

# City Gallery of Contemporary Art Trento

Tento, Italy

## Cai Guo-Qiang. Ethereal flowers

**7 September 2002 - 24 November 2002**

The first solo exhibition in an Italian museum of the great Chinese artist (Leone d'Oro at the Biennale of Venice in 1999) is an exhibition played on lightness, evanescence, on the relation between real and virtual so to lead the visitor to a spiritual dimension. Among the projects made specifically for the City Gallery of Trento one will be dedicated to "Chung Kuo", the documentary by Michelangelo Antonioni, made in 1972 with the consent of the Chinese government, and then immediately banished. According to the Chinese expectations the movie was supposed to picture modern China, the progress and the innovation, but the director was attracted instead by the crowds riding bicycles, the misery that nonetheless kept intact values of solidarity. As the target of a long denigrating campaign Antonioni became the symbol of Western wickedness, so much so that his name is written in school books and he became the most well-known foreign person in China after Marx and the fathers of Communism. Now the movie has been rehabilitated and Cai Guo-Qiang wants to go back to this example of cultural misunderstanding due, according to his words, "to the stylistic and formal discrepancy between Socialist Realism and Neorealism".

The movie, (now reprinted by Cinecittà Holding together with other movies by Antonioni - curator Carlo Di Carlo, his all-time assistant-director and highest expert of his work - and also listed in the retrospective dedicated to the director at the Cinema Festival of Venice), has been used by Cai Guo-Qiang in a double screening: the first in the daylight in the courtyard at the entrance; the other on a red screen indoors - the people, the landscape and the cities will be only moving shadows, almost elusive.

A second work made specifically for the Gallery is "Passage", a evanescent river that flows in the basement and that portrays the idea of passing and becoming, typical of the Trentino region with its rivers and roman roads by which the artist was mesmerized. The work aims at being a *promenade* for the spirit and a passage from the material to the immaterial, from real to virtual.

Moreover the City Gallery will host oil paintings and large canvases made with gun powder, the drawings with writings covered by explosions, works that the artist prepares straight from his workshop in Trento in the weeks before the exhibition. A section will be like a documentary, with the videos of the firework performances that made Cai Guo-Qiang known in the world: the explosion of pseudo atomic mushrooms in front of the Twin Towers in '96, the great Chinese fire dragon that inflamed the sky of the Kunsthalle in Vienna in '99, the numerous "Progetti per gli extraterrestri/Projects for the aliens" where the artist wanted to create works visible from the space of the short duration of an explosion, even though ephemeral.

After the opening at the City Gallery at sunset at 7.45pm the visitors will be invited to go to Sardagna, at the Congress Centre "Panorama" of the Opera Universitaria on the hill that dominates the city, using either the cable car or a chartered bus service. From there it will be

possible to see the city down below and in front of the cemetery colourful fireworks will rise. From high up they will look like flowers that quickly open up, resembling dahlias, peonies, chrysanthemum: a homage to the dead in the graveyard. Two video-cameras will film the fireworks: one from high up at Sardagna, and the other down at the cemetery, showing the point of view of the quick and the dead. The action promotes reflection - according to the words of the artist - on the thin line that separates "life and death, what is visible from what is intangible, art and daily rituals, the city of the past and that of the future, the top of the mountain and the city down below, approaching the opposites". The performance "Ethereal Flowers", which the exhibition is named after, will be on display in the gallery as "Heaven on Earth" from the following day onwards, with the screening of the videos from the two points of view on two arched screens.

For the occasion of this exhibition in Trento a large catalogue will be published by Silvana Editoriale, the first catalogue in Italian about the artist, curated by the director of the Fabio Cavallucci Gallery, with texts by Hou Hanru and Pier Luigi Tazzi, and an interview to Cai Guo-Qiang by Monica Dematté.

The exhibition was made possible thanks to several collaborations: **Rai** which gave the rights and **Cinecittà Holding** which retrieved the movie "Chung Kuo", The University of **Trento** and **Opera Universitaria**, and especially the **Martino Martini Centre** of Trento.

At the opening the vicar of the cultural attaché, **Zhang Jianda**, will attend on behalf of the **Embassy of the Popular Republic of China** in Rome.

Catalogue: Silvana editoriale

**Press office: Irma Bianchi Comunicazione**