Caiguo-Qiang (surname pronounced tsai, given name pronounced gwo chang) was born in 1957 in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. Even as a child he was interested in art and would sketch landscapes around his house in watercolors, and later in oil paint. Caiguo-Qiang was part of a theater troupe as a teenager and also appeared in two martial-arts films. At the age of 24 he entered the Shanghai Drama Institute to formally study stage design and related disciplines including architectural drawing, lighting and costume design. During the summers he and his future wife Hong Hong Wu would travel to the far corners of China to experience nature and primal memories of the land. His experiences were reflected in works that incorporated rubbings of natural objects such as rocks and tree roots.

From early on his work has combined both scholarly and politically charged aspects. Proficient in a variety of mediums, Caiguo-Qiang began using gunpowder in his work to foster spontaneity and confront the suppression that he felt from the controlled artistic tradition and social climate in China at the time. While living in Japan from 1986 to 1995 Caiguo-Qiang explored the properties of gunpowder in his drawings, an exploration that eventually led to his experimentation with explosives on a massive scale and the development of his signature explosion events. These explosion projects, both poetic and ambitious, aim to establish an exchange between viewers and the larger universe around them.

Caiguo-Qiang achieved international prominence during his time in Japan and his work began to be shown around the world. In 1995 he moved to New York, where he currently resides. His work reflects his cultural history and draws on a wide variety of sources including feng shui, Chinese medicine, dragons, roller coasters, computers, vending machines, and gunpowder. Since 9/11 he has reflected upon his use of explosives both as metaphor and material. “Why is it important,” he asks, “to make these violent explosions beautiful? Because the artist,...
like an alchemist, has the ability to transform certain energies, using poison against poison, using dirt and getting gold.”

The Guggenheim has a special history with Cai. In 1996 he was selected as a finalist for the inaugural Hugo Boss Prize, which is administered by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and awarded to extraordinary creative figures in contemporary international art. His participation in the Guggenheim’s accompanying exhibition was a catalyst for Cai’s international recognition, and the work he presented, *Cry Dragon/Cry Wolf: The Ark of Genghis Khan* (1996), is among the highlights of the Guggenheim Museum’s contemporary art collection.

Through years of artistic practice, Cai has formulated collaborative relationships with specialists and experts from various disciplines, including scientists, doctors, feng shui masters, designers, architects, choreographers, filmmakers and composers. Many who have worked with him on projects have reflected upon how profoundly meaningful the experience has been to them. Cai is once again working on a large collaborative project as a core member of the creative team that is planning the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.
“What influenced me most when we began to learn about Western contemporary art in the 1980s was not a particular work, tendency, or idea but rather the huge amount of information suddenly made available: this vast, hundred-year span of modern and contemporary Western art. The main impression it left me with was: ‘Damn, you can do anything you want!’”

**EARLY WORKS**

As Cai approached his late twenties, he began experimenting with art-making techniques that directly harnessed the spontaneity of natural forces. Initially he experimented with laying oil paint on canvas and blasting it with air blown from an electric fan that he held over the surface of the canvas, shaping the movement of paint with the force of wind. He titled each of the two works he created in this way *Typhoon* (1985). Their swirling imagery and the process of creation represent Cai’s yearning to create art that does not just depict a natural phenomenon but is itself the direct manifestation of that phenomenon—in this case, a windstorm.

In 1984 Cai introduced gunpowder ignited directly on his oil canvases, which he positioned horizontally on the floor. He lit fuses igniting the gunpowder and creating loud bangs and flashes of fire, which then vanished in clouds of smoke. The result was a textured surface that looked and felt like an explosion, blackened and charred. Cai would continue to develop a process where these natural forces allowed him to relinquish control, resulting in compositions formed by the random marks of sparks and smoke.

Soon after his move to Japan in 1986, Cai switched from igniting gunpowder on painted canvases to igniting it directly on sheets of Japanese-made paper. By the end of this period of experimentation Cai had established a distinctive visual language incorporating the direct effects of gunpowder explosives.

Cai’s early two-dimensional works focus on themes that would continue to resonate through his work:
- references to Chinese folklore and mythology;
- the use of gunpowder, a famous Chinese invention that is charged with cultural nationalism; and
- the expression of concern for humanity—the human condition in relationship to “the visible and invisible worlds”—which remains his central subject.

