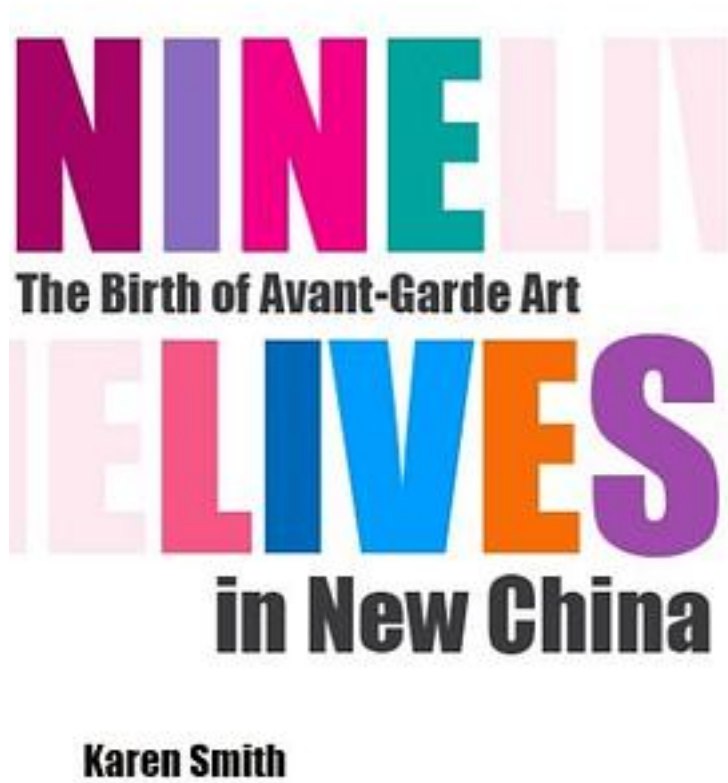


# Nine Lives



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出版者:Blue Kingfisher

出版时间:2008-8-1

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9789881714336

In the early 1990s, the idea of contemporary art in China simply did not compute to a foreign audience. But in 1993, ten contemporary Chinese artists debuted at the 48th

Venice Biennale. They were immediately hailed as progenitors of a Chinese "avant-garde." Their brightly colored, Pop Art-inspired paintings played with socialist motifs, parodied Mao, and gave a visual expression to the feelings of disaffected Chinese youth. They were everything western audiences expected of contemporary art from the People's Republic of China. But a number of critics were rather guarded in their opinions. Was this another flash-in-the-pan phenomenon just as Soviet art had been in the 1980s? Could a Chinese avant-garde maintain a distinct identity of its own and shake off its penchant for imitation? The answer is clearly "yes". The emergence of a market for their art transformed the lives of these avant-garde pioneers from rags to riches, from outcast to hero, from social pariah to cutting-edge cool in a Chinese society adapting to a new era. They did not change but China has changed.

The ideology they once had to fight now propagates a cultural climate of laissez-faire that is tantamount to encouragement. Set against China's official program of modernization, "Nine Lives" paints a compelling picture of artists working beyond the pale of official culture, who started a new cultural revolution that is sweeping China today.

作者介绍:

Karen Smith is a Beijing based expert on contemporary Chinese art, and has lived in Beijing since the early 1990s. Currently she splits her activities between curating exhibitions, educational programmes, and writing about Chinese art. She lives and works in a courtyard close to the Forbidden City. She is one of the few personalities in the Chinese art scene who has consistently followed her instincts in developing new work by emerging and unknown artists, while at the same time maintaining her relationships and interest in the work of China's now more established big name artists. Her book "Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant Garde Art in New China" is now considered one of the key texts in the study of Chinese art.

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