I have to warn you, but in my old age the world has been complicated, so you have to excuse me, if part of the lecture is a little coplicated, but to make simple answer to complicated problems, is also a problem.

Recycling Art

This is the title of today's lecture, it is in 5 sections

1. Tan Ping and Bjorn Nørgaard, an exhibition we have right now in Denmark. In the exhibition the works talks as physical images in their form, surface and colour, figuration, this is the basis for our work with art.

2. Referes direct to the title of the lecture, the cast collections of antique figures, why these figures again and again though centuties inspires the artists, and their importance in the past and now.

3. Continues with concrete examples on how artists uses these figures and other references to past artwork, the question is why it is important still to refere to the past in order to move on.

4. About how these ideas and thoughts could affect on our physical urban spaces and create more beautiful and more human cities.

5. Finally a few comments about the digital tools possibilities and and impossibilities.

THE EXHIBITION

The most important thing in art and life is the people you meet and especially those that become a part of your life.

In 2005 after having worked in China for 3 years, I met Tan Ping at CAFA, when I had organized that Denmark and our National Gallery would donate 12 cast sculptures from The Royal Cast Collection, more on this later.

Tan Ping was going to Denmark together with Xia Dewu to select the sculptures that were to be a part of CAFA's cast collection.

This meeting became the beginning of a dialogue in German, which has led to much and including now an exhibition, "Tan Ping – Bjørn Nørgaard," at Horsens Art Museum.

Through our many meetings and conversations we have discussed the world, the global world that we are all living in, the different cultures and political systems and their chance of creating opportunities for peaceful solutions to the world's great challenges through dialogue and collaboration, and thus conditions for the individual human to evolve and use his or her creative capabilities.

As we are both artists, a painter and a sculptor, a Chinese and a European, we have simultaneously talked about art's possibilities and prerequisites for entering into the global dialogue.

Visual artists express themselves through their art first and foremost, it is in the meeting with the work, the artistic manifestation, that we can provide a particular "aesthetic" dimension, here aesthetic is not to be understood as something pretty, but through sensation and a material/medium the visual artists create image structures of our world that provide particular conditions to see contexts which the common everyday language supersedes or overlooks.

The exhibition by Tan Ping and me is a wish for a dialogue of images between two different approaches to the concept of art, it is not a collaboration but two independent expressions, two working methods, two approaches to reveal the concept of art, which is united in the passion for art and the belief in art as a crucial method of cognition to describe the situation of humans in the new global digital world.

Tan Ping expressed it very beautifully in his speech at the seminar that initiated our exhibition at Horsens Art Museum.

Quote:
From our exhibition today we can see that we are closely connected in our art in many ways.
Our differences are clear. His work focuses on the three-dimensional, where sculptures make up a significant part, while I for my part engage with the two-dimensional like paintings. His works are concrete and tell stories, while mine

are abstract and irrespective of time.

He is a Western artist, while I come from the East, but he likes tea and I prefer coffee.

At an exhibition with two different artists, we also realize the difference between the two cultures, between art and the values of art and the underlying cultural differences.

But I think that it is more important to look at the things that we have in common. We both have experience with studying and working in other countries. What is more important is that in these times we both see the whole world's culture as nourishment for our works of art. It is the same challenges of the world that we are both drawn to and that we wish to immerse ourselves in with our art.

I would like to thank him for building a bridge between us in such a manner that we can have a proper dialogue on an artistic basis.

I would like to thank Tan Ping to build this bridge between us, to make a true dialog based on the art.

The plaster freed art

When I visited CAFA for the first time in 2002 it was in the new buildings and I was shown around a top modern academy, very impressive, it has since been expanded several times. There was a very notable rotunda in the area, when I asked what it was I was told to my surprise that it was the academy's cast collection and that is was still in use in class.

In Europe, the cast collections are no longer in use, except in Copenhagen. In the late '70s it was the artists from the '60s that saved our cast collection, and as a professor in the '80s and '90s I actively visited our casts in class and that continues.

In European art we see the Renaissance in the 14th century Italy as the place where the modern idea of art emerges, inspired by ancient Greek art and philosophy, but subsequently the first academies of art start in order to educate painters, sculptors, and architects so that they could glorify the princes and the church.

Here one started with cast sculptures of ancient figures and architectural elements, which were brought into the academies. The teaching was to draw and model after the cast sculptures and discuss form and proportions, which became the foundation for the later Classicism and it`s lesson on proportions.