The gunpowder painting *Self-Portrait: A Subjugated Soul* (1985/89) is a transitional work made during the end of Cai’s time in China before he moved to Japan in 1986. He never showed the gunpowder paintings in China because he was concerned that they would be misconstrued as a “rebellious gesture or unpatriotic act.” The work reflects the tumultuous emotions he experienced during this period. Cai took this work with him when he left China and reworked it after the events in Tian’anmen Square in 1989, repainting the background and adding the subtitle *A Subjugated Soul*. The revised title superimposes new meaning on the painting by projecting the feelings of alienation and loneliness Cai experienced as an expatriate separated from his homeland during a dark time in its history.
What is your response to this work? How is it similar to or different from other self-portraits you have seen?

What does it tell you about the artist who created it? What does it not tell you?

Although Cai created this work in China, he felt that he could not show these experimental works in a conservative and highly politicized environment. Think of something that you have created. Who are you willing or not willing to share it with? What influences your decision?

Cai worked on this painting twice. First during its initial creation in 1986 while he was living in China and then again in 1989 after the Tian’anmen Square protests when he was living in Japan. The Tian’anmen Square protests were demonstrations critical of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. They were centered on Tian’anmen Square in the city of Beijing, and the resulting military crackdown on the protesters by the government left hundreds of civilians dead or injured. How does the subtitle *A Subjugated Soul* change your response to this work?

In 1985 Cai created his two *Typhoon* paintings by using an electric fan to energize the paint surface. Choose a natural phenomenon—flood, tornado, hurricane, earthquake, monsoon, sandstorm—and create a work that embodies that force. Both the way your work is made (process) and the way it looks (product) should reflect the natural phenomenon you have selected.

An artist’s self-portrait can show us more than just facial features. They can also reveal inner states of mind. Look at self-portraits by artists you admire, and then consider what would be the best and most authentic way for you to create a self-portrait. What medium should you choose? Why? How will you depict yourself? What size and shape should this work be? Create the most personal of self-portraits, and like Cai, only share it in the right environment.

In Cai’s search to find a material that would afford him “a sense of liberation” he experimented with many methods. However he feels his early efforts failed because, “my eyes remained in control of my hands.” What might Cai have meant by this statement? In what ways could working with gunpowder prove to be liberating?

Research the Tian’anmen Square protests of 1989 and the worldwide reaction to this important historical event. Compare Tian’anmen Square to recent protests by monks in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). Have a class discussion to share your findings.
“I wanted to investigate both the destructive and the constructive nature of gunpowder, and to look at how destruction can create something as well.”

Cai’s drawings made by igniting gunpowder explosives laid on paper constitute a new medium of contemporary artistic expression. Like his explosion events, the gunpowder drawings convey his central idea of using natural energy forces to create works that connect both the artist and the viewer with a primordial state of chaos, contained in the moment of explosion. They also demonstrate his central interest in the relationship of matter and energy. Matter (gunpowder) explodes into energy and reverts to matter in another state (the charred drawing). In this way these works are charts of time, process, and transformation.

To create the drawings, Cai places sheets of specially made paper on the floor and then arranges gunpowder fuses and loose explosive powders—and sometimes cardboard or paper stencils—are also used—to create silhouetted forms over the paper’s surface. Here and there, he lays wooden boards to effectively disperse the patterns resulting from smoke and the impact of the explosion. He then weights all these elements in place with rocks to intensify the explosion. Once the setup is completed, he ignites a fuse at one end of the work with a stick of burning incense. Then, with loud bangs, the ignited gunpowder rips across the surface of the paper, lighting the array of explosives according to its designated pattern and engaging artist and onlookers in a momentary encounter with the spectacular power of explosive destruction. A second or two later, the paper lies in clouds of acrid smoke. Assistants run to stamp out any embers with rags. Finally, the drawing is removed from the floor and hung up vertically for the artist’s inspection.

