

Target, 靶子, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 68 X 38.5 X 20cm



From Pit #5  
Zhang Wanxin

來自五號坑  
張萬新



## Tyranny Meets Irreverence in Pit #5

Wanxin Zhang's sculptures are born of the collision of disparate social movements and their attendant aesthetic innovations, brought together by the happenstance of the artist's life and personal inclinations. Colliding elements include the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and its ubiquitous propaganda, the harsh dictatorship of Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BCE) which produced the famous life-sized terracotta army, and the 1960s and 1970s American counter-culture movement, one of whose products was Funk Art. Such an unlikely combination of influences coalesced in Zhang's oeuvre not long after his 1992 move from his native China to San Francisco. The result was a highly individualistic body of works that employ sly humor to undercut imperatives to conformity, whether dictated by historical megalomaniacs, or by modern culture.

As a student in the Department of Sculpture at the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts in Shenyang, Wanxin Zhang followed a rigorous five-year course of study that focused on figural realism, emphasizing the use of clay. Following graduation, Zhang favored working with metal, but he returned to clay upon arriving in San Francisco and being exposed to the works of such clay artists as Peter Voulkos (1924-2002) and Robert Arneson (1930-1992). The former founded the California clay movement with his large-scale, rough, obviously hand-shaped works, and is credited with giving clay, "previously regarded as restricted to the realm of craft, a working vocabulary for use in freestanding sculpture."<sup>1</sup> Arneson, a leading light of the Bay Area Funk Art movement, imparted a funky twist to clay, producing works that were humorously anti-establishment—not only in terms of their overt subject matter, but also in their irreverent stance against the art establishment which favored "serious" modes such as abstract expressionism. The result was that "when Funk merged with Arneson's brand of narrative it catapulted the sculptor outside the framework of the other clay practitioners."<sup>2</sup> The Bay Area Funk clay movement inspired Zhang to return to clay and experiment with expressing his personal experiences of historical forces in brash, large-scale works infused with humor.

As his career has matured, Wanxin Zhang has developed an ongoing major series of works that fall under the umbrella title of Pit #5. The signature image from this series is that of a standing figure modeled after the terracotta warriors that were discovered buried in pits adjacent to the burial mound of Qin Shi Huang, near Xi'an. Four pits had been constructed to house the emperor's army: Zhang's Pit #5 follows on from there. While free-standing clay sculpture may have been a novelty in terms of later twentieth-century art, the discovery of Qin Shi Huang's terracotta army showed that it had flourished two thousand years ago in China. The tomb sculptures were discovered in 1974; Zhang visited the site in 1983, catalyzing for him the revelation that the first emperor of Qin, as a dictator who employed art as propaganda, was a historical precedent to Mao Zedong. Zhang compared the megalomania of a tyrant who would divert untold labor (that of up to 700,000 men) to the creation of a tomb complex that would glorify him in the afterlife, with that of Mao, whose image was ubiquitous during the Cultural Revolution: literally billions of his portraits were produced in the form of sculptures, paintings, posters, buttons, tapestries, and so on. Qin Shi Huang is credited with destroying knowledge through the execution of intellectuals and destruction of books that were counter to his interests; Mao Zedong was responsible for death and destruction on an even grander scale, and Wanxin Zhang finally fully understood this upon viewing the terracotta army.<sup>3</sup>

