Hans Ulrich Obrist Interviews Liu Wei

HUO: First of all I want to say how happy I am that we could reconnect and do this new interview. I'll begin at the beginning and ask you how it all started: How did you come to art, or how did art come to you? Was there a kind of epiphany involved?

LW: No, it was an uneventful transition… I was painting when I was young, there was nothing to entertain me, I had nothing to do, and I was too young to read. I'd seen an older kid painting and it seemed really interesting; you could clearly express all sorts of interesting things. So there I was painting but I had no education in traditional ink painting. My parents supported my interest and later I attended the middle school attached to the China Academy of Art. The Academy had a big influence on me. I entered the middle school in 1988 and it shared the campus grounds with the Academy, which at that time was part of an active and progressive intellectual movement. Art then was not simply a visual thing and it was probably everything in your life. I believed it defined the present, and to this day I still question whether I'm really an artist. I'm certainly not an artist who just paints or makes installations.

HUO: Where would you say your first artwork lies? Where would the catalogue raisonné start?

LW: I really started in '99 with my video installation *Hard to Restrain*, which basically broke with the inertia of my college education. But I'd also been painting before then, and from '96 to '99 I'd say I was distancing myself from my student work, and I still feel that there was self-expression in those paintings, and there was emotion, so I could say that my portfolio began then. But I guess I didn't really begin seriously thinking about art, apart from paintings, until 2003 or 2004.

HUO: Can you tell me about these student paintings?

LW: They were slightly expressionistic and not very abstract, while being meticulous in an expressionist manner. I painted many pieces of fruit cut open, as though they were bodily organs, with open mouths through which you could see the throat, but flat, feeling just like the surface of the work had been cut open. It was still fairly perceptual.

HUO: And then obviously something happened with the exhibition "Post-Sense Sensibility." We discussed this already in the last interview, which we did for The China Interviews *that Phil Tinari published. But it would be good to come back to this exhibition, because somehow it wasn't a movement, it wasn't a manifesto, and yet it was a very important group show. It included Qiu Zhijie, Yang Fudong, Chu Yun and Xu Zhen—all these artists who work independently now—and you were telling me that*

you, and all these artists, were interested in the body, in the visceral. So I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how your work now is maybe less directly related to the body. And also if there was any kind of a connection to Viennese Actionism?

LW: I feel it's a bit like that. The generation ahead of us were not that much older than us, because they grew up during the socialist phase. It was after the opening up and reform that they were subject to new things from the West, but in fact they were very idealistic and political, rebelling against what had gone before them, because they had that earlier socialist education. But we grew up when things were constantly changing and nothing seemed stable. There was a turnaround in values every couple of years, and in that process all social values changed so there was no stability. Today you'd believe in one thing and tomorrow you'd believe in something completely different. Because we grew up that way, the art was also like that. I now think that the artists of the 1950s and 1960s were spiritually great, even though their work might not be the best. After we grew up, we actually discovered that they couldn't offer solutions for our many problems—going down that same path would have been hopeless. We needed a new ethos, and we needed our own forms. After the 1970s we were also influenced to some extent by the exhibition "Sensation" in the UK, and at the end of the spectrum there was the style of Viennese Actionism. At that time we felt we wanted brutalism, and every artist then seemed to want to spill blood and have power. Those were the only criteria.

HUO: If one looks at your solo work, which has been basically ever since this group dissolved and everybody began to pursue their own trajectory, what is interesting is—and I realize there are these parallel realities in your work—there is photography, there is painting, there is installation, there is your more socially informed practice, etc.

LW: Art's just like this, and there's no simple, single mode of expression. In the past you might have reached a particular conclusion or understanding about the world, but it is in reality itself that we read, ponder, discuss and imagine how we should read reality and ask what reality fundamentally is. Because when we fling our abstract understanding back into the real world, what we get is no longer a theoretical view, but the virtual outcome of our understanding and possibly also the imaginative space activated in the process. It's these imaginary and virtual results that motivated me to make art, and they're a way of tossing aside material and logical thought, as well as the idea that there is only one way to understand the world and one way to act. Other mediums all come with their own ideological aspects, and so if they don't work for now, they may be able to in the future.

