Einladung zum Gastvortrag

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

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Mural Abstraction: Ornament and Decoration in the Modern Chinese Academy

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Hörsaal B, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Koserstr. 20, 14195 Berlin

This talk examines how problems of decoration (*zhuangshi* 裝飾) were central to modernism in China. Beginning with the first major public art project following the death of Mao, the Beijing airport murals of 1979, this talk telescopes backward in time to map ornamental thinking and concepts at the Central Academy of Craft and Design. Architectural ornament, Buddhist painting, and grammars of ornament reproduced throughout the Academy's collection, textbooks, and journal provided alternative histories of world art, one that was more elastic to the more circumscribed demands and canons of academic painting and sculpture. Meanwhile, faculty and students explored the expressive potential of ornament derived from folk, ethnic, and vernacular subjects, producing exercises in nonrepresentational form. For the Academy's teachers and students, decoration was the supplement to the ideological overdetermination of the fine arts. Throughout the twentieth century, as this talk suggests, decoration offered the triumph of formal beauty, aesthetic autonomy, and lineages of heritage that grounded modernism's universality.

Christine I. Ho is associate professor of East Asian art history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and currently a visiting scholar in the ERC project CHINACADEMY. She is the author of *Drawing from Life: Socialist Painting and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China* (University of California, 2020). She has also published articles on design, craft, and murals in *The Art Bulletin, Archives of Asian Art*, *Art History*, and edited volumes.

Yuan Yunsheng: Water Festival: Songy of Life (detail), mural, Beijing Capital Airport, 1979. Photo: Joan Lebold Cohen Archive, Asia Art Archive.

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