The works presented in the current exhibition include the artist's familiar riffs on the terracotta army, as well as figures emerging from a red wall symbolic of Chinese culture, and sculptures referencing iconic Cultural Revolution objects. Among the latter are discs featuring silhouettes of Mao's face, referring to the Mao buttons whose large-scale production consumed so much metal that Mao once quipped the metal should perhaps be diverted to the manufacture of airplanes. In comparison to the original small, mass-produced shiny red and gold Mao buttons, Zhang has created larger, obviously hand-hewn discs where the absence of Mao's facial features is an obliteration equivalent to the destruction of "feudal," "rightist," and "anti-revolutionary" elements under Mao—which in real terms meant the destruction of individuals whose thinking was not in line with the policies of Mao or his representatives. Notable among Mao's supposed representatives were the Red Guards, young people excited by the idea of creating ongoing revolution, who in an unchecked frenzy performed widespread acts of destruction of cultural property, and violent persecution of anyone they considered anti-revolutionary. Zhang has fashioned clay versions of the armbands worn by the Red Guards, inscribed with their identifying title, Hongweibing (Red Guard), but making subversive puns by substituting characters pronounced similarly but having different meanings (for example, inserting wei characters that mean tiny, flavor, and tail). Zhang also has created a few models of the site most strongly associated with Mao's power, Tiananmen, from where he made proclamations and addressed millions. Sunflowers adorn two of the Tiananmen sculptures: Zhang has commented, "When I was young, there was a song called 'The [Communist] Party is the Sun, I am the Flower' to convince the people that the government is all powerful and nurturing. However, as I think back now from an artist's perspective, I realize that that period is actually very dark, and the crude sun and the upside down flowers represent that. . . . The period was definitely not as beautiful or 'shiny' as it was made out to be."<sup>4</sup>



Three sculptures in the exhibition depict figures emerging from a red slab background which may be a wall, but also suggests an imperial door adorned with bosses. One figure is still embedded in the wall; a second has emerged and wears the blue of the Mao era or of the pre-Maoist scholar; and a third—whose features are most fully realized—sits at his ease clad in contemporary business attire. According to the artist the wall represents Chinese culture, and the fact that different figures emerge from the same wall reflects the fact that some aspects of Chinese culture, notably central control, seem never to change. Another figure is inscribed with numbers on his chest and stands against a white background: he is standing in front of a shooting range target. Zhang explains “The figure is a combination of Terra Cotta Warriors and Red Guards and demonstrates how they were being used by the government/dictator of their times and how they had no thoughts of their own. Their full acceptance of the government is a hereditary slave-kind of thinking that was nurtured by the imposing government.”<sup>5</sup>

Like the figure standing against a target, Zhang’s freestanding figures also merge Red Guard with terracotta warrior. They have left youth behind, and their demeanors suggest disillusionment. They are ready to fight for neither the protection of Qin Shi Huang in the afterlife, nor for Mao’s ongoing revolution: the expectations placed upon them seem to have exhausted them. In a sense this is heartening. Unlike the terracotta warriors, who may appear to represent individuals but were assembled from endlessly recombined molded variants of different body parts, and unlike the Red Guards, who surrendered their individualism in favor of mass hysteria, these men appear to be individuals shaped by time and experience. If society can learn from experience, too, then there is hope for the future. That Wanxin Zhang serves up these complex ideas surrounding societal control with a touch of irreverent humor renders them all the more powerful. He leads his viewers to the realization that past, present, and future are interrelated, and the legacy of the past must be understood for the sake of an unencumbered future.

### Britta Erickson

(Note: Catalogue essay funds were donated to the Red Cross for Sichuan earthquake relief.)

1. Catherine Schear, “The Genesis of Clay Figurative Sculpture in California, 1955-1974: Potter and Pot, an Intersubjective Encounter in the Work of Peter Voulkos,” in *Metamorphosis: Creative Imagination in Fine Arts Between Life-Projects and Human Aesthetic Aspirations* *Analecta Husserliana* 81, ed. by Anna-Teres Tymieniecka (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 205.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
3. Emily J. Sano, “Tradition and Transformation: The Figural Sculpture of Wanxin Zhang,” *Clay Art International Yearbook 07-08* (Athens, Greece: Clay Art International, 2008), p. 97.
4. E-mail from the artist to the author, 6 June 2008.
5. *Ibid.*

**Britta Erickson**, Ph.D. is an independent scholar and curator living in Palo Alto, California. Her doctoral dissertation investigated patronage modes in the career of the mid-nineteenth century Shanghai School artist, Ren Xiong. She has taught at Stanford University and has curated major exhibitions at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C. (*Word Play: Contemporary Art by Xu Bing*) and the Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford (*On the Edge: Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West*). She is on the advisory board for the Ink Society (Hong Kong), Asia Art Archive (Hong Kong) and Three Shadows Photography Art Centre (Beijing), as well as the editorial board of *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art and ART Asia Pacific*. In 2006 she was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to conduct research in Beijing on the Chinese contemporary art market. She was co-curator of the 2007 Chengdu Biennial.



