



Chinese performance art, 2009
screenprint

La Trobe University, Geoff Raby Collection of Chinese Art.
Donated by Dr Geoff Raby AO through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019. © Hua Jiming.
Photo: Jia De

Chinese performance art (2009) forms part of a body of work by the artist Hua Jiming that historicises various periods and people of art history, both Chinese and Western.

The images stitched together here are hand-drawn impressions of many of the most famous works within the canon of Chinese performance art from its beginnings in the 1980s. In this accumulation of individual artworks, some of the major tendencies of performance art in China begin to emerge, among them its broadly subversive character. Other themes pictured here include extreme body-oriented and durational works – Zhang Huan, *12M²* (1994), and Tehching Hsieh, *Cage piece* (1978–79) and *Rope piece* (1983) – the reconciliation of new experiences of commercialisation and Westernisation through the 1990s – Xu Bing, *Culture animal* (1993), and Zhu Fadong, *This person is for sale, price to be negotiated* (1994) – new kinds of engagement with public space vis-à-vis the body of the Chinese citizen – Song Dong, *Breathing* (1996) – the exploration and subversion of gender – Fen-Ma Liuming, *Lunch* (1994) – the legacy of Dada and the readymades of Duchamp – Huang Yongping's *Roulette series* (1985–88) – and, finally, the lack of women included within this medium and within the canon of contemporary Chinese art more broadly, with Xiao Lu's *Dialogue* (1989) being the only work by a female artist represented here.

Hua relies on the notoriety of the works that he depicts, which are recognisable even through his rough and haphazard linework. The cultural currency of these images reveals that *Chinese performance art* is not only a document of the history of Chinese performance art itself, but also of its historicisation. These images have been drawn from the 'official' photographic documentation of these works, each of which has come to stand in for the complexity of the performances themselves as messy and multifaceted events. Obscured here, between Hua and the works that he depicts, is another figure in the history of contemporary Chinese performance art: that of the photographer. Their role as documenter of this history has, in many cases, opened up complex questions of authorship and ownership as these images have later circulated in the global art market.

Genevieve Trail, 2022