

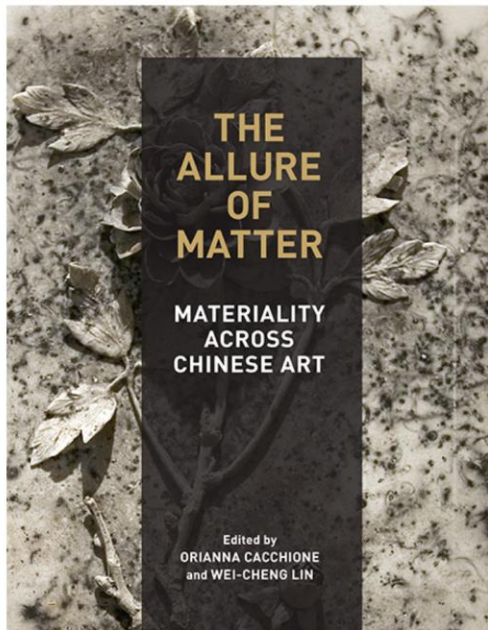
W9 (Week 3, Thursday)
**Materiality - Comparing
materiality of civilisations
Ancient China**

HPAR4010

What makes civilisation?

Dr Katharina Zinn / Dr Thomas Jansen

THE ALLURE OF MATTER: MATERIALITY ACROSS CHINESE ART



\$35 / 328 pages, 110 color plates, 7-3/4" x 10-1/4" / ISBN
9780935573640 / © 2021

Since the inventions of porcelain and gunpowder, Chinese artists have experimented with unconventional artistic materials and used conventional materials in unorthodox ways.

This groundbreaking volume is the first publication to expound the trans-historical importance of materiality in Chinese art by bringing together essays from leading scholars, curators, and conservators. Essayists Anne Feng, Yuhang Li, Wei-Cheng Lin, Catherine Stuer, and Yusen Yu examine how materials including lacquer, rock crystal, paper, and gold stimulated advances in premodern Chinese art. Alex Burchmore, Orianna Cacchione, Nancy P. Lin, Sara A. Moy, and Rachel Rivenc analyze several instances of material experimentation in contemporary Chinese art in essays that consider materials as varied as gunpowder, plastic, and water.

This book builds upon scholarship originally presented at the **Art and Materiality Symposium**, held on the

Let's imagine

- An art form, “based not on representational, iconographic, stylistic, or even geographic conventions but instead on the materials used in its making”
- “Material Art” (*caizhi yishu* 材质艺术): a “type of art [that] entails an artist’s consistent use of unconventional materials to produce works in which material, rather than image or style, is paramount in manifesting the artist’s aesthetic judgment or social critique.” (Wu Hung 2019: 15)
- → Need to take into account the role, agency, potentiality, and constraints materials have on artists and artworks, not just on the final artwork but on the production process as well.

