



Tong Kunniao

In 2015, one of artist Tong Kunniao's installation works was bought by a museum director. Ahead of him lay dozens of exhibition invitations and contracts with galleries from both China and abroad. At the age of just 25, Tong was a fresh graduate from the sculpture department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

The same year, one of Tong's counterparts Hao Liang had taken part in several influential shows held at leading Chinese museums and galleries. The 32-year-old ink wash painter had made a big splash a year previously with one of his works fetching 5.6 million yuan (\$820,128) at Christie's auction house in Shanghai, a record sum for a living Chinese painter aged under 35.

With support from art institutions, galleries and auction houses, the thriving art market in China over the past decade has provided a healthy environment for artists born after 1985, a generation whose art and thinking has been greatly influenced by the internet and the forces of globalization.

"China's strong economy makes it possible for them to rise to fame early in their careers. They are familiar with the internet and technology, which helps them express their ideas in their artwork," says Zhu Zhu, an independent curator and art critic.

Zhu sees these young artists as "a generation of screeners", who are good at obtaining knowledge from various sources on the internet to produce artworks that focus on their emotions and personalities. Unlike the older generation of Chinese artists whose knowledge systems were built mainly on their life experiences, these young artists are far more familiar with Western art history.

"Due to the internet and globalization, the topics that young artists in China concern themselves with, their selection of artistic mediums and their means of expression mirror those of their peers in the West," Zhu adds.

Tong Kunniao



Tong Kunniao's installation made from rubbish. PROVIDED FOR CHINA DAILY

Before dismantling his large-scale outdoor installation *Art Trash* at Beijing's Minsheng Art Museum in person, Tong played football with some of his young artist friends. The 29-year-old jokes that he is both a football player and a part-time artist.

The six-meter high artwork with doodles on its surface attracted thousands of visitors to explore its two-storey interior, decorated with dozens of small installations, during its display at a music festival in Beijing in April. Like the name of the work, most of Tong's artworks are made from trash, or to be more exact — from discarded materials.

"My friends always ask me first whether I want something when they are about to throw it away. My studio is full of discarded objects," says Tong, who had just been given a set of wheels from a friend's old car.

Because of his passion for collecting rubbish, Tong is often labeled as an environmental artist and he was even invited to take part in a TV show about environmental protection in June.

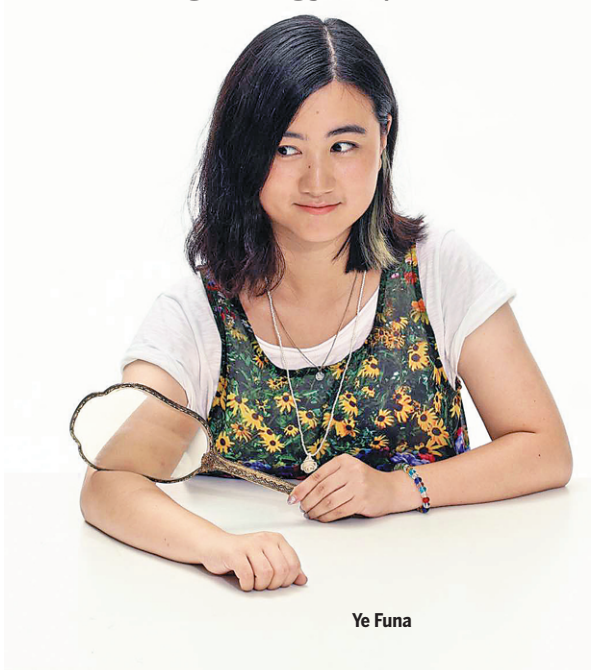
For Tong, art can be done in a relaxed way, and he prefers to focus on individual emotions. His art is often inspired by daily life and things that happen to him or his friends.

The artist tries to use recycled objects to express a sense of humor as well as to respond to contradictions in life and society. This is apparent in his work *Do Something Without Pig Ass*, where he made silicone pig tails beat drum-like cutting boards.

Since graduation from college, Tong receives at least 20 exhibition invitations a year, together with requests to collaborate with brands and art institutions. Over the past three years, he has taken up art residency projects and

AWASH WITH IDEAS

A new generation of Chinese artists are using the internet to inspire them to break new ground in terms of technique, style and genre, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.



Ye Funa

held solo shows in the United States, France and Germany.

"There are too many invitations. I refused some this year just to spend more time on my artwork," he says.

Tong says he is open to any art form as long as his ideas can be fully expressed. He paints, makes short videos, records voice-overs and music to compliment his artworks.