HUO: So, how do you decide on adopting a certain medium over another?

LW: This might involve some hard thinking. Take performance for example. Some of us artists have discussed the problem of how we preserve performance as an artwork, and in most cases performance is actually made into a work in video, photographic or documentary form. But the result is that the performance itself is secondary, and if you were to repeat the performance it would be like staging a show, which could only be an archive, and this is one reason I avoid performance as a genre. It is valid only as a one-off in time, and its authenticity can't stand a second run. But this "absolute" draws me to it, and I'm always wondering how performance art can be used.

Things can exist in the mind, and it'd basically seem that anything can exist materially, but it's also because of the mind that materiality is limited. We all know that all existing systems, philosophies, knowledge and behavior have their constituent historical and political elements, and only when we interrogate and reflect on them can we see the reality of what they are. This is what I want to reflect on, and of course this type of thinking is not directly experiential or based on action. For me it's an aesthetic principle, and if it's concretely applied in action then I hope that there's cautious scrutiny and control—that might be what I demand—so that the aesthetic sense brought about by the logicality of the intellectual question and the mode of expression is again not a simple question of form. There are in fact already many limitations—for example I can't make use of scientific principles or high-tech media technologies, nor can I directly make use of news events. Possibilities that seem to be too simple and lacking in logic exercise control over my excessive desires—sensory stimuli, utilitarianism and real behavior, as aesthetic questions. We come with so much baggage and we have to choose the times when we toss a lot away.

HUO: We should talk a little bit more about your exhibition at the Minsheng Art Museum. It's 2011, it's a good moment to be looking at all the work that you've been doing, and also in this moment there is this exhibition called "Trilogy." Do you consider that to be a survey? Because there seems to be a lot of different elements coming together.

LW: In fact I'd thought the work [in this exhibition] had been pushed out of sight. I'd been working on *Merely a Mistake* for about three years and I'd gone through several stages in thinking about it—from the removal of the earliest subject, then onto something baroque and then to some futurist sculpture. I'd discovered that none of my conceptions had any significance for the work's visuality, which had in fact become the piece's dominating concept. I thought that what would finally remain would be time and the power of determination, but now I can see that they weren't enough, and maybe I wanted

to continue until I could no longer go on, so I renamed the work *Kalpa of Death* for a while. I often felt utterly powerless, with reality so powerful. But this is a good thing, and it was the motivation for doing this exhibition; the external reality I felt through my works seemed so powerful and cruel that the works were diluted. The important thing was not the actual works but what they brought with them. Reality is so powerful, but people living in its midst feel numbed most of the time. I wanted to describe how the rationality of real existence is determined, and how we should remain suspicious of it. I also hoped the works could somehow reflect true reality, and that in the future we could develop in that direction, given that our immediate reality should be something else.

HUO: Yes, I'm interested in this aspect of reality because we discussed it a little bit last time in the interview. But one of the things I didn't ask you, which I wanted to address this time, is the question of the production of reality. Because obviously architecture and urbanism play a big role in your work, and we could think about, for example, one of our earlier collaborations, Love It, Bite It*, which was part of "China Power Station" in Oslo, co-curated by Gunnar Kvaran, Julia Payton Jones and myself. Actually our first collaboration was the Guangzhou Triennial co-curated by Hou Hanru and me, which exhibited the 2005* Indigestion *pieces. But ever since, whenever we have collaborated—like on "China Power Station" and also on the Lyon Biennale which I organized with Stéphanie Moisdon and Thierry Raspail, where you did* Outcast*—the work has had a very strong connection to architecture. Obviously in the case of* Love It, Bite It *it is still at the level of the maquette. But in terms of* Outcast *on a one-to-one scale, it was a building, a sort of mini crystal palace. When I saw the images of your great exhibition "Trilogy," there was again a kind of urban sprawl. There's a piece with books and stainless steel at the end of the exhibition, an accumulation of skyscrapers really.*

