

# « 天堂 - PARADIS - PARADISE »

WEN FANG / THE HUNDRED FLOWERS OF MAGAOZHUANG

Galerie Paris-Beijing



Spring 2011



Poverty Alleviation through Art

*a co-production Wen Fang / Femmes du Ningxia*

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# POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH ART

**P**aris - Liumiao (Ningxia) - 2006 - H el ene Gronier and Perrine Lhuillier organize a pilot project with local female embroiderers to test their capacity to meet an order of embroidered soles. The goal was to empower these female embroiderers from Ningxia province to get out of poverty through their traditional skill, hand-made embroidery.

**Beijing - 2009**, Wen Fang, a young Chinese artist, was originally dreaming of using her art to help China's destitute... The concept of Poverty Alleviation through Art was born!

**Beijing - November 2009**, at the annual gala of the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Beijing<sup>1</sup>, Wen Fang met with H el ene Gronier, the president of the French NGO Femmes du Ningxia. It was only a tiny step from poverty alleviation through handicraft to poverty alleviation through art.

This close affinity led to the first act, *Textile Dreams* (see box p. 3), which was carried out in Ningxia and brought to the forefront the women member of the Magaozhuang Hundred Flowers Cooperative. This first act not only strengthened the new friendship between Wen Fang and H el ene Gronier, but also confirmed the sustainability and benefits of the Poverty Alleviation through Art project.

This project has several specificities:

- A common vision by the artist and the French NGO supports the project
- The traditional embroidery skills of the women member of the Hundred Flowers are the root of the artist's inspiration
- The artist generously transfers part of the proceeds from the sale of artworks to the Hundred Flowers
- An investment logic allows to support the next acts of the Poverty Alleviation through Art project

Part of the proceeds from the sale of artworks at *Textile Dreams* will thus be dedicated to the second act, *Paradise*. Carried out in Ningxia again, *Paradise* will feature a dream space made of coloured threads and other inventions by Wen Fang around the theme "Woman of Yesterday and Tomorrow"... Much more ambitious than *Textile Dreams*, this new creation will require financial support from sponsors.



The 23 artworks created during *Textile Dreams* were exhibited in Beijing and available for sale. The *Textile Dreams* artworks have brought in 60,000 RMB to this day. 30,000 RMB will support a design training program and the improvement of these women's life quality, notably healthcare expenses; the remaining 30,000 RMB will be invested in the *Paradise* project.

<sup>1</sup> An artwork offered by Wen Fang was auctioned at this gala; the proceeds were entirely transferred to Femmes du Ningxia to support its programmes.

