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(Introduction speech to the March 13th Round Table in Salonica)

CHINA-EUROPE: ARTISTIC PRODUCTION, MARKET CRISIS AND THE NEW ART

We have decided to use a Greek word for this Round Table today, a word that is echoed in different tones - all seemingly in a suspense scale from worry to catastrophe - and this is the word "crisis". Crisis in economy mainly, in the banking system, in the credit policies, in the industrial business, in the real estate business, which lead to unemployment, to poverty, to bankruptcy, which lead to social instability, demands, demonstrations, riots and rage.

It is clear that the western governments are looking for ways out, more or less conservative attempts to solve parts of the problem. Most of the European governments have decided to generously finance the banks, that is to give a strong medication to the patient, or else to give a push to that which has already proved its weakness and will most probably fall down again if nothing changes radically in the future. I am not an economist and I am not a politician, but I intuitively see a solution through the implementation of radical and bold measures. This intuitive thought leads me to make comparisons between the new global socio-economical situation and the contemporary culture.

One task of the artists is to be radical and bold and the curators' mission is to support this radicality and boldness, often taking risks or sharing the artists' risks. A smoothly going art market possibly diminishes the artists' risks and at the same time makes the art work spiritless and nerveless. Artists rely on the easiness of life. It seems incoherent, but it is both distressing and encouraging to produce art in times of uncertainty. Both hard and creative. This will be actually, the title of our next biennale of contemporary art, to open next May here in Thessaloniki.

Some years ago, a new window opened in Europe towards the contemporary art world: the window to China. What kind of new wind was blown? Was it an interest towards new creativity or simply a big fresh new market? Was there a similar interest in contemporary European art from the Chinese side? Was this interest limited in the art market or did it manage to intrude the art institutions as well? I am sure there will be many interesting questions waiting for discussion in the Round Table.

I wish to thank deeply the Forum Europe-China for organizing this Round Table today. Mr. Pierre Calame and Ms. Yu Shuo were not able to be here today. I am sure some words about the Forum and its activity will be heard today by Francois Bossiere. The SMCA has always given emphasis to inviting artists from geographical areas with difficult access to the so called western world. I understand that it is the Forum's task to bring closer two big cultures and populations and this is not always easy to succeed. One very simple example was the difficulty of having visas issued for our Chinese guests, Ms. Nan and Mr. Li. We are very happy to have them here today and we thank them for their patience. I thank the artist and poet Demosthenes Agrafiotis who made the link between the Museum and the Forum and whose knowledge of contemporary Chinese art was very helpful. I thank the participants that came from different places in Europe to take part in today's discussion.

I warmly wish good luck to the talks of this Round Table and I hope there will be a fruitful follow up in the near future.