LW: About cities. I'd never intended to move in the direction of architecture and, regardless of whether or not I was actually doing architecture, I can't say I was deliberately addressing architectural questions. It's completely natural to think that, of course, but many things are just unavoidable, and the city and country I live in is also like that. I grew up in a period of urbanization, and the massive changes in my environment and the problems these brought demanded attention as the cities expanded and wantonly developed. I populate my personal mental space with abandoned buildings and use them to express a demonic reality. But to provide any rational explanation for this work of mine probably lacks a sense of truth. I believe that time remains comparatively truthful, so it's not a bad thing to put questions about time to one side. At times, true reality doesn't feel real, and this is the gap I focus on; this is why I want to dispense with concepts in my work. This phase might pass, and my work might later return to my own self. In the past, when I had just begun to make artworks, they were all concerned with my personal

experience and feelings, but after 2004 I avoided these topics. The recognition that the expression of personal experience lacked a rationale was at that time replaced by the recognition that art was possibly a work sustained over a long period of time, and to examine each independent work in isolation was possibly of no significance. In this exhibition I am clearly aware of the context established for later work, and the necessary problems this will entail. So this exhibition is not definitive; it's more like a telling. Now I want to return to myself, but the focus and stratum are now different. Personal experience founded on rationality is sensory knowledge of rationality that places the body and spirit within reality. But without subjective engagement, it lacks authenticity.

HUO: We already mentioned a couple of examples of your links to architecture. We have Love It*,* Bite It*, we have* Outcast *and now there is the new piece at the entrance of the exhibition, which is a little bit like utopian architecture, but at the same time it's quite dystopian because it's made out of found fragments. Can you tell me about this piece?*

LW: In the past I'd made a stone out of books, and I was drawn to books because I'd never read enough but had seen a lot of them; somehow my sensory awareness of books was that they were actually like rocks. They were uniform in density and capacity, as well as visually, and no technology was required to give them their shared visual quality. Later it was simpler to turn books into buildings—they could hold a lot more. The morphology of books seemed to give them the ability to replace all other architectural and urban building materials, so that people could forget about streets, glass, cement, aluminum frames and lighting—the lot. Books could represent a real world and expand wantonly. These two works simplify these forms of materiality, so aren't they more material as a result? Is this question significant at all? I'd like to return to this topic later.

HUO: Can you tell me more about these three chapters in "Trilogy"? Because the exhibition in Shanghai involves many different aspects of your practice, but also each chapter seems to be very distinct and different from each other. It starts with this piece we described, with this urban sprawl, an almost organic sprawl, and then you go into other chapters called Merely a Mistake *and* Open the Door. *Can you explain to me the overall vision of this exhibition and if it's a kind of a total installation or a kind of a* Gesamtkunstwerk*?*

LW: At the outset we called it a trilogy, and at that time we hadn't decided on all the works that'd be in the exhibition, but generally speaking we first thought to make the three halls three stretches of conversation. This was an abstract notion that had no plot and the works had no background logic. The structure was in fact like the environment in which I usually work. My studio creates the lines along which I think about things, and when I

am making artworks and looking at them I invariably think of other questions, so when works are determined for presentation they've already become the dregs of thought, and the necessity of their survival was something I had thought about. What we make now should relate to ideology, and the first room of the exhibition, titled *Golden Section*, is visual ideology, which is very oppressive and which audiences are forced to view at close range. But the specific details are scattered, especially in the central room which houses *Merely a Mistake*, and they are part of a complete process of development from reality to phantasm, which is a demonic development encompassing many similar things—the transformation into the hallucinatory and demonic takes place in our reality. Later I wanted to get rid of everything, tossing out all concepts and attitudes, especially from that central room. I wanted to kill the lot, and by doing that I'd at least be able to feel the passage of time and sense the existence of will. You are somehow consumed, and everything is consumed, so if I left some of these concepts that already existed for a critic to consume with his predetermined language then this might possibly have been the most terrible thing.

The final room was about turning power on and off, and had nothing to do with old televisions, which was not an aesthetic I needed. I only needed that image of the dazzling instant, the flash, that stimulus coming at short intervals when the power is turned on and off, although it was not necessary that the power dazzled—simply that its use was ongoing. That was the simple point of departure.