# ●●● POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH ART, ACT II 天堂 - PARADIS - PARADISE

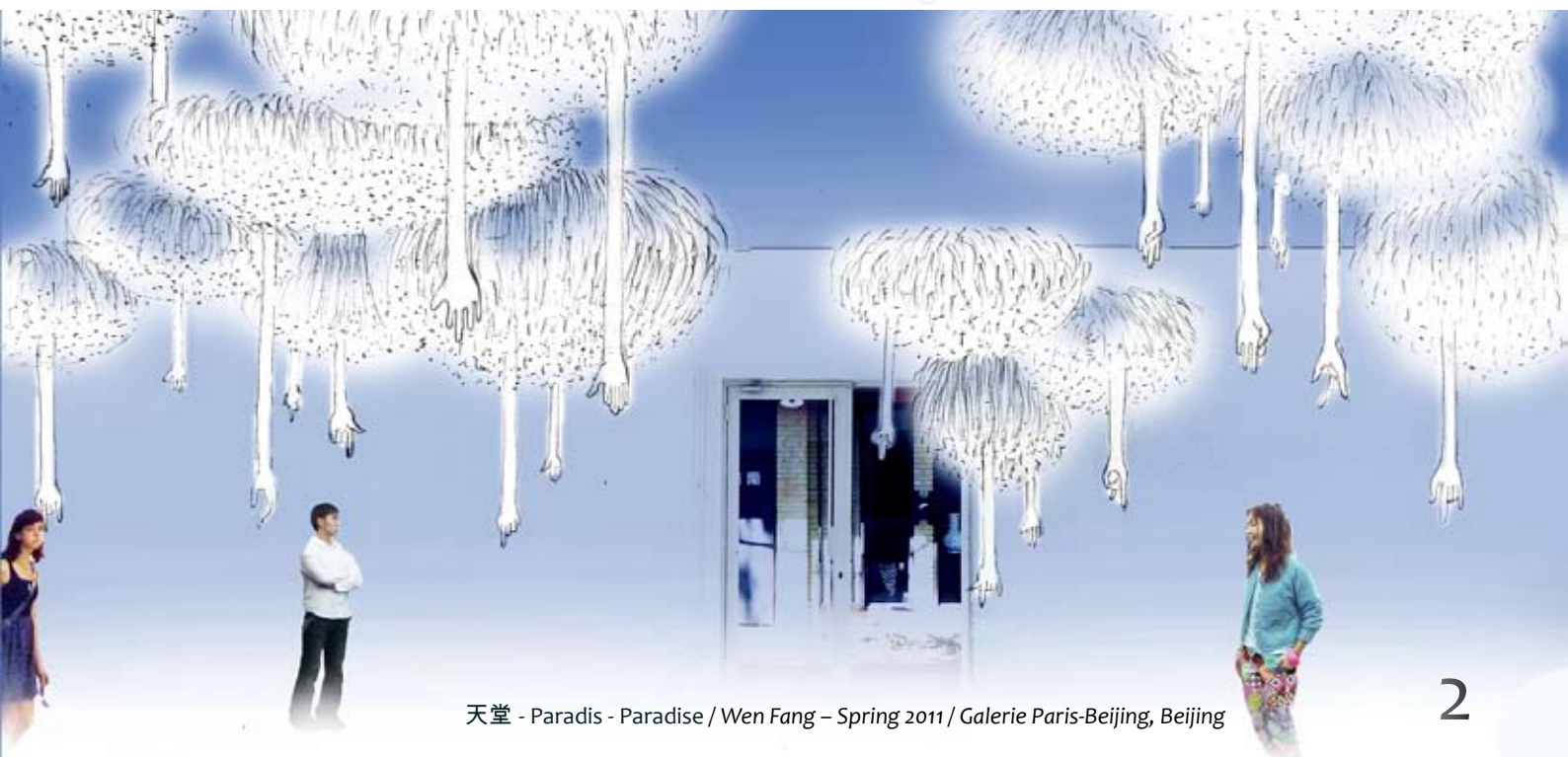
In this new project, Wen Fang gives free rein to her imagination. She develops a language mixing poetry and daily objects. This second project is characterized by the creation of a sensational space in three dimensions that takes the onlooker to another world. An utopian world, entirely made of embroidery threads, leather and wood, between the earth and the sky, wrapped in femininity and dream. Through this new artwork called 天堂 - *Paradis - Paradise*, Wen Fang hopes more than ever to use her talent to pursue a noble ambition: to help the Flowers think, dream and awaken to the extent of their know-how.

*“Every time I saw the multicolored threads stall in the market of the small city of Yuwang (Ningxia), often swept by the sandstorms, I had a burst of inspiration. These dazzling and joyful colors would make you smile even on a sad and grey day. For years, women in this region have used these colored threads to sew and weave their dreams and their love for their families. Now, I would like to weave with these women living on the poverty line a paradise of multicolored thread. This paradise will be a surreal space, based on the theme ‘Woman of yesterday and tomorrow’. Through this new creation, I hope to change the image of weakness and distress of these women. I really want to make a miracle happen with them, with all of us. For them, for me, but all also for all the women in the world.”*

Wen Fang



Project model



# THE ARTIST, WEN FANG



**B**orn in Beijing in 1976, Wen Fang grew up in the Chinese capital. At 18, she was already passionate about photography, clicking away frantically at the city and its people: photos of friends in derelict buildings, rubble or construction sites; shots of homeless people or random subway passengers, whom she photographed stealthily, her camera hidden behind an umbrella.

She went on to study at the Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts, and worked as a web designer for 6 years.

But Wen Fang could not help dreaming about France, to her mind the cradle of Art. She took French language classes in Beijing's Alliance Française for

a year, before joining the Ecole Louis-Lumière, the photography and cinema school in Paris. There, Wen Fang became captivated by Man Ray's surrealist works, which pushed her to "see beyond what can be seen".