Where's my kingdom?, 還我江山,  
2008; fired clay with glaze,  
63.5 X 35.5 X 25.5cm



Since 1974 four burial pits of the Qin terra-cotta soldiers who have been guarding the tomb of Qin Shi Huang for over two thousand years have been uncovered and excavated in Xian, China; and Chinese-American sculptor Zhang Wanxin has been turning out new warriors for the Qin Emperor from Pit #5 in San Francisco in the United States from 1997.

The new finds from Pit #5 are a fusion of the Eastern and Western cultures. They blend the past, present and future together. One most visible characteristic of Zhang Wanxin's new warriors is the pair of round sun-glasses over their noses which have helped hiding the souls of these figures. Wanxin used this simple but self-assured addition to enhance the contemporary nature as well as the spiritual impact of his warriors.

Wanxin, graduated from the Lu Xun Art Institute in 1985, went to the United States to further his studies in 1992. He received his Masters Degree in Fine Art from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco and stays as an instructor of the Academy. After arriving in the United States, Wanxin is very much inspired by the Californian clay movement and the American Funk artists. Such influence shows up in most of his sculptures.

"The Chinese blood flowing in my veins fuels my creativity in the West," said Wanxin of his creating process. Since inaugurating his Pit #5 ten years ago, he has received numerous acclaims and recognitions both from the American art scene and the academic circle. Audiences love the creativity and boldness of his new warriors while appreciating his respect and keeping the ancient and initial ingenuity of the Qin terra-cotta soldiers alive.

Art Beatus



Early metal work: Season, 季節, 1989, 早期鐵質雕塑

於精藝軒展出著名旅美雕塑家張萬新的個人作品。秦兵馬俑坑至今挖掘出了四個坑，讓世人看到兩千年前秦朝兵馬俑的面貌和浩瀚歷史遺跡。而張萬新在美國以藝術家的角度建造他的"五號坑"，他將當今的大千世界推進"五號坑"裡，作品題材關注到人性、社會、政治等方面，跨越時空地給觀眾傳遞強烈震撼力。他的陶瓷人像作品充滿現代氣息並帶有無國界的幽默感，令觀眾直接感受到作品的非凡氣魄和深度，以多方位組合方式向觀眾報告文化傳承與變遷帶給人類精神上的衝擊。

在"新兵馬俑"系列，萬新用現代人的眼光角度表現對古秦兵馬俑的印象和情感。他大膽地為現代俑們臉部架上一副墨鏡，這一簡練筆觸非但沒有遮上心靈的視窗，反而加深了人物內在精神的張力。墨鏡將個人的遊移背景和萬新對中西文化，政治和宗教相亦又相斥的疑惑擴展到群體現象。展出作品還有他對生活中人物形象的塑造系列，有樸實陝北老農形象；也有背靠紅色深沉背景的門牆而坐的西裝打扮普通現代人形象，為觀眾留下了可以充分發揮想像的空間，作品都顯現出人文的意味和底蘊。還有耐人尋味的"紅白十年"系列包括紅袖章、毛像章、天安門等紅色符號題材，顯示藝術家自己經歷文革歲月時留存心靈記憶的色彩影像和故事。張萬新在對秦陵文化的反思中找到了那種畸形的意識形態遺傳的初根。似乎在"秦兵馬俑"與"紅衛兵"之間隱藏著一些引人深思的聯繫，有待觀眾去發掘和聯想。

在美國十多年來，張萬新專注藝術創作，認真研究中西文化精髓，致力追求自己作品的深度。他的作品極具品味和欣賞價值，他自然大氣的雕塑手法及拙中見智的老辣方式顯示他功底深厚；泥的走勢，色的韻運即龍飛鳳舞又不乏莊嚴，作品返璞歸真似一氣呵成，構圖直率獷悍，充分顯現了他獨特的藝術天賦和深厚修養。