*Extension* (1994), like many of the gunpowder drawings, is inspired by one of Cai’s large-scale explosion events, in this case, *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10* (1993), for which Cai ignited a line of fire—evocative of a dragon gliding across the land—using 10,000 meters of fuse extending from the end of the Great Wall into the Gobi Desert. The drawing is mounted on 12 oversized panels, and the viewer must walk along the length of the work to fully experience it. The panels of the folding screen are displayed in a pattern that shifts the perspective of the drawing in and out, mimicking the peaks and valleys of the Great Wall while also suggesting, as does the wall itself, the undulating body of a dragon.
Measuring 256 x 1,560 cm (more than 7 feet high and 50 feet long), this drawing is enormous in scale. On a hallway wall of your school use string or masking tape to delineate the dimensions of this drawing. How does realizing the size of this work influence your response to it?

Cai intended for this drawing to refer to the undulating forms of the Great Wall of China and a dragon, which are two symbols of China. In what ways does this drawing suggest these forms? What other associations come mind as you look at this drawing?

This drawing is the combined result of the artist’s careful planning and the energy of a forceful explosion. Which elements of this work seem to be preplanned and which seem to be the result of an explosion?

If you did not know that this drawing was created by the use of a gunpowder explosion, how might you think that it was made?

Although you cannot use gunpowder to produce your work, there are alternative materials and processes you can experiment with to create works of art. Consider nontraditional materials found in nature as well as elemental forces, including sun, wind, earth, and water that might be used in the creation of art. Like Cai, you should document your process through the use of digital photography and/or video and share both the process and product with your classmates.

Cai has conceived some of his works as Projects for Extraterrestrials and designed them to be viewed from a celestial vantage point. They call into question whether there might be other intelligent forms of life in the universe and address the possibility of communication with other beings. Consider designing your own Project for Extraterrestrials. Create a plan with your own ideas on how you might attract the attention of and initiate communication with an alien life form.

Cai asks, “If beings from another planet landed here, what kind of things should they see to understand human achievement?” Create your own response to this question, and share your ideas with your classmates.

The Great Wall of China—parts of which were built as early the fifth century BCE—was constructed to protect China’s northern borders from invasion. Investigate other walls in history, both real and imaginary, including the Berlin Wall (Cai focused on this historical wall in his installation Head On in 2006), the Iron Curtain, the walls of Jericho, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, and any other walls you can discover. Think about the purpose of walls throughout history, and consider the alternatives available in today’s world. Then discuss the extent to which such barriers remain practical.
One of China’s most famous inventions, gunpowder—literally meaning “fire medicine” in Chinese—was originally discovered by ninth-century Taoist alchemists who were searching for an “elixir of immortality.” Over the years Cai has developed his use of this medium into elaborate explosion events. These projects are usually commissioned by museums, art biennials, or national and international agencies and are conceived as works of art with their own conceptual, allegorical, and metaphorical narratives.

Cai’s explosion events operate as performances created for live public audiences, whose impact—thunderous bangs, fiery light, and smoke—conjures both violent chaos and ritual celebration. Each event is thoroughly documented through photographs, videos, and drawings.

By harnessing fire as an ancient and constant element of geological formation, social ritual, religious purification, and life’s destruction, Cai’s explosion events represent the artist’s central interest in both ancient and modern cosmological science.

In March 2004 Cai was invited to Valencia to discuss a possible project. On March 11, only three days before his departure for Spain, the city of Madrid suffered a terrorist attack, a series of coordinated commuter train bombings that killed 191 people and wounded more than eighteen hundred. This tragedy prompted the artist to develop Black Rainbow:

*Explosion Project for Valencia* (2005), which, with its black fireworks that were specifically invented to explode in daylight, commemorate the victims of the train bombings by evoking the ritual of gun salutes that honor fallen soldiers lost in battle.

Cai inverted the brilliance of fireworks designed to explode against a dark night sky by exploding the black fireworks during the day. He has stated that Black Rainbow, like ancient smoke signals, signaled alarm. A somber and dreamlike salute, the ominous arc of smoke also served as a reminder that, despite contemporary associations of such materials with terrorism, explosives can possess ethereal and profound beauty.

The project in Valencia commenced at midday, unfolding in three successive rounds of explosions, perhaps alluding to the three train stations that were bombed during the busy morning rush hour. The black rainbow erupted against a blue sky, and then slowly dissolved leaving a dark cloud.

“In China every significant social occasion of any kind good or bad . . . is marked by the explosion of fireworks . . . like the town crier, announcing whatever’s going on in town.”