When one discussed these ancient figures in class, the kings, heroes, and gods that they depicted were irrelevant, one discussed them as pure form, thus art got its own language, concepts, and syntaxes, which solely referred to an artistic discourse, art became an independent form of cognition through a translation of the senses in material and form.
The cast collection had freed art and formed the foundation for the modernism that grew out of the Enlightenment in Europe.

To understand the present one must know the past, if we do not know where the concepts have emerged from, we cannot develop them further so that they create new visions for the future.

The '60s freed tradition

Where it was the cast collections in Classicism that freed art as a particular form of cognition, and Modernism's breakthrough in the 19th century (late Qing dynasty) which finally broke with Classicism's academic tradition and canon of proportions, in the '60s with pop art, minimalism, conceptual art, the Fluxus movement, etc. it was in the critique of modernism's elitist character that tradition was freed.

The belief of the evolutionary progress, which stems from the 19th century's two great utopias, communism and liberalism, was up for discussion, and a number of experiments expanded the concept of art to include the way in which we arrange our lives and society.
Artists formed groups and developed "Companies" that produced new forms of life. There were fierce rebellions against the remnants of Colonialism and Western Imperialism, which continues to dominate the world.

In the '70s it became clear that even though the highly experimental art from the '60s had opened up new paths, which changed the concept of art radically in ways still relevant today, the dream of a more open and "public" art form was still a dream, the new concept of art was also despite its banalities still elitist.

We began to discuss craftsmanship, tradition and classical art's general human values and began working with the concepts of "Recycling Classicism" and "Popular Classicism", where the traditional materials and classical figures together with contemporary figures and materials became letters in a sculptural alphabet.

The work process created the sculptural "sentences" which was neither naturalism, symbolism, abstract art nor anything else. It was an anonymous structure consisting of characters to which no meaning could be ascribed other than the fact of their existence.
They constituted a series of practical exercises, which could, and still can, be carried out by anybody capable of working on a personal and on a metaphysical level at the same time.

These material principles, where the object and the material are "released" from convention and considered to be pure characters or "letters", were transmitted to images and myths, old and new, the ones which form part of our history and traditions, as well as the way we shape images in the present.

This was done in such a way, that the images became devoid of content in order to fit into new combinations with references back in time to our traditions, but also had a function in the present.

The use of fragments and figures, not just from our own cultural circles, but from the whole of the known world, has been an integral part of our work ever since.
History is a raw material that belongs to all of us. It can be viewed as a form of eclecticism and chronologically it coincides with what has been labeled post-modernism.

This is not a simulacrum, however. Rather it is a demonstration of faith in the importance of these images for our perception of ourselves as humans.
This apparent chaos of images and meanings is not a collage that anchors the image to its materiality or submits the individual elements to control by an overall idea. It is an attempt to define a new alphabet of forms and shapes, consisting of both new ones and old, from which the individual can piece together "sculptural" sentences in his own head.

This project I call: The Reunion of Myths, the dream of a Gothic modern Babylon; the breakdown of the grand stories and visions. And after the borders have been erased, I see all the broken images wandering aimlessly around all over the world; now and then, they gather into non-homogenous piles, only to be separated again in front of our eyes and inside our heads. We recognize them in flashes, like detached images from our childhood, the stories which made us dream and hope and fight, which gave us love, strength, and action.

They need us now; now is our turn to provide a home for the myths and images, before they disappear completely.
This is an attempt to describe the breakdown of the images and the reunion of the myths, the homeless image.

In the collaboration with citizens, tradesmen, engineers, and architects, we dreamed of a monument for the future, for life, for all human beings.
Monuments, decorations, commissions, etc. are applied works of art, applied for joy and experience for many. After the avant-garde, or perhaps simultaneously with the avant-garde, or perhaps even before the avant-garde, sometimes when you are standing with your image in solitude or in your group and think what kind of image is this, where is it going in the world, all alone without us, and you want to follow it on its way and not just leave it to others' capriciousness, you want to create the image of the image, the function of the image.
What can we use it for, better workplaces, a happier life, a better society, the big picture, life.

The examples I mention are an attempt to give these ideas a physical form that points towards the ideals that every society must be built upon.
A comprehensive concept in the West is the concept of freedom, which we in this new global world have great problems giving a universal form that can contain all cultures.