HUO: One of the things that is interesting also is that the exhibition includes painting. You studied painting and have always remained interested in it, yet you told me that it's not the most important thing in the work because the most important thing is reality. Nonetheless it's recurrent. These paintings are done with a computer mouse. So, it's a necessity to continue painting. Maybe chance can also enter. These new paintings seem more reduced than the rather complex Purple *Air paintings and the more enmeshed earlier painting. You've also got this title,* Meditation. *Can you tell us about these new paintings and if the role of painting in your practice has changed?*

LW: My painting has changed and I now feel painting should develop in the direction of rationality. Now I think along the lines that each image and scene is a component in my mind that I can reassemble in any way. In analyzing the significance of the particular image, the greater significance it acquires through constant visual reordering, the closer that all issues and ideas are married to the visual. In a painting we add many daily experiences, and this is the truth and rationality of universal experience—and I won't discuss that. However, there is another visual truth that can make me feel I am experiencing something terribly unfamiliar, and for me it's not some deficiency I can make up for from the stock of imagery from quotidian experience, because it has drawn away

completely into something pristine that cannot be supplemented by something cerebral. Controlled observation, drawing on quotidian experience, is something I'm now extremely interested in. By subjecting our thought to control we are able to peel away the layers of superfluous experience and desire. It's a process you can't stop, because if you stop halfway, you have to go back to the beginning, because it's like the stars that are constantly moving and are without end, because you haven't thought that the strength of logic or thought is like thinking of a step in a process.

HUO: Maybe a few words about the last chapter, Open the Door. *One always thinks of doors and Duchamp, so I was very curious if there was any kind of relationship with your work to Duchamp, but I was also thinking of Nam June Paik when I saw these almost derelict monitors showing very basic lines.*

LW: The concept behind these readymades is abstract, and I have no interest in either media, the content media can express or materiality in itself. I am only interested in the mode of existence and movement of these entities: the old television sets are unimportant. One can rip off their casings so that there is nothing but the tube—and it's the strong light of the picture tubes that I need—but I felt that displaying them that way was also not good, because I wanted to respect their authenticity, and whatever went beyond the reality of their existence was unnecessary—that was the point my consciousness reached. That whole room was a single work; the more the core was compressed the better, and in the instant the TV was turned off it seemed that everything imploded into an infinitely tiny speck of light. Later, all the objects nearby were related to this, and the entire work had the feeling of sinking into it. When the works *Open the Door* and *Power* were together, the environment of the whole room changed, and from being visual and literary they became more intellectually and logically ambiguous. I had no way of deciding what was more interesting for me; maybe I was more interested in these dubious relationships, regardless of how I'd later explain them.

HUO: Also it's interesting because it reminded me of a show called "Property of Liu Wei," which was a show you did in 2006, one of the earliest of your shows I had seen: there was an Anti-Matter TV*, an* Anti-Matter Washing Machine*, there was an* Anti-Matter Fan*. I was very amazed by that. It's interesting because when we worked on the Guangzhou Triennial, we showed* Indigestion*, and you said the realness comes from the materials. They were very scatological pieces, made out of residues of oil production.*

LW: These early works dealt with concrete reality, which can entail too much discussion of social ethics calling for plans for solving problems. At my present stage I haven't reached the level for dealing with this and this isn't something I want to think about. I require a limited

reality that includes all things, encompassing those that are cut and those that are anti-material and which can render it incomplete or lacking, destroy it, or produce something that must be confined within it. This is basically it, and it's a simple way of thinking. I don't want too much in my works; I want to minimize the work entailed, and that's what I'm seeking.

HUO: At the beginning your work was about the body. The earliest work I saw when I came to China was a sort of fragmented body photography in the early 2000s. And then the body was gone but the work was still very organic—it was these Indigestion *piles.*

LW: In the earlier period, the body was something from my personal experience and sensory knowledge, and I was aware that this was limited with regard to the era and environment in which I lived. I was even lacking any sense of the authentic, because your sensitivity to your own body might simply be numbed in a society like this going through such dramatic change.