When she came back to China in 2004, she resolutely wanted to become a photographer. But finding work was not easy...

She decided to leave for Tokyo, where one of her friends lived, to undertake a project on Japanese youth focusing on the links between tradition and modernity. An issue with which China was also struggling.

Back in China again, she started using new media to expose her photographs.

The mingong brick was born.

## EXHIBITIONS

**2010** Textile Dreams, Yishu 8 Gallery, Beijing, China

**2009** Birthday Present, Paris-Beijing Gallery, Beijing, China  
Isabelle Huppert, la femme aux portraits, Ullens Center for Contemporary Arts, Beijing, China

**2008** Dior & Chinese artists (50th anniversary of DIOR), Ullens Center for Contemporary Arts, Beijing, China  
Our Future, Ullens Center for Contemporary Arts, Beijing, China  
Foundations, Paris-Beijing Gallery, Beijing, China  
Chinese Women Photographers Exhibition, Ravenna, Italy  
The Golden Brick: What are you looking at ?, Olympic Museum of Lausanne, Switzerland

**2007** The Dream of the White Mansion, Paris-Beijing, Beijing, China

**2006** Walls, Beijing 798, Beijing, China

**2005** Get it louder, Beijing-Shanghai-Guangzhou, China  
First place for the Marie-Claire Prize in international reporting

**2004** Fémis Photography Festival, Paris, France  
L'oeil intercontinental, Paris, France  
Pink Ribbon Public Welfare Photography Exhibition, Redgate Gallery, Beijing, China

**2002** Asia Art Festival, Fukuoka, Japan

## Selected works

**2008** Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy Foundation for Creation (LVMH), Paris, France  
**2008** Ullens Center for Contemporary Arts, Beijing, China

# FEMMES DU NINGXIA

**F**emmes du Ningxia (“Women of Ningxia” or FDN), a French NGO working with Chinese women. Established in January 2007 Femmes du Ningxia is an NGO working in the field of international development.

FDN’s objective is to accompany women living in extremely precarious conditions to create and sustain an economic activity based on their existing skills: traditional handmade embroidery.

Because of its democratic mode of operation, the individual commitment system it is based on and its sustainable effects on community development, a cooperative has appeared as the best organization form to carry out this development project. FDN has implemented participatory methods to enable the villagers to become actors of their own development and run independently their economic activity.



The Magaozhuang Hundred Flowers Cooperative was thus born on October 14, 2007. Besides the financial objective of this project – to bring a source of income to the women, FDN’s mission has also been to reinforce the women’s autonomy through empowerment.

Through numerous trainings (embroidery technique, management, design and art workshop), meetings and exploratory missions to Beijing, FDN has helped the women member of the Hundred Flowers to develop their expression skills, their social status

and their sense of initiative.

The two-year partnership agreement signed between FDN and the Hundred Flowers on August 21, 2008 now comes to an end. FDN intends to keep supporting the development of the cooperative through advice and the Poverty Alleviation through Art project.



## FDN Commitments

- Favouring participatory approaches so as to ensure that members of the Hundred Flowers cooperative are the main actresses of their own development.
- Applying best practices, by relying on an active network of experts to inform our actions.
- Abiding by high standards of transparency, towards beneficiaries, members of our association and donors.

## FDN Actions

**In 2008**, embroidery skills improvement for the women member of the Hundred Flowers and purchase of weaving machines, ironing boards, etc required for effective operation of the cooperative.

**In 2009**, round of trainings (management, embroidery technique improvement, design, etc), rental of a workshop in Yuwang, additional equipment (desks, cupboards, computer, etc) in order to make the Hundred Flowers more professional and autonomous

**In 2010**, first orders, creation of prototype, art workshop, last round of trainings (computer skills, design, etc)

**Website**

[www.femmesduningxia.org](http://www.femmesduningxia.org)

# NINGXIA

## NINGXIA, ONE OF CHINA POOREST REGIONS

**N**ingxia is located in the north-eastern part of China. It borders Inner Mongolia in the arid steppes of Central Asia. One of the People's Republic of China's five autonomous regions, it also ranks as China's third-poorest rural region. The principal causes of poverty are drought and desertification. The rainfall is on average less than 200 mm per year. More than 65 % of the land area in Ningxia suffers from desertification, which affects 90 % of the population. Poverty and drought damage health, particularly that of women. Based on starchy food, their diet does not include dairy products, while fruits and vegetables are rare. Families cannot often afford medical fees.