This year, he started to draw a series of small-scale ink paintings onto silk, and now often spends entire nights working on them. Tong says that after years of turning to learn from Western art, he has now begun to look at his own culture and identity to find artistic inspiration.

Hao Liang

Unlike Tong's flexible choice of art forms, Hao Liang has dedicated himself to traditional Chinese ink painting since he was a young boy. The Beijing-based artist is still certain that ink will be his only focus for a some time to come.

Regarded as a representative of China's finest young ink painters, Hao's works are collected by top international museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

The 35-year-old's solo exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery in New York in June was a sellout show.

Hao's unique approach of reinventing the traditional genre of Chinese art sees him mixing elements from both East and West in his scrolls, which are often more than 10 meters long.

His latest scroll *Streams and Mountains Without End* took him more than half a year to complete. The plants, mountains and stones in the painting are gradually transformed into geometric shapes, a departure in style from the traditional Chinese ink techniques used by ancient painters to follow the forms of cubism forged by Pablo Picasso.

"My art is complicated and contains a variety of cultural influences, not just Chinese culture," explains Hao.

Thanks to the internet, Hao has easy access to various areas of interest, such as those from Persian and Islamic cultures. He has also read works by many philosophers from Russia and the West.

"I have wide interests, all related to culture," says Hao at his studio while drinking Chinese tea. On his worktable also stand bottles of whiskey.

Born into a film family — his grandfather was a movie director and his father a producer — the painter's scrolls are influenced by film shooting techniques.

"My long scrolls are like the stories told in a film. I employ various storytelling techniques to portray the landscape," he explains.

Hao has been demonstrating his talent for ink painting since the age of four. He loved visiting an antique market close to his home as a teenager, which also helped him develop his love for traditional Chinese art.

Hao earned a master's degree from the ink painting department of the Sich-



Hao Liang's painting *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* — Relics. PROVIDED FOR CHINA DAILY



Hao Liang

uan Fine Arts Institute in 2009 and won a key art prize later that year, leading to rapid fame in art circles.

His ink painting depicting a man with a mask fetched millions of yuan in 2014 at the Christie's autumn auction, winning him wide exposure to art institutions both at home and abroad.

The artist, however, seems unperturbed by his fame. He keeps to a regular daily routine divided between his home and his studio, and shuns social media to focus on his work. He is not generally considered as a prolific artist since his long scrolls takes months to complete.

Ye Funa

For artist Ye Funa, she can't imagine how she would survive without the internet now that both her life and art are so closely interconnected.

Ye launched her signature artwork *Nail Project* on her WeChat account. She originally planned to assemble some ideas for fingernail art in 2014 and called on her friends to offer their input.

Her call was answered with such passion that she was completely caught off guard as thousands of people offered their own creative ideas as the topic went viral across social media.

In 2015, the artist started to conduct performance art online by tapping into the rising popularity of live steaming. Entitled *Peep Stream*, Ye broadcast several performance art shows that would normally have taken place in a theater live on the internet, drawing tens of thousands of views from ordinary people who had probably never seen such a show.

"My art focuses on pop culture and the public aesthetic," says Ye, 32, who is also a teacher with the experimental art school of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

"The internet is just a tool for me to bridge the divide between the public and art," Ye explains.



Nail works from Ye Funa's *Nail Project*. PROVIDED FOR CHINA DAILY

She also paints, creates installations and makes videos. The artist refuses to limit the definition of her art to a single medium.

"These days, it's hard to define young artists' work. We choose whatever form that can realize our ideas," adds Ye, who is currently living in Switzerland as part of an art residency project.

Ye was born into an artistic family. Her father Ye Yongqing is an established ink painter and her mother is a sculptor and oil painter.

Although she has been immersed in an artistic environment since childhood, Ye says she never thought of being an artist until she went to study art at Central Saint Martins in London.

As for her internet-related art projects, Ye says many people didn't understand her in China. But thanks to years of study in London and experiencing her peers' experimental art practices there, she now feels much more sure about her own art.

Ye also had a lot of show invitations offered by art institutions after her graduation. She has already held several solo shows in various cities around China.

Speaking of the difference between her parents and her, Ye gives the example of Coca-Cola.

"For my parents, Coca-Cola can be used as a metaphor in their work, while for me, it's just part of everyday life," she adds.

Just like the internet, she grew up with it, and is used to spending about 10 hours online every day. New technology, Ye says, is just a tool to help young artists to show off their personality.

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