I should explain at the outset that these turds were not a magnification of human turds. *Indigestion* was not about a particular creature, and biology itself is the protagonist. You know that this animal is something that was somehow able to digest these things that have suddenly come out and that the growth of desire is greater than your digestive system, hence *Indigestion*. The logic behind this was inconsequential, I now feel. The biological feeling that Leon Golub described might, I think, be interesting, because it has something of the parallel worlds you mentioned earlier, but I haven't so far made that connection and so this could be a revelation for me.

HUO: Scientists often tell me about the moment of a discovery. Benoît Mandelbrot described the moment he discovered fractals. Do you remember the day you invented Love it, Bite it*? Because this has become one of your most iconic pieces, and I was just curious, when did you invent it?*

LW: This is an interesting question and I often think that the world is controllable and everything is determined. So when you say that on a rainy Wednesday you discovered fractals, I feel that all the elements had to be in place to make that possible. *Love It, Bite It* came about because when I was thinking that if you removed all the buildings embodying power from the city so that it was like a warren of cells in which the poor could live, I happened to be looking at my dog licking an ox's ear, and in China an ox's ear is a metaphor for authority, and so if the dog actually bit into the ox's ear, then he would soften it up and it would taste even better. Of course I don't know what motivates my dog, and not being a dog I can never know, but he does love those things. That's where I made the conceptual connection for that work.

HUO: We're having a conversation for your book, so maybe we could talk about the role of books in your work and to what extent the medium of the book is significant.

LW: For me books are mostly materials, and I've used more of them in my art than I've ever read. I've also burned a lot, but they don't burn well, because they're so compact. I don't read every day and it's more a physiological need, like when I'm troubled or depressed. Reading calms me down. Then they make me look at the world more rationally and sense reality, providing a basis for my feelings; but when I'm actually making art, I can never think about them and I conceal my knowledge.

HUO: What are your favorite books?

LW: I rarely read fiction and mostly read philosophy, history and science fiction, or some types of reference books. Most recently I've been reading the history of Western philosophy and other books that let me understand more about Western society. Maybe that's because there are problems in life that cannot be solved, as well as artistic and commercial questions that also can't be solved. But you don't need so many things and you have no way of rationally discriminating between them. Or do you need to know what things you fundamentally need? If you confront reality simply then you'll strengthen your spirit.

HUO: Do you do your own books, artist books, books you design?

LW: No, I don't. I feel that if you can express yourself in writing this must be a wonderful thing, and the feeling must be like what I get from creating art, but I really don't have that talent. However, writing in the same way as Wu Shanzhuan is appealing to me—marrying symbols or diagrams with texts. The kind of imagination generated from diagram-like imagery often carries great meaning for me. For example, when Einstein explained gravity and the bent universe (or something similar) he used a diagram that looked like a lot of balls thrown on a net, warping it. It's hard to make up the kind of wonder that visual association can achieve.

HUO: Where do you see the key inventions in the work? Obviously Love It, Bite It *is a very iconic work, but where do we see the moments that are turning points?*

LW: *Love It, Bite It* is far from being my favorite work, because audiences see it in a way I didn't intend, and so I felt a complete loss of control; even though it was well received I found that hard to accept. So I refused to do anything else in that series. But I still ended

up doing more works, and whether it was other people's encouragement or my own desire, the compromise was for me more truthful, or maybe I wanted it this way. The 2003 Shenzhen Biennale curated by Hou Hanru marked a turning point for me, as that was the first time I worked with an international curator. I really respected him, but my work was a failure and I didn't even complete it. After that I began to think seriously about my career.

HUO: It was a new beginning?

LW: That came in 2006 when I created *As Long As I See It*—that marked a major turning point. But it was only the start of my work on my buttocks [landscape series], and it wasn't complete, and only by 2006 can I say that I had made a complete turnaround. It was finally in 2009 that I embarked on the work I have been doing until now.

Phil Tinari: Yeah, the cutting works, which was this idea of the material being exactly what was in the frame of the Polaroid photo. I think you see that kind of still happening in the recent show—you have a lot of things playing off that.

