

Einladung zum Gastvortrag

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How was art electrified? Mental Photography, Aerial Medium, and the formation of the global brain in China

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1897 was a year that largely goes under our radar screen. In hindsight, it turned out to be a year of uncanny coincidence. Stars were aligned. In that year, Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) published “On Electricity”; China had its first native-owned power station in Shanghai; and Tan Sitong (1865–1898), a starry-eyed young reformist, wrote extensively on electricity, ether, and global psychic connectivity. Tan was executed at the age of 33 by the Qing government the next year as the Hundred Days’ Reform he had participated in failed. However, the electricity-ether-globalism meme lived on. It resurfaced a century later, in the 2012 Shanghai Biennale, on the site of the power station that was founded in 1897. Coincidentally—or perhaps not—Tesla’s avatar also showed up in the form of the Tesla Tower on the Biennale

curator’s map. Stars were once again re-aligned. In-between 1897 and 2012 is thus an untold story of the exploration of the mental photography, aerial medium, and formation of the global brain, borne by a charged medium, an aggregate of electricity, ether, and global consciousness, that repeatedly electrified art, and vice versa.

Eugene Wang is the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art at Harvard University. He is also the founding director of Harvard CAMLab dedicated to turning art historical knowledge into sensorial experience and integrating art and digital technology. A Guggenheim Fellow, he has published extensively on Chinese art and culture ranging from antiquity to modern and contemporary periods. He is the art history editor of *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (2004) and author of the prize-winning *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*. His current research explores the relationship of art and consciousness.