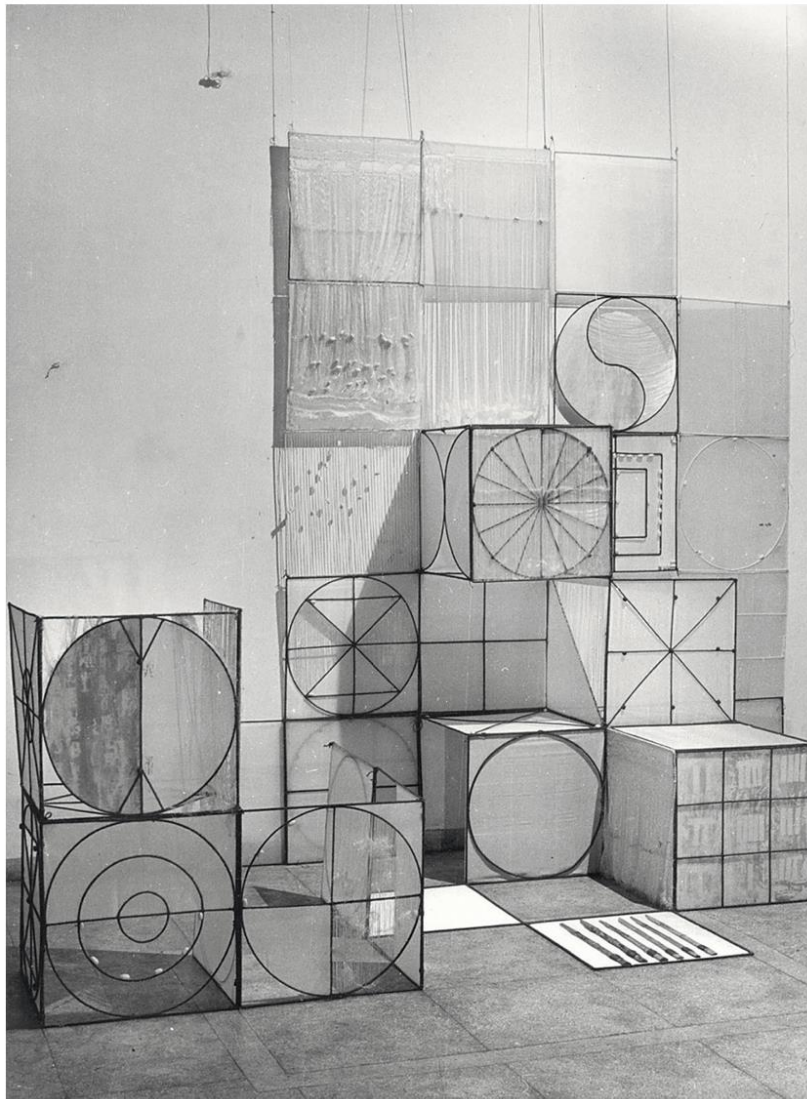


Figure 1 Liang Shaoji, *Yi Series No. 1–Magic Cube*, 1988. Silk fabric, dried silkworm cocoons, rice paper, and metal, dimensions variable. Installation view, *China/Avant-Garde*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing, 1989. Courtesy of Liang Shaoji.

Materials as diverse as water, xuan paper, cement, raw meat, pig brains, the human body, yak butter, human fat, honey, porcelain, incense ash, and pantyhose.

Materiality



Figure 2 Ruyi scepter, eighteenth or nineteenth century. White jade, 40 × 13 × 5.4 cm. Collection of the Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, The Brooks McCormick, Jr. Bequest, 2015.1422.

- Focus not on finished artwork(s) but rather on the material(s) of which they are made.
- What is a 'material'?
- What does it do?
- What does it mean?



Figure 3 Ga De, *Ice Buddha (Bingfo)*, 2006. Site-specific performance with Buddha made of ice, dimensions variable over time. Courtesy of Ga De.

The material approach

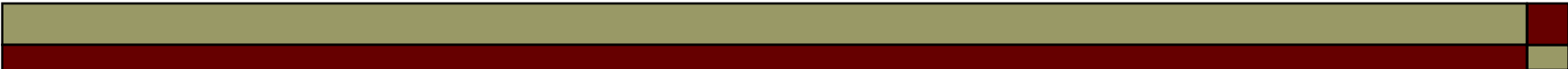
- ...“pays attention to each work’s physical presence, substance, scale, the process by which it was made, and other factors.” (Miller 2021: 5)
- Scholarly discourse tends to project universal interpretations or cultural constructs onto objects or imagery – this object is used in ancestor worship.
- Human beings’ capacity to recognize and produce signs guides our interpretation → *cognitive approach*.

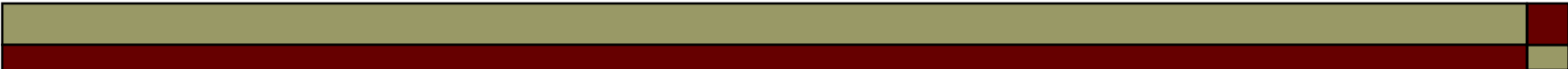
Materials

- Shift in the very conception of the role of materials: from the phenomenological *encounter* to the ways in which histories, stories, and agency are directly embedded in materials.
- Tim Ingold argues, “to understand materials is to be able to tell their histories—of what they do and what happens to them when treated in particular ways—in the very practice of working with them.” Ingold 2012: 434.
- Jane Bennett: “things do in fact affect other bodies” (Bennett 2010: 5)

How did people select material?

- ❑ Criteria people followed when selecting materials to produce objects:
- ❑ “material-task synergy”: a preference for raw materials efficient to obtain and/or to work upon.
- ❑ “material-function synergy”: demonstrates partiality towards particular substances depending on the crafted object’s intended function.
- ❑ “material-representation synergy”: a partiality towards particular substances whose physical attributes are reminiscent of other substances; and that may have mattered in terms of representation.

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- ❑ Material availability did not dictate substance exploited to make tools
 - ❑ Communities did not only use materials that were easily available → great effort to acquire materials deemed better suited for the implements' intended function
 - ❑ Choice was exercised when choosing materials



Early Figural Representation

- Figurines crafted in antler, bone, shell, stone, clay



Fig. 3.1 Bird figurine carved in an antler (front and back)
Lingjing, Henan province



Fig. 3.2 Stone bear head
Baiyinchanghan, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia



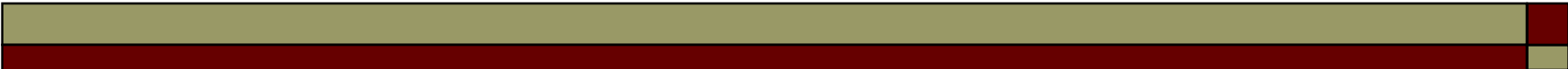
Fig. 3.2 Shell human face
Baiyinchanghan, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia



Fig. 3.4 Open-work eyes on carved human skull
Xinglonggou, Aohan Banner, Inner Mongolia



Fig. 3.5 Clay pig figurine
Xiaojingshan, Shandong province

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- ❑ Meritocratic rule from the Qin onward → specific implications for the art commissioned by the aristocrats of the period.
 - ❑ Elites were concerned with their peers' reception of works that they commissioned; also with such works' impact on the larger population.
- How did Chinese art connect with political expression?

Literature

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Thank you for listening!

感谢大家!

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