LW: That's not the whole story. It wasn't so much the Minsheng Art Museum, but having the reality that enabled me to have the sense of sequence to construct phantasms. This careful thinking probably characterized the earliest of the buttocks series, because although the subject was the body, the work had nothing to do with biology; but if biology was of no consequence, then it was totally because of the problems of the system. This in fact marked a turn towards something simpler. Being simpler, it was also purer and more direct in its dogmatic expression, and so they had to accept the work, which they saw as beautiful landscapes. This process ended my earlier stage of the sensory and, discovering that there was no way reality could be circumvented, what you face is a robust, rationally constructed reality.

HUO: Let's talk more about Love It, Bite It. *Can you tell me about what triggered the idea for this piece?*

LW: It was a chance work made during a period that might be regarded as my turning point or epiphany. Man's desire for power is like a dog biting dog chews. Man and dog are both animals. When you look at that work, you know what it is, but if you make it more squishy, people might find it beautiful. It seems that power is enticing, and however you dress it up, it still radiates an aura. It was from that time on that I felt that all work seemed to become more complex, although it was in fact astoundingly simple; but simplicity acquires technique to give it richer and stronger spiritual force.

The work can be casual, but when I decide to do something, one of the reasons I do it is I can sense the relationship between its visual form and its rationale, and I believe my style and materials are a sufficient substitute for technology. For example, when I was working with books or with dog chews, I let my assistants improvise, doing what they thought reality permitted, and so there was no chance that technical issues would arise and they could continue with the work. I only needed to control the master plan, and if there was any doubling up I'd try and solve the core problem. This seemed to have transcended art, but I was using art to resolve problems, and that made me even freer.

The entire exhibition was a process of logical thought, with technical logic and social behavior being aesthetically unified and ultimately being the quest for the authentic. As for the organic blending of different materials subjected to authentic sensation, this truth didn't derive from any delineation of reality, so how could it be described? If you describe it as a painting, you regard the material sensation as not so important. But for me, this might be the reason I made it. The sensation of its painted surface might be the kernel of the authentic sense, and this is knowledge acquired through the senses mediated through thought, oblivious to whether technique or concepts come first. But everything [in the exhibition] was like that, and the installations were like that; like the development of human society, technology and thought arose at the same time, and everything is similar, and so in view of this commonality within, there cannot be problems.

HUO: Do you consider yourself to be a painter? Or do you consider yourself to be a sculptor? Or do you consider yourself to be an installation artist? Or is it a redundant question?

LW: I can't think about these questions, and for me it's not an issue. Apart from the fact that I have specific definitions of what a painter or a sculptor is, I require that any term embodies my conceptual attitude.

HUO: And what's the future?

LW: For now I've cancelled all future exhibitions, and previously I had also called off a number of shows. Small and large—I've cancelled everything for the second half of this year and the start of next year. I'm not saying that I can't do anything more, it's just that I need a break in my life and to move on and get everything finished. I have a lot piled up, and I need to take it apart, because there is some criticality, to a greater or lesser extent, to the things I've done to date. Now I feel that much of what they say has little or no significance; many concepts seem interesting, but are actually spurious and perhaps mere decoration. Now I'm thinking about things, and some seem to be developing and moving

in the direction of socialist realism and whatever form that genre could possibly take in the present context. You make discoveries and critique them; but one also needs to be vigilant about such enthusiasms.

HUO: Photographic works?

LW: Photography, painting, sculpture—all are primitive constructions, and when you hear these words you feel a sense of strength, as though in 3-D.

HUO: What is your relation to the art market? In the '90s nobody in the Chinese art world talked about the market.

LW: Even reading books is about this question. I never had this sense before, and now we are increasingly losing control in the face of commercialization, especially since the coming of the Western galleries—and you can see they have all come to China to do business. We earlier posited that the West had a strong and unyielding rational culture, and it was a West about which we had many illusions, including about its gallery system and its academic system, but now there has suddenly been bit of a change. It's no longer so strong, business is not doing well, and, given that, we really don't know how we should consider these issues. The things you believed in are no more, and so you have to be stronger alone.

