

JENNIFER WEN MA

Brain Storm

October 15, 2009—January 3, 2010



Jennifer Wen Ma's *Brain Storm* is a work in two parts: a single-channel video projected on a scroll-like screen in a gallery; and images generated from the video and printed on transparent film, and mounted on the windows of the bridge walkway connecting the house to the Goh Annex. Showing a man and a horse crossing a stormy landscape, the piece alludes to an inner journey, or a brainstorm, unpredictable, uneven, and moody. Ma has reconfigured *Brain Storm*, originally commissioned in a three-channel version for Guggenheim Bilbao in 2009, for the smaller, more intimate space of the Phillips, adding an audio component—the sound of breath blown through lips—that reinforces the psychological quality of the piece. *Brain Storm* is displayed near **Jacob Lawrence's** *The Migration Series* and in conversation with landscapes by **Paul Cézanne** (*The Garden at Les Lauves*), **Arthur Dove** (*Me and the Moon*), and **Vassily Kandinsky** (*Autumn II*), works that for Ma evoke movement or travel, whether spatial, temporal, or mental.

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Brain Storm builds on the Chinese tradition of ink wash landscape merging it with modern technology. Where the Western tradition of linear perspective strives for an accurate representation of the three-dimensional world seen from a single vantage point, Chinese landscape painting has multiple perspectives and is time-based: the viewer travels through seasons and mountain ranges, as states of mind unfold. In a reinterpretation of this tradition, Ma created *Brain Storm* by painting on glass with poured ink washes and filming the process.

At first glance, *Brain Storm* seems monochromatic: black, white and gray. On closer view, its ink splashes reveal ranges of hues: some are the result of digital vibrations at the edges of the washes; others are in the ink itself and may be warm or cool. According to Chinese tradition, ink (mo) has five colors (burnt, thick, heavy, light, clear), and the colors have six hues (black, white, dry, wet, dense, light). What we think of as pure black actually has many variations. Moreover, applying the ink with different brushes and gestures adds further color gradations. "It is precisely this richness of colors and vibrancy of surfaces that I responded to most in the works of Kandinsky, Cézanne, and Dove," says Ma. Indeed, the expanding, limitless space of Cézanne's *The Garden at Les Lauves* has parallels in Chinese landscape; the free-floating shapes and color washes in Kandinsky's *Autumn II* evoke the buoyancy that is so characteristic of ink paintings; and the silent companionship of man and moon implied in Dove's abstract, dreamy, *Me and the Moon* finds an echo in the relationship of man and horse in Ma's *Brain Storm*. Mixing Eastern and Western traditions and ancient and modern practices, Ma's piece resonates with the temporal, fluid, and lyrical dimensions of these modern European works.

Ma works in media other than video, including installation, drawing, fashion design, performance, and architectural and public art. Born in 1973 in Beijing, China, she moved to the United State in 1986, and received an MFA from Pratt Institute, New York, in 1999. She was a member of the core creative team for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, and chief designer for visual and special effects. She won an Emmy as an associate producer for the NBC broadcast of the Games' opening ceremony.

Ma has participated in numerous international exhibitions, including the 2009 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, 2006 Singapore Biennale, and shown her work at museums such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, National Art Museum of China. Her upcoming projects include 2010 Taipei International Gardening and Horticulture Exposition among others. Her permanent public artworks are on view at the Digital Beijing Building, and San Francesco Bridge in Colle di Val d'Elsa, Italy.

The presentation of *Brain Storm* is made possible by Transformer and Shigeko Bork mu projects, in conjunction with *Ink Storm*, an exhibition curated by Ma at Transformer, Washington, D.C. (September 18–October 31, 2009).

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