also imagined and full of material. Possess both spiritual connection and cultural association. The relationship between the spirit and culture of the art, we can see AI JING's variety. This I also repeatedly emphasized before, as a young artist, AI JING'S life and growth in nature of the creative spirit and her pursuit are not only live in her music career, but also lives in her art life even though she from zero, that's why we can find her in a brand new way. although she really want to subjectively restart her art life from zero, but which is not likely possible. Because to make one artist gives up everything that had been made is one impossible job to do. Like AI JING's music production work early and art work nowadays, they represented AI JING's true disposition, or the real AI JING I witnessed. The real Ai-Jing was not in the exhibition for us to find. Only when she showed us her comprehensive, so we can understand AI JING's essence of art. Also her artistic character.

Ai-Jing's artistic true color, besides she did a lot of play in her art theme "Love", to see her multi-diverse ways of art is what we did for more than a month.

What I want to emphasize particularly is, with such different art style, when she met KEN GO KUMI, it pushes us to think AI JING and her art work. A construction form which we ignored at past. This construction form I said was actually a space, construction space and painting space, and her decoration space, they were all different. When the structure emerged adjustment, planed AI JING would painting with "LOVE" theme, and this produce new change. Even though this new change was only live in KEN GO KUMI's work, and AI JING encountered only a small symbol, piling up on the ground on display. But in the middle of relations, we see a new AI JING art. So when we about to draw a finish line on the exhibition, we look back on the past, from the National Museum to China Art Museum, AI JING and her art, I sensed a great sublimation within this very short time by exhibition. Of course we need to thank those Shanghai audience, and thanks to Ai-Jing and her ability of audience demand domination, and to grasp the public pursuit of development China culture in this cultural trend.

I knew Shanghai was successfully held a "Monet Exhibition" and gained quite amount of applause.

This also raised a very important cultural question to us, why was the "Monet Exhibition" become such a success and earned so many audience, but the other exhibition held at the same time, "the Rubens, Van Dyck Exhibition" was the completely opposite result? I believe this is something we need to recognize about our cultural state. I have said this, we have to generate the art of our time, but beyond that, we still needs to nurture or cultivate our audience. Chinese audience still have a long way to go, compare to our great grand China Art Museum.

I see a lot of audience today at the exhibition room, the amount of them was out of my expectation. But to be subjectively speaking, during this grand exhibition, our audience needs to understand this exhibition and its main purpose or the academic meaning. This is something we needs to know. So this kind of problem would leaves behind to us when AI JING's art work completely successfully finished exhibiting. On behalf of a museum personnel, I believe we had a long way to go, we need to figure how to deal with the problems publics leaves us, how to satisfy out public needs, how to make our public cultural services more efficient and better, and to demonstrate artist more holonomic and accurate. I wish we stays together and push this forward with our best. Thank you all very much.

### **Li Sheng, Deputy Director of China Art Museum**

I can feel the love; Ai Jing has dedicated her love to the pursuit of art, the ongoing exploration of art, and the persistent advocacy of art.

### **Ai Jing, Artist**

I want to challenge myself in a different way at every exhibition. Before this, the exhibition at the National Museum of China was conceptual. So for the China Art Museum exhibition, I wanted to show works that transformed from a conceptual language to a more painterly and expressive language. We showed the series I Love Color and Mr. R, and I also brought my installation Once Upon a Time on Yanfen Street. The works discuss the relationship between memories/emotions from the past and the society, and I hope that people can sense the exploration of time and space in my works.

As for the four public programs, I wanted the exhibition to be fluid and ever-changing through them. On-site performance is cool because everyone who gets to experience it will always have a distinct memory of it. Whether you are an old man, a child, or whoever that attended the program, he or she will have a non-replicable memory.

From the National Museum of China to the China Art Museum, there is a formula to the exhibition called "Ai's Formula": I LOVE AIJING=LOVE AIJING=AIJING=AI+=AI=JING. I came up with it during a trip, and it is reductive. I want to talk about the last part "Jing", which is the word I chose to represent my collaboration with Mr. Kengo Kuma. From what I understand about Mr. Kuma's work, I can feel his respect ("jing") for the nature, which is present in the way he connects the nature and the architecture. The materials we used for the project were all recyclable, so after the exhibition, everything will go back to where it comes from.

### **Kengo Kuma, Japanese Architect**

Not only is there warmth in Ai Jing's work, but there is also a state of Zen. "Zen" came to Japan from ancient China, and you can see the idea of Zen incorporated in different kinds of industries. In Ai Jing's work *The Tree of Life*, she used disposable chopsticks. This is a very ordinary material, and few people would pay attention to it, but she noticed it. For the exhibition, I used recycled newspaper to make an object similar to an egg crate; it is a very basic material, but it became a Zen and natural work. Ai Jing always says that I can teach her about space, but I learn about space from the Chinese Zen.

### **Dr. Pier Francesco Fumagalli, Vice Prefect & Director of Far Eastern Studies at the Accademia Ambrosiana**

When I was at Ai Jing's exhibition, I saw many children with their parents; a lot of them were mothers with three or five-year-olds. There was a child who was probably five, very interesting, he took the letters L, O, V, E off the floor and put the word "Love" together on his own. He had a good time. I think what is great about Ai Jing's art is that it is even comprehensible for children. Love is very very important, for humanity and for nature. We keep talking about protecting the nature and creating more love for humanity. This is a great example. I was very happy to see the children at the exhibition, and it feels like a new fire, full of hope.

### **Robert C. Morgan, Editor at Asian Art News**

I am very happy to be at this symposium and closing ceremony for my dear friend Ai Jing. Undoubtedly, many friends and colleagues have been supportive of the exhibition. The Ai Jing I know is not only a famous singer but also a famous artist now. I think I have just used many words to describe Ai Jing, and there is someone similar in the United States. His name is Bob Dylan. For a long time, people think that Bob is a country singer, and he sings folk and pop songs. In fact, he is an artist as well. I use this example to show that it is possible for an artist to do well in one context as well as another one. But you have to be a superman, like Ai Jing.

Let's talk about what we should keep in mind when we talk about museums. I know there will soon be 200 more new museums in Shanghai. How will they survive? What should we do? How will they attract visitors instead of being storage space for artworks? Today we define museums as a lively representation of our culture. We know that a museum is more than the architecture. It needs to promote exhibitions, and it should have programs that attract visitors.

This is the sixth time I have been to Shanghai; the first was 2002 when I came here for the Shanghai Biennial. I hope that I will have more opportunities to be here-not just here-but many other places in China. I believe that China is a great country with great art; in fact, we have already seen the evidence. If we want our museums and art to survive and thrive, we need more support from other organizations. What is more important is that we should feel passionate about museums.