張萬新於1992年赴美留學並獲三藩市藝術大學雕塑碩士學位。2006年5月獲得美國專業性極高的佛吉尼亞格瑞特(Virginia Groot)雕塑基金會的年度一等獎，是該基金會創辦18年來的首位華人雕塑家獲得的最高榮譽。近年來，張萬新先後在三藩市、紐約、邁阿密、華盛頓、溫哥華、聖地牙哥、懷俄明大學、和布羅羅馬大學等地舉辦個展、聯展及講座，作品被廣泛的收藏。其作品並被紐約大學著名藝術評論家裘蒂·蘇爾滋(Judith Schwartz)編入續將在倫敦出版的新書，"Confrontational Ceramics"一書中。



Red Wall 2, 紅牆二, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 74 X 43 X 30.5cm





Untitled Warrior, 藍俑, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 63.5 X 25.5 X 19cm







Broken Armband, 紅衛兵, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 46 X 20 X 13cm



Sun and Flowers, 黨是太陽,我是花, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 61 X 15 X 25.5cm



New God, 新上帝, 2007, fired clay with glaze, 71 X 25.5 X 25.5cm







Mao's Side Profile, 毛像 - 側, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 51 X 51 X 2.5cm



Mao's Portrait, 毛像, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 51 X 51 X 2.5cm



Untitled Warrior 2, 黃備, 2008, fired clay with glaze, 61 X 25.5 X 19cm





張萬新

1961生於中國，長春  
1978-1980 吉林省藝術學校  
1980-1985 魯迅美術學院雕塑學士  
1992-1996 美國加州三藩市藝術大學，雕塑研究生  
1996-2008 美國加州三藩市藝術大學雕塑學院研究生導師

部分個展:

2008 移動的夢想	美國 加州 核桃溪市 李瑟藝術中心
來自五號坑	中國 香港 精藝軒
來自中國	美國 密西根州 藝術和科學博物館
2007 加州五號坑	美國 加州 佛朗西諾美術博物館
2006 五號坑邁阿密	美國 佛羅里達州 邁阿密市博妮絲·思丹邦畫廊
五號坑舞臺	美國 懷俄明州 大學美術博物館
2004 五號坑新俑	美國 佛羅里達州 邁阿密市博妮絲·思丹邦畫廊
2002 新兵馬俑展	美國 加州 三藩市 三角畫廊
2001 與中國珍寶的對話	美國 加州 三藩市 沃爾普畫廊
1997 張萬新新作	美國 加州 三藩市 303 空間畫廊
嘗試穿越	美國 加州 三藩市 中華文化中心
1996 對話	美國 加州 三藩市 藝術大學雕塑藝術中心

部分群展:

2008 臺灣陶藝雙年展 鶯歌博物館 中國 臺北  
薩迪巴瑟爾收藏展 美國 亞歷桑那大學美術館  
觀察亞洲提娜 卡諾畫廊 美國 新墨西哥州 聖塔斐市  
20年20藝術家 516畫廊 美國 新墨西哥州 阿波庫克  
2007 第22屆日本現代雕塑雙年展日本 宇部市  
泥和彩中國陶藝五千年 洛爾美術館收藏展 美國 佛州  
2006 北京2008 奧林匹克室外雕塑設計展 中國 北京  
2005 另一個主流維爾諾諾私人收藏展 美國 亞歷桑那大學美術館  
河岸雕塑雙年展歐文斯布林美術博物館 美國 肯塔基州  
第七屆三藩市國際藝術博覽會美國 三藩市

部分獎項:

1989 中國吉林省美術大展一等獎  
1989 中國第七屆全國美展雕塑銅獎  
1997 美國加州洛杉磯奧托市室外雕塑學術獎  
2000 美國加州聖地牙哥美術博物館優勝特別獎  
2004 美國紐約Joan Mitchell 基金會，畫家及雕塑家獎  
2006 美國國家美術基金和Andy Warhol 基金會獎  
2006 美國芝加哥Virginia A. Groot 基金會年度一等獎

部分公共收藏:

三藩市藝術大學美國  
佛朗西諾美術博物館 美國  
懷俄明州大學美術博物館美國  
洛爾美術館 美國  
中國美術館 中國  
亞歷桑那大學美術館美國  
佛吉尼亞格爾特基金會 美國  
大連市中國  
阿波庫克市美國

