

SEAN KELLY

Chan, Dawn. "Sun Xun," *Art Forum*, August 15, 2008.

ARTFORUM

Sun Xun



Sun Xun, *New China*, 2008. Installation view.

After studying printmaking at the China Academy of Fine Arts, Hangzhou-based artist Sun Xun started his own animation studio, *Pi*, in 2006. His work has been screened at numerous festivals, including the 2007 Torino Film Festival, and has been shown in exhibitions at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art and at ShanghART, among other venues. For his first show at an American museum, he inhabited the Vault Gallery at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles for over a week to develop the site-specific installation *New China*.

APPARENTLY, THE ARCHITECTURE of the Vault Gallery was originally prepared to host the works of Leonardo da Vinci, but now it is a site for contemporary art exhibitions. The form of the space has a style of its own. Its unconventional design and domed ceiling allow for infinite imagination. I found it suitable for interpreting the idea of "New China," because there are many forgotten stories in China. My installation draws inspiration from a small book titled *New China*, given to me by a friend. The book, probably published before World War II, was written by a missionary who lived in China for many years and who knew the culture well. The general thrust of this book is to instruct people in how to love their country, how to construct their country, and how to be a useful person, in addition to addressing China's revolution at that time.

Everyone knows that China was called New China after 1949, but it is interesting to me that this appellation existed even before the war. After I read this book and examined China's recent history, I found that the country actually runs around a circle, that history is round and infinitely recurrent. We are used to creating a boundary between the present and the past. But actually, history has no such boundary. All the wall texts in this exhibition are pulled from *New China*, but they also relate to the animation.

I established my own animation studio in 2006, but I don't think animation needs to be my only medium. In my opinion, all things can be related to animation—it can connect to any other tool or genre. Animation is not in itself an important thing; in a way, it's like history—it shows only the most external thing. In actuality, animation is always incomplete. Only by striving to break through other limitations in other

media can I reach the most precious aspects of animation. I will try anything so long as I think it will yield interesting art. But I also think art is not the only culminating purpose; it is not an end in itself. Rather, it illuminates our history—not only the history of China but also the history of the world. There is culture behind art. So the artist plays an important role but will never play the primary role.

Discussing this subject, an artist's self-judgment is vital. Today, Chinese artists are likely to be seen as representatives of China in the world. It's good that China and Chinese artists are concerned about our role, but it is what we do that is important. Being concerned can't be our purpose. It is obviously hard to create works about China, because the subject—the target you aim at—is powerful enough on its own. Art's attempt to address such a large topic as China is like waging a revolution on civilization fought one by one. Success is always uncertain. Probably artists will fail again and again, because art is a dream that emerges from an accumulation of continuing failures. But this dream will have irreplaceable value forever.

— As told to and translated by Dawn Chan