### **Tongxin county: a poor rural population**

The activities of Femmes de Ningxia are based in the villages of the county of Tongxin: one of Ningxia's counties officially recognized as "poor".

The county of Tongxin includes 237 villages with a total population of 322 600 people. 82 % belong to the Hui minority group. Illiteracy is still widespread and the income per capita very low: between 50 and 120 euros, representing a quotidian income of 14 to 33 eurocents. Tongxin county is situated at an altitude that ranges from 1 240 to 2 625 m. Canyons,



hollowed by the erosion due to rare but heavy showers, alternate with narrow plains. Only a third of the 4 445 km<sup>2</sup> total surface is arable. Nevertheless, agriculture represents the principal livelihood of the inhabitants. Consequently, some 77 000 farmers migrate each year towards Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, or the Yiwu region of Zejiang.



# THE HUNDRED FLOWERS OF MAGAOZHUANG

AN ANCESTRAL KNOW-HOW  
AS THE SOLE SOURCE OF  
PROSPERITY

In Ningxia, women are experts in embroidery: they embroider soles, amulets and many other objects for celebrations, mainly marriages, but also to decorate their interiors. Embroidered soles are constitutive of the tradition of local crafts in northwestern China. Offered to kin, friends and the beloved, they are symbols of affection, friendship and love.



The level of education is rather low: more than 60% of the women who founded the cooperative do not know how to read or only attended primary school. Therefore, for these women who are aware that a scattered production will not reach a critical mass, this cooperative provides a unique opportunity to improve their living conditions both in terms of income and education.

## **The Hundred Flowers of Magaozhuang, first non agricultural cooperative**

On October 14th 2007, in the presence of local and regional government representatives, about 60 embroiderers and women apprentices of Magaozhuang county founded The Hundred Flowers of Magaozhuang, a handicraft cooperative specialized in embroidery.

## **Improving women's living conditions...**

This foundation generated enormous enthusiasm and support from most women of the three villages comprising the county of Magaozhuang: they have enrolled and invested themselves in this endeavour.

## **...by making them actresses and masters of their own life**

Benefiting from the vocational training they will get, the cooperative members will fully and autonomously participate in the local economic development. They have numerous expectations: not only they do want to improve their income and overcome poverty but they also want to learn how to read and write, as well as obtain recognition for their work. They are all aware of the responsibilities involved in managing a cooperative to make it a success and have enthusiastically committed to this challenge which gives them a chance to take control of their own life.



The Hundred Flowers workshop is located in Yuwang, a small city from Tongxin county, at just about the end of the world...

**Website**

[www.baihuahezuoshe.com](http://www.baihuahezuoshe.com)

# GALERIE PARIS - BEIJING

**F**ounded in 2006 by Flore and Romain Degoul, Galerie Paris-Beijing is dedicated to contemporary world photography and comprises a 300 squared meters space in Beijing, at the heart of 798 Art District, and a 150 squared meters space in Paris.

The gallery represents artists whose original and conceptual creativity associates aesthetic considerations with technical mastery, from traditional photography to the new possibilities offered by digital processes.

An essential link between Paris, a capital of world photography, and Beijing, now an established art scene, the gallery's distinctive selection follows two simple objectives:

- ▶ To discover and promote internationally a new generation of rising and established Chinese photographers.
- ▶ To be a platform in China for acclaimed western photographers and to represent their works in a country where their names and works are little known or displayed.

Passionate and vibrant, Galerie Paris-Beijing particularly supports rising artists with the ultimate goal to make them parts of important public and private collections; this is why, in addition to local exposure, Galerie Paris-Beijing publishes art books and catalogues on their behalf, as well as presenting them in the foremost international photography festivals and art fairs.

Ultimately, the gallery bears witness to the richness of China's contemporary photography creation through its collection, and is pleased to offer its expertise to new as well as established collectors.



Galerie Paris-Beijing supports the project: organization of the exhibit, catalog, media communication. The founders, Flore and Romain Degoul, have promised that 10% of their part of the proceeds will be donated to Poverty Alleviation through Art.