Although the photograph documenting it cannot provide the experience of the explosion event itself, after reading the description and looking at the photo describe your reaction to this work.

There are many possible symbolic interpretations for *Black Rainbow: Explosion Project for Valencia*. Read more about the terrorist attack that prompted Cai’s response at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3504912.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3504912.stm). Also consider some of the ideas the artist incorporated into this explosion event, including associations with the color black, with explosions, and with rainbows. Then write a paragraph describing your considered response to this work.

How is Cai’s use of fireworks for *Black Rainbow* similar to or different from fireworks displays that you have seen?

Imagine that you are a resident of Valencia. Is this an event that you would have supported and attended? Explain.

Consider how and why people mark important events in their country's history. Research and discuss the history and rituals involved in various memorial events in the United States, including Veteran’s Day, Memorial Day, and Pearl Harbor Day or days that mark more recent tragedies such the Oklahoma City bombing and 9/11. Compare the way that such events are marked in comparison to celebratory events such as Independence Day.

Choose a national holiday or another day of remembrance and working in groups, design a thoughtful and original way to commemorate the event. Diagrams, video and/or still images, recorded sound, three-dimensional models, and/or written texts may be incorporated into the presentations. Each group should come up with one agreed-upon design to share with the whole class.

In conjunction with another one of Cai’s explosion events, *Tornado: Explosion Project for the Festival of China* (2005), a comprehensive microsite was created that allows students to design their own explosion event. Visit [http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/fireworks/main.html](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/fireworks/main.html)

The production of some of Cai’s explosion events involves the expenditure of great amounts of time and effort, as well as lots of money. All this productive energy is burned up in a flash. According to Cai the cost of these events is part of the work, “It’s a triumph of spiritual reality over material reality. Because money is a symbol of power, status, and privilege in our society, and exploding $200,000 worth in fifteen seconds is in itself a statement.” Discuss whether you agree or disagree with the artist’s statement.
“We live in a world full of terror, of discussion and fear of terror. However, if you present only that, you are not providing a perspective. What if it is also something that is very beautiful and dreamlike? Does that reflect something? I always come back to this point: that art ought not to just restate what we know and how we live, it must provide a perspective, a distance.”

Cai’s early training in stage design proved to be the perfect preparation for his dynamic installations. Spatially, the display of elements floating in space gives a sense of antigravity and other-worldliness. Similar to unfolding Chinese hand scroll paintings and screens, the installations unfold as Cai composes a linear sequence that implies movement through an event.

Since 9/11 terrorist attacks and suicide bombings have become a central theme of Cai’s work. The clearest example, Inopportune: Stage One (2004), was first realized in December 2004 for the exhibition Cai Guo-Qiang: Inopportune at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MMA MoCA), North Adams, and is now in the collection of the Seattle Art Museum. It simulates the trajectory of an exploding automobile tumbling through space, offering up the contradiction between a spectator’s abhorrence of violence and attraction to the abstract beauty of some violent images. Nine white Ford Tauruses are positioned in various stages of movement through the air. The first car remains inert on the ground. As each subsequent vehicle progresses through the sequence in midair, electric light rods protruding from their bodies emit blinding, flashing lights that mimic an exploding bomb as well as fireworks. The palette of the light rods begins with a white, hot light, and grows progressively warmer and more vibrant as the angles of the cars rise and the “explosion” progresses through time, then quiets down into soft hues of purple and pink and at last a soft blue. The last vehicle is placed on the ground, absent of any light, as if the car bombing never happened. The overall composition has the look of motion photography or a sequence of freeze frames from a movie. According to the artist, the expansive horizontal layout—which viewers walk along and through to experience fully—also refers to the temporal experience of viewing Chinese handscroll paintings, whose narratives unfold horizontally.

For the exhibition copy of Inopportune: Stage One fabricated for his Guggenheim retrospective, Cai has reconfigured the work as a vertical installation that rises up through the open central space of the museum’s rotunda building.
What is your first response to this work? Make a list of all the words that come to mind to describe this work and your reaction to it. In class share your responses. How many are shared? How many are unique?

The original version of this work is configured as a horizontal installation. The exhibition copy fabricated for the Guggenheim has been reconfigured dramatically as a vertical installation that begins on the ground floor and ends with the last car resting on the highest level of the rotunda’s ramp. Which installation would you prefer to visit? Why?