I am not opposed to capital[ism] and I feel in fact that capital is interesting because it is more valid than anything else and it's a truthful reality; it's the soil in which everything can be realized and imprinted. But now it feels somewhat… There is no choice, and capital has no choice. The opposition is basically gone. We never could have imagined that we would have the feeling that nothing we do is of importance and that nothing we think of is important, and that in the end only acquiring capital is of any significance and everything we acquire has become something that can carry a price tag in a supermarket. It's not that the things you do can't change— you can do architecture rather than sculpture—but the more you struggle the more you become a pawn in their game, and this struggle is very subtle.

HUO: One thing that we haven't explored yet in the interview is this whole idea about the readymade—particularly now that you want to talk more about reality. There is the readymade that can go back to its original function and there is the readymade that is irreversibly modified. The Skype conversation was interrupted when we discussed this.

LW: That's right, we were cut off by Skype, and I'm just trying to think again about what we were talking about. I really didn't know that was real, and now I feel that being cut

off by Skype was very real—virtual but disconnected. Now we are back. I think that in this life so many things are superfluous, and so we often play with readymade objects not wanting to make another thing, and the things I design do not have the rationality of the readymade, and they always lack an arm or a leg or are mentally impaired, so the existence of readymades is like the existence of living creatures as a perfect society of organisms.

HUO: Dan Graham always says the most interesting thing nobody looks at is the "just past." They look at the future, they look at the past, they look at the present, but no one looks at the "just past."

LW: In fact, I prefer to think of the "almost now" rather than the "just past," but it is not now, however close it might be. To begin with, you could fantasize more about many more things, as we were just discussing, and they could all be distinguished. In the past there were many fantasies including technology and for many things you could have a body and personal fantasies, but later you discovered this wasn't interesting so you just returned to reality. But when you really entered the midst of reality it was in that instant that you could feel that this wasn't authentic, because you'd made no judgment about any of the things, and that came as a sudden discovery. So I feel that there's always the "almost now" in all of this. I feel that it might be more interesting because looking at things that way must be precise and requires greater space and temporality.

HUO: I noticed that you don't have a website. And there doesn't seem to be a lot of focus on your online presence so far. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the Internet?

LW: It's not that I don't pay attention to the Internet, but I am always forgetting to pay the maintenance fee for my website and so other people have taken over the domain. After it happened twice I decided I didn't need that type of website, if it had no particular mode of thinking and was only serving as publicity for my own works. I felt I didn't need it and so there was no need to be online. I am always avoiding high-tech and technical media works. In 1996 when I acquired Windows I began to chat online, and I felt that the world was fantastic and completely virtual and that everything could become an art work, and that the distances between individuals—including what we were discussing earlier as well as gaming sequences and images—could all attract people, and it was all very exciting. But later I discovered that you want to do something interesting but the outcome dazzles as technology, and I felt that what I wanted was not technology but an understanding of it. Now I'm wondering how I can put this question to use, because it is something you can't avoid, because changes become increasingly socialized, you can't cut yourself off from it, and when you lack it you become the past, even though it might not be the entirety of your life. What ultimately is

the truth in its reality and what degree of truth is there? Earlier we spoke about unrestricted closeness to reality, but I neither wish to reminisce nor wish to be in the future.

PT: For you it's still always about this pursuit of truth.

LW: Even if it has authentic truth, I'm not going after technology and I'm not going to talk too much about views that might be too conjectural, because the truth I need requires logic. This is very important if you are not a computer geek. For example, when I began as an artist, China had very few computers, but the people around me were pretty amazing and some of them could be called hackers, and so we discovered that the things we were doing together, they saw differently. Our usual experiments had no significance for science. But while our conjecture took place dispassionately, we were delighted when we repeatedly first discovered the nature of something. Still, we needed some authentic truth, and this was the problem.

HUO: What about Pop? Is there a connection to Pop?

LW: I like Pop, and when I was a student there was a lot of it about that I liked, but for me it's not something I can use.

HUO: What role does chance play in your work?

LW: I can't accept random chance. I demand control. It's the result of cognition, which is direct experience.