Freedom without love is anxiety. Solidarity without responsibility is stupidity. The monument is a dream, a dream of an image, one image that is strong enough to be simple and yet large enough to be diverse. Art – the image is a method to describe correlations in what appears to be incompatible events, art is a method that exclusively builds upon humanity, the image can be perceived immediately by everyone across languages and borders.

<u>Die Soziale Plastik in urban spaces</u>

The last images today are examples of how these ideas on a slightly larger scale like concrete sculptural and architectural functions can work in the public sphere. Today I have tried to relate the expanded notion of form and the expanded concept of art to earlier artistic creations of form.

Today in art everything can be art but that does not mean that everything is art. That which has carried earlier art up through a couple of thousands of years or more is the clarity of the form, however contradictory it may sound, it remains valid, but as we cannot refer to a clear notion of form, the responsibility lies solely with the individual.

When I visit large cities throughout the globe the concept of pollution is everywhere.

POLLUTION – NOISE – HEARING
POLLUTION – UGLY – SIGHT
POLLUTION – THE BODY – THE FEELING
(THERETO THE CITY ALSO NEEDS TO SMELL GOOD AND TASTE GOOD)

Pollution is politically something with CO_2, particles, the agrochemical agriculture, micro plastics etc. and it is important.

But for a human being's daily life the impact of noises, sounds, ugly big commercials, bad buildings and urban spaces, and the materials that our bodies meet, is of crucial importance, here art and architecture has a great responsibility.

In Europe through time art has been a part of the public space on extraordinarily different premises, ideals of different times and the zeitgeist give what we now call art radically opposing expressions, yet it still makes sense to "calibrate" over time, without knowing how the concept of art has been shaped, we cannot develop the concept further so that it still has its own form and substance.
Ignorance is not a virtue, it is written that "knowledge is power" hence the dominant forces of our time, the global monopolies, wage war against memory, the dumber we become the more we consume.

The visual arts' path from being integrated in myths and rituals, to the ideals of the antique, to the deep interaction with the churches of the Middle Ages, and in a representative role with kings and princes, to becoming an independent form of cognition with classicism and the enlightenment, which became the nation-state's most important way to create a national democratic identity, before the truly modern detaches art from everything.

What is the role of art in the competition state's global financial market, countless people think that we should serve this or that good cause, the beautiful as a particular way of knowing the world has become unclear and hazy.

When we talk about the function of art in urban spaces and in interaction with the architecture, we can mention monuments, commissions, art in the public sphere, site-specific art, contextual art, relational art, integrated art, temporary art, event art, and lately identity art.

Soon more curators, art historians etc. will be educated than artists, together with the market they define a still tighter framework for art, the concept of the readymade has been exhausted beyond all of the concept's possibilities.

The concept of the social sculpture, first defined by J. B., rests on an English translation – "The social sculpture", but in German Beuys uses the expression "Die soziale Plastik", and in German the concept "Plastik" is where the sculpture is shaped in wax, clay or plaster, it is the moldable principle of art, to model society on the basis of art's intuitive aesthetic concept of form, he does not mean that all manner of political labels should be attached to art.

He got the idea when the sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruch before his suicide ahead of World War II stated "the form of art arises when society presses art;" then Beuys reckoned that art could press back, this pressure on society from art is "Die soziale Plastik,"

The sculptor's material is the physical shape, here the laws of classical physics apply, weight, height, length, width, hardness, softness, etc. It is also the physical laws that govern our body and senses.

In the digital media, everything is pixels, everything is translated into 0 and 1, here there is neither weight, height, length, width, hardness, nor softness, but a flat luminous screen, multinational corporations try to seduce us into this artificial dream world.

The image structures and figures that molded us as a culture and as humans have slowly begun to dissolve in the digital fog, whether we as physical and spiritual beings can insist on humanism in this future is a crucial discussion.

Digital media contain many possibilities and impossibilities, it can be a splendid tool, but the best computer that was ever created is yourself.

For art, it is vital to also work with these technologies, in order for us to develop allegorical images for an understanding of human nature and the origin of the digital algorithms that increasingly dehumanize our world.

I'll leave the last word to Confucius:
The Master said: "It is second nature for the magnanimous Man that he has obligations towards others. It is second nature for a bad Man to accentuate his own person." (   )