Cai frequently reconfigures components of his installations. Think of another way that these nine cars could be shown in a different space, for instance your school cafeteria, a local shopping mall or a town park.

Cai sees both beauty and destruction in violence. Discuss this dichotomy and the possibility of being both attracted to and repelled by a single image or event.

Inopportune: Stage One ends with one car that has landed safely, without a scratch or dent, with all four wheels securely on the ground. How does this positioning affect the way you interpret this work?

- Although Cai is depicting a car bombing, a terrorist act that is aimed at destruction, he is avidly nonideological and declares that an artist’s task is not to say whether something is good or bad but simply to show reality in a new way. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your response.

- In planning the installation of Inopportune: Stage One for the Guggenheim’s exhibition, Cai used an architectural model of the museum and model cars to choreograph the most dramatic vertical effect. Sketch a plan for an installation work. Then, use cardboard or foamcore to create the architectural model for a space where your work would be installed. Using readymade toys or handmade models show how your installation would be realized within the space. Share you ideas with your classmates.

- Art critics have compared Inopportune: Stage One to works by other artists, including:
  - Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), Transverse Gallop, 1887: http://www.math.yorku.ca/SCS/Gallery/images/muybridge_galloping_horse.jpg
  - Chen Rong (13th century), Nine Dragons, 1244; this work is in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: http://www.mfa.org/index.asp

What parallels to Cai’s work do you see in each of these works?
“People ask me why I made this work [Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard], and I obviously have many reasons. . . . [But] I acted more upon intuition. . . . You have to know when to follow your intuition because it is then that things can become fun and interesting.”

As a boy growing up in China, Cai saw the iconic socialist-realist sculpture Rent Collection Courtyard, created in 1965 by members of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. The 1965 version, which still exists in multiples located throughout China, is composed of 114 life-size figures arranged in a series of groupings depicting the mistreatment of peasants at the hands of prerevolutionary landlords. For a decade, it was reproduced and erected in cities throughout China, where it was the most emotionally charged and political image after Mao's portrait. It was hailed by the central government as a tribute to the great accomplishments of Chinese communism.

Cai’s Venice’s Rent Collection Courtyard was realized for the Aperto Over All exhibition at the 1999 Venice Biennale. He invited ten sculptors to Venice from China, including Long Xu Li, who had worked on the original sculpture, to re-create selected groupings. Cai’s installation was fashioned on site from wire and wood armatures and 60 tons of clay. Perhaps the most compelling encounters with the piece took place during the opening days of the exhibition while the academically trained artists from China were intentionally still hard at work producing the life-size figures as visitors looked on. During the remaining months of the exhibition the unfired clay figures were left to slowly dry and disintegrate, and any that still remained at the close of Aperto Over All were then destroyed.

In Venice the installation was praised for its postmodernist appropriation of the historic icon and won the Venice Biennale’s important Golden Lion award. In China, however, the work was severely criticized. The Chinese press raised the issue of plagiarism, writing about the political controversy raised by the work and the widespread belief that Cai was attacking his homeland. A copyright infringement lawsuit against Cai and the Biennale was filed in China by sculptors who participated in creating the original work, but the courts ultimately dismissed the case.

For the Guggenheim’s exhibition Cai has created a new version of the installation, New York’s Rent Collection Courtyard (2008), this time on the ramp of the museum’s rotunda. Again, Chinese artists have come to replicate the clay figures, and visitors will be able to watch as the work is completed.
This work is meant to be experienced in person. Imagine yourself walking among these figures as they are being created on the ramps of the Guggenheim Museum. What is your reaction to the work? What would you want to ask the sculptors?

These figures are crafted from clay. Without being fired in a kiln they begin to crack and deteriorate. Cai has made this deterioration part of the work. How does the fact that they are impermanent affect the meaning of the work?

Cai remembers seeing Rent Collection Courtyard as a child. He has commented, “I first saw the work as a young person in China and was very moved by it. The work was replicated in every city in China; everyone experienced it and was moved by it. Often people would even cry. At that time I didn’t understand the work’s cultural strategy, or that the intention was propagandistic, but now as a contemporary artist, I notice the techniques that were used to engage with people and make them feel like part of the work.” Look carefully at the work. What “strategies” do you think Cai is referring to? How does this work create empathy? How is it propaganda?