Tail Armband, 紅尾兵,  
2008, fired clay with glaze,  
53.5 X 23 X 13cm



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## **Zhang Wanxin**

Born in 1961, Changchun, China

### **Education**

1992-1996 Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture, Academy of Art University, San Francisco, USA

1980-1985 Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture, Luxun Institute of Fine Art, ShengYang, Liaoning Province, China

1978-1980 Diploma of Fine Art, Art School of Jilin, Changchun, Jilin Province, China

### **Teaching**

1996-present Instructor, Academy of Art University San Francisco, USA

1985-1992 Assistant Professor, Jilin Art College, ChangChun, China

### **Solo Exhibition**

2008 "Pit #5, Shifting Dreams", Bedford Gallery, Leshner Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek, California USA  
"Report from Pit #5", Art Beatus Gallery, Hong Kong, China  
"Pit #5, Michigan", The Alden B. Dow Museum of Science & Art, Midland Art Center, Midland, Michigan, USA

2007 "Pit #5, California Artist Too", Fresno Art Museum, Fresno, California, USA

2006 "Wanxin Zhang's New Works", Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, Florida, USA  
"Pit #5 Laramie, 2006", University of Wyoming Art Museum Laramie, Wyoming

2004 "Figures of the Future's Past - Pit #5", Bernice Steinbaum Gallery Miami, Florida, USA

2002 "Ceramic Sculpture", Triangle Gallery San Francisco, USA

2001 "Treasures of China-A-Dialogue", Vorpall Gallery San Francisco, USA

1997 "Wanxin Zhang 1997", Space 303 San Francisco, USA  
"Breaking Out", Chinese Cultural Center, San Francisco, USA

1996 "Dialogue" MFA Graduate Show, Academy of Art University Sculpture Center, San Francisco, USA

### **Group Show (Selected)**

2008 "A Human Impulse: Figuration from the Diane and Sandy Besser Collection", Arizona State University Art Museum, USA  
"Artists to Watch - Asia", Turner Carroll Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA  
"Taiwan Ceramics Biennale", Taipei County Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

2007 "In Your Face", Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, USA  
"Clay and Brush: The Ceramic Art of China", Lowe Museum of Art, Coral Gables, Florida, USA  
"What is Next?", Florida Craftsman Gallery, St. Petersburg, Florida, USA  
"The 22nd UBE Biennale International Sculpture Competition", Yamaguchi, Japan

2006 "45th Anniversary" Triangle Gallery, San Francisco, USA  
"Landscape Sculpture Design for Beijing 2008 Olympic Games", Beijing, China

2005 "Little Basil" Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, USA  
"Riverbend Sculpture Biennial 2005", Owensboro Museum of Fine Arts Owensboro, Kentucky, USA  
"The Other Mainstream", Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona, USA  
"Palm Beach 3", Represented by Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, USA  
"The 7th San Francisco International Art Expo", Byron Cohen Gallery, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

2004 "It's for the Birds" Traveling Exhibition, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery Miami, USA  
"Art Basel Miami Beach" International Art Fair, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, USA

### **Award and Grants (Selected)**

2006 Virginia A. Groot Foundation Sculptors Grant – 1st Place Evanston, Illinois, USA  
NEA / Warhol Foundation, Artist-in-Residence Award, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY, USA  
2004 The Joan Mitchell Foundation Inc. Painters and Sculptors Grant New York, USA  
2000 Distinctive Merit Award, San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, USA  
1997 Honorary Merit Award of the Outdoor Sculpture Search, Los Altos City, USA  
1989 Sculpture Bronze Prize, The 7th National Art Exhibition, National Art Gallery Beijing, China

### **Selective Collections**

Academy of Art University, San Francisco, California, USA  
City of Albuquerque, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA  
City of Dalian, Dalian, China  
Fresno Art Museum, Fresno, California, USA  
Lowe Museum of Art, Coral Gables, Florida, USA  
National Fine Art Gallery, Beijing, China  
Sandy Besser Collection, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA  
University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, Wyoming, USA  
Virginia A. Groot Foundation, Evanston, Illinois, USA  
Private collectors in US and Switzerland