HUO: Do you write?

LW: I haven't read that much, very little. I cannot express myself so well in language and writing, but I believe that writing is a wonderful form of expression, and very pure. When I was in Berlin, I was motivated to write and used to try writing.

HUO: What's the smallest work you've created?

LW: A ceramic work, a small cup, which had an opening in it.

HUO: And your biggest work?

LW: That room, or this show at the Minsheng Art Museum.

HUO: We haven't talked about your sketches yet. Are you a doodler?

LW: It's a habit I have. If someone is talking I might be sketching on paper. It's very casual. I usually carry a notebook around with me, and I might be sketching when I'm talking, without thinking about it.

HUO: What is the newest work that you created yesterday? When I asked Hans-Peter Feldmann he e-mailed me this image of a pillow on a table. What is your newest work?

LW: It seems I haven't made a work for a long time, and after the Minsheng show I didn't want to do anything. But if I was in my studio I might automatically start working on something new, so I should go back and try it.

HUO: Do you have dreams?

LW: It seems I dream very rarely.

HUO: Do you have any projects that were censored or self-censored?

LW: Often. Every day I discard a lot, and for now my life is mostly taken up with discarding things. There are still things to go through, and the last one will probably be the train to the Shanghai Biennale.

HUO: You were to smuggle on a train?

LW: At that time I was fascinated by the idea of being an illegal immigrant or smuggler, when a person's identity, art and the good life—everything—depended on getting across the border. Of course there were different ways of doing it. But the essential thing was the process of negotiating the journey, and of course the obvious thing to negotiate was ensuring that the track you took between countries was one that was facilitated by economic and political relationships. The reality was that for an artist attempting to smuggle the works he wanted to exhibit into a biennale in the walls of the train's compartment, the process of negotiation was of far greater importance than the journey itself.

PT: I think let's end it on this note of reality. For you it's always about coming back to engage with reality.

LW: There's a lot I want to say. In fact, more or less everything about reality can be a topic of discussion.

HUO: That could almost be a conclusion, but you said you wanted to get more into film. Poet Czesław Miłosz told me that everyone in the 20th century was influenced by film. I'm curious to know what films influenced you. Yang Fudong said it was Shanghai cinema.

LW: I used to be a real film buff, and when I was a student I had access to every film and I would screen a lot of the films of at school, and I acquired a lot of films.
At first I saw a lot of films on VHS, VCD and DVD, and so I began to think that films were not so interesting. I didn't realize what enormous changes had been made to them. There seemed to be little that was new. They were increasingly commercial, and you watched them for coloring. But I particularly loved the films of Pasolini and Fassbinder.

HUO: How did Pasolini inspire you?

LW: Because I'd read interviews of his, as well as his books. His feelings made a deep impression on me, as did his sense of truth. His knowledge permeated his life and it was everywhere. His views were part of his life, and that's something I want to feel.

HUO: We spoke a lot of things you like; what about things you don't like? Like Gilbert and George say they really hate backpacks—they think backpacks are the worst things. What do you dislike?

LW: I don't like writing letters.

HUO: One more question: Do art and politics mingle for you?

LW: For me art and politics are together, and have to be connected.

HUO: Can you say how?

LW: The combination might be abstract. In life there is no way you cannot discuss politics. Maybe for other people this is not the case, but for me the topic is unavoidable. There are many restrictions—even your way of life is determined by these issues.

HUO: Do you have pseudonyms?

LW: I don't have a pen name, because I don't like this idea of having another name. It's like giving my kid a foreign name. I don't like the idea of another name.

HUO: What is your favorite color?

LW: No, I don't have a favorite color, but I do like bright composite colors and I'm not too keen on pure colors.

HUO: What is your advice to a young art student in the 2000s?

LW: At the present time? Art should make you free and not be shackled.

HUO: Very last question. What's your formula? Do you have a formula?

LW: I'd like to be able to do artworks according to some geometric formula. Given that so much of the original conception might be indeterminate or lacking, that would be great. Most usual formulas lead to absurd conclusions, and that's actually what's interesting.

HUO: Thank you very much.