

For Immediate Release

July 1, 2008

Publisher: AW Asia  
ISBN: 978-0-9785764-4-8  
480 pages, fully illustrated throughout  
Soft cover, 11 x 9 inches  
\$50.00



**Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-Garde Art in New China  
"The Updated Edition"**

*"[Chinese contemporary art] is now the hottest art market in the world... But could the sudden injection of cash stifle an art scene that is still in its infancy?"*

-Jonathan Watts, March 13, 2008, article in The Guardian

Yes, Chinese art is hot but it is not in its infancy. As critic and curator Marianne Brouwer writes in the preface to the second edition of *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-Garde art in New China*, "Karen Smith provides the public with an indispensable companion to the long road, the many departs a zero, the breaks, traumas and success stories that have shaped Chinese art over the past twenty-five years."

"Written and published well before the art market exploded and the price of anything Chinese in contemporary art rose sky-high, *Nine Lives* was conceived in order to fill an existing void. It was the first publication in English to attempt to map out a comprehensive art history from Mao's death to today. The second edition, coming only two years after the book first appeared, proves that it is still fulfilling its initial mission."

*Nine Lives* takes as its point of departure the questions: "What does "avant-garde" mean in the context of modern Chinese history? How do politics, ideology, familial circumstances and the impact of socio-political events influence the individual creative process in China?" A highly readable and insightful book, *Nine Lives* maps out the birth of the Chinese avant-garde from the mid-1980s to the present in a series of vivid portraits of the lives and careers of nine artists (Wang Guangyi, Geng Jianyi, Fang Lijun, Gu Dexin, Li Shan, Zhang Xiaogang, Xu Bing, Zhang Peili, and Wang Jianwei) who have come to embody the avant-garde in Chinese art, as painted by the author, British art historian Karen Smith.

These nine individuals were born at the onset of the People's Republic of China, grew up during the Cultural Revolution, and emerged in the 1980s as some of the most influential characters shaping modern art within China, as well as its profile on the international scene. Their

compelling personal histories and views on China provide new readers with a foundation and timeline for understanding Chinese history, culture, and the identity of its art world.

### **Why an “Updated Edition”?**

The speed of change in China prompted an updated edition just two years after the first, both in China and in terms of the artists’ careers; all nine artists have had their reputations cemented in a way that makes *Nine Lives* seem prophetic. Now, each “life” is brought up to date and includes illustrations of new works. Refinements have also been made to the original text and the overall layout.

The new edition is bigger and thicker than the first, paralleling the increase in scale of all that is ‘China’ today, and of what the artists are now contending with as they address the ever-pressing issue of how to evolve, as they watch younger generations pick up their ideas and run faster and further than many of them ever believed possible.

*“Nine Lives is recommended and rewarding reading, especially for students of Chinese culture and modern societal landmarks...”*  
(Midwest Book Review)

### **About the Author**

Karen Smith was born in Hertfordshire. She graduated from the oil painting department of Wimbledon Art College in 1987, and moved to Asia in 1988, settling in China in 1993 to explore with an art scene that was then unknown beyond its national borders. Today, she is an acknowledged authority on the Chinese avant-garde, and the contemporary art scene to which it gave birth. In April 2008, she was named one of six foreign nationals instrumental in promoting Chinese art internationally (Visual Production magazine, Shanghai).

Smith’s curatorial work includes:

My China Now—a moving image project (Hayward Gallery) 2008

Illumination: Ai Weiwei (Mary Boone Gallery) 2008

The Real Thing (Tate Liverpool) 2007

The Chinese: Photography and Video from China (Kunsthaus Wolfsberg) 2004

Revolutionary Capitals: Beijing in London (ICA) 1999

Smith is currently writing a monograph on artist/architect Ai Weiwei for the Contemporary Artist Series, published by Phaidon, and due for release Spring 2009.

### **About the Publisher**

AW Asia is a New York organization devoted to the promotion of contemporary Chinese art. Its programs include institutional loans, curatorial initiatives, educational outreach, and publications, including U-TURN, a new periodical chronicling the development of Chinese art from 1979 to the present. AW Asia maintains a collection of works of art by avant-garde Chinese artists, which serves as the basis for travelling exhibitions, ongoing installations, and educational programs.

For additional information on AW Asia, please visit [www.awasiany.com](http://www.awasiany.com).