• This work was awarded the Golden Lion at the 1999 Venice Biennale but was also severely criticized in China. Discuss how the same work viewed from different perspectives can evoke different responses and emotions. Debate this issue in your classroom with one group seeing the work from the perspective of the Biennale judges and a second group taking the side of the Chinese journalists.

• Create a sculpture from unfired clay where the fragility of the work will be part of its meaning.

• This work was neither originally conceived of by Cai nor fabricated by him. Cai’s creative act was remembering the strong emotions it had evoked in him as a child and understanding that by re-creating it in another context, he could create a new work, a new dialogue. Sometimes the act of moving something from its usual environment into another setting can change its meaning. Experiment with this idea. Document this process photographically, first showing your subject in its customary environment and then in a new site aimed at transforming its meaning. Discuss your work and its intentions with your classmates.

• Although Cai was emotionally moved by this work when he visited it as a child, as an adult he came to see it as political propaganda. Can you think of anything that you experienced as a young child that has changed its meaning for you as you have grown older? A story, object, holiday, film, book, or place and so on? Describe how your thinking has changed.

• Cai recognizes that his early training in stage design has proved useful. “My current work draws a great deal on these years of study. I learned how to read an architectural plan, draw up a budget, get organized, and work in a team. When I make something, I do not only think of myself.” What profession do you aspire to? What skills do you think will be most important to acquire? Interview professionals in that field and ask them which earlier experiences were most important in helping them to prepare for their current work. Make a list of ways that you might be able to gain some of these preparatory skills and experiences.
“This museum has everything that other museums have—a space, a curator, light, audience—but it does not have all the baggage that comes with new museums, such as insurance, climate controls, electricity, security guards, etc., so I faced a challenge similar to when the primitive cavemen first painted on the wall.”

In the early 1990s Cai began what are called “social projects,” which strive to integrate contemporary art into the everyday life of communities and cities. Assuming the role of cultural activist, Cai began collaborating at nonart sites, creating opportunities for dialogue and participation.

This thinking has been extended to consider the nature of museums and their possibilities. To this end Cai founded his own museum franchise dubbed Everything Is Museum. Inspired by artist Joseph Beuys’ philosophy that anyone can be an artist, Cai shifted that idea to propose that any place can be a museum and took on the role of curator, a specialist with a critical eye who selects a series of artworks and decides how they will be displayed. To date the Everything Is Museum series includes six interventions into unusual, abandoned sites such as pottery kilns, old bridges, and military bunkers. Collaborating with government officials, artisans, volunteers, and contemporary artists, Cai uses extraordinary leadership to realize these complex large-scale projects. Responding to the conditions of each new location for a project, he carefully considers its history and culture with the sensibility of an archaeologist or historian.

One project, BMoCA (Bunker Museum of Contemporary Art) on Kinmen Island, which for five decades was primarily a military garrison protecting Taiwan from Mainland China and where thousands of soldiers and civilians lost their lives during attacks by communist Chinese forces. This island held special meaning for Cai because he grew up in Mainland China in Quanzhou, a port city just across the Taiwan Strait, and remembered from his childhood the noise of bombers flying to and back from Taiwan and the explosive sounds of artillery. He dreamed of converting Kinmen’s network of vacant military bunkers into sites for art and creativity. For the inaugural BMoCA exhibition Cai invited 18 artists from China, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora to create site-specific works to transform Kinmen into a place for experimental artistic and community programs, including exhibitions by local school children.

In 2009 Cai plans to open QMoCA (Quanzhou Museum of Contemporary Art) in his hometown. This new structure will be designed by Norman Foster’s architectural firm, Foster + Partners, and function as a community-based museum and performance center. An exhibition documenting the Everything Is Museum series is on view in the Guggenheim Museum’s Sackler Center for Arts Education, where visitors are invited to create and display their own ideas for unique museum sites.
Wa ng We n-chih, born in Taiwan in 1959, is one of the 18 artists Cai invited to exhibit at BMoCA. At Nanshan Fortification Bunker No. 2, Wang worked with a group of craftsmen to build a bamboo and rattan artillery-shell-shaped tower nearly 50-feet high and a network of tunnels that invite climbing and resting. He was interested in integrating the former war zone with its natural environment and providing a calm place for meditation: “My work searches for harmony after catastrophe or massive destruction.” What is your response to Wang's work? Do you think he has accomplished his stated intention? Is this a place you would want to experience? Explain.

In what ways is BMoCA different from museums you have experienced? In what ways is it similar?

Would you have liked to participate in this project? Imagine you are one of the schoolchildren who were invited to transform a military bunker. Describe the type of space you would have created. What do you think you might learn and/or remember from this experience?

For his Everything Is Museum projects Cai, an internationally known artist, takes on the job of curator, choosing the art that will be shown instead of creating it. Which job appeals to you more, artist or curator? Why?

Cai has asserted that “everyone is an artist” and “everything is museum.” What do you think the artist means by these statements? Do you agree or disagree with his assertions? Explain.

For five decades, from 1949 until the 1990s, Kinmen’s strategic location, between Mainland China and Taiwan, placed the island at the center of ongoing tensions. Research the history of the conflict and have a class discussion about what you learn. How has Cai addressed this history in creating BMoCA?

If Cai were to come to your community looking for a site for another Everything Is Museum project, what site(s) would you suggest to him? Why? What do you think should be inside that museum space? Why?

During Cai’s exhibition, visitors will have the opportunity to create and display a model of their Everything Is Museum site in the Guggenheim Museum’s Sackler Center for Arts Education. Think of a real or imaginary structure that would make an interesting or unique site for a museum. It may be a familiar place or something from your wildest imagination. Create a sketch or paper model for your museum and describe the type of exhibitions one might see and/or experiences one might have while visiting it.

When asked “What is a Chinese artist? What is an Asian artist? What is an international artist? What is a contemporary artist? What is a traditional artist?” Cai replied, “It is me. This is what I am. Our times have given us the opportunity to belong to every category.” After viewing Cai’s work do you agree? What aspects of his work can be deemed Chinese? Asian? International? Contemporary? Traditional?
RESOURCES

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DVDS


WEB SITES

The Kennedy Center, Artsedge. Lesson plans for grades 9–12 integrating visual arts, language arts, and science created in conjunction with Cai Guo-Qiang’s explosion event Tornado: Explosion Project for the Festival of China (2005). Includes documentation and a microsite where students can design their own explosion event.

www.caiguoqiang.com
Cai Guo-Qiang’s Web site with links to articles, writings, exhibition history, and project documentation.

www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum
The educator’s guide is available with downloadable images on the Guggenheim’s Web site.

www.pbs.org/art21/artists/cai/index.html
Art 21: Art in the Twenty-First Century, Web site for the PBS series focusing on contemporary art and artists, including Cai Guo-Qiang.

This educator’s guide is adapted from Thomas Krens and Alexandra Munroe, Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want To Believe, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2008).

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**VOCABULARY**

**APPROPRIATION** The concept of taking possession of existing materials, imagery, or techniques from everyday life, popular culture, or past traditions, often without permission, and reusing it in a context that differs from its original one. Appropriation techniques are frequently used in order to reveal meaning not previously seen in the original.

**CULTURAL REVOLUTION** A comprehensive reform movement in China initiated by Mao Zedong to eliminate counterrevolutionary elements in the country’s institutions and leadership. It lasted from 1966 to 1976 and was characterized by military rule, purges of intellectuals, restructuring of the educational system, and social and economic chaos.

**FENG SHUI** (pronounced fuhng shwey) Literally “wind and water,” the Chinese art or practice of positioning objects, especially graves, buildings, and furniture, to create harmonious surroundings by enhancing the balance of yin and yang and the flow of energy.

**INSTALLATION** An artwork designed for a specific gallery space. Its components are to be viewed as a single work of art.

**POSTMODERNIST** Postmodernist theory questions and dismantles the grand narrative of Western culture. It includes appropriation and other aesthetic approaches that critique modernism’s principles of innovation, artistic authenticity, and individual expression.

**PROJECTS FOR EXTRATERRESTRIALS** Cai’s monumentally scaled events that seek to create a form of communication between humankind and the universe.

**SOCIALIST REALIST** Art that is realistic in form and socialist in content. Socialist realism was first adopted officially by the Soviet Union and was later embraced by other communist countries such as China. In China socialist-realist art sought to glorify the communist regime led by Mao Zedong.