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深蓝  
DEEP BLUE

致敬塔拉号  
a tribute to Tara

That's Shanghai

Sept. 2019

## Author and Curator Stanley Chen Discusses Environmental Art

By [Bryan Grogan](#), September 26, 2019

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The Tara Ocean Foundation was founded 16 years ago in 2003, with a mission to combine science and art, undertaking ocean expeditions around the world studying a variety of topics and areas. They have explored the Arctic, collected information about plankton (discovering 100,000 new marine species in the process) and have also studied coral life in the Asia-Pacific region, passing through Hainan, Xiamen, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

This month, Tara linked up with [Galerie Dumonteil](#) in Shanghai to open the exhibition *Deep Blue: A Tribute to Tara*, which shows work that ponder the ocean.

Japanese artist Maki Ohkojima, who took part in a Pacific voyage aboard Tara in 2016, was in attendance at the opening of *Deep Blue: A Tribute to Tara*. In the course of explaining her beautiful works, 'The Whale' and 'The Cave,' Maki told the audience, "We have the ocean and forest inside us, without them we would die quickly." A very simple but powerful statement.

Within the past month or so we have experienced more forest fires in the Amazonian jungles than in recent years, which caused the world to unite for climate marches, seeking drastic action on environmental issues. In light of these global developments, this exhibition is timely and offers an opportunity for visitors to learn and reflect on questions that deal with the environment.



*Aurore de la Morinerie. Image courtesy of Galerie Dumonteil*

Curating the exhibition is Stanley Qiufan Chen. Better known for his contributions to science fiction literature, Chen released *Waste Tide* in 2013, while the English language version of the novel was released in May of this year. Dealing with the idea of E-waste in a South China town, the book helped to establish Chen as an environmentally conscious writer on the global stage.

Chen begins by telling us about his involvement in this show. Friends with Galerie Dumonteil's Asia Director, Yuxin Zheng, they got to discussing the exhibition over dinner and he found that Tara Ocean Foundation's ideas aligned with his own. "I am a science fiction writer and most of what I have written involves ecology, especially my novel which came out in English this year, called *Waste Tide*," he tells us. "It's about electronic waste in China, so it's connected. I think we had lunch or dinner last year and we talked about Tara. I thought it was a very interesting idea to bring together all of these different perspectives. For example, what Tara is doing, why we are concerned about the ocean, the plankton, coral, micro-plastic streams in the ocean. It all has huge significance on us."



*Top: Hugo Deverchere. Bottom: Michel Temman. Image courtesy of Galerie Dumonteil*



Speaking on the make-up of *Deep Blue: A Tribute to Tara*, Chen says of the artists on show, "Each one of the artists has great quality and style, and they show different perspectives. For Hugo, he used technology and photography, and he connected with distance in history and space, so that gives us a broader view. Maki has a more Eastern perspective, bringing together Buddhism, the cycle of life, a great harmony of ecology. You can see life and death within one whale, everything seems to be living in harmony."

The combination of these viewpoints allows the observer to move through the gallery, taking stock of a number of concepts. We begin to consider how art can impact social issues, and particularly in reference to the environment. Chen tell us, "Storytelling is a better way to engage with your audience. You can resonate with them emotionally, because you're talking from a multi-sensory way, using video, audio, literature to help people create these imaginary scenarios, so that you really feel that you are living in this kind of toxic environment, and people start to feel empathetically, about the pain and struggle of everyday life."



*Maki Ohkojima. Image courtesy of Galerie Dumonteil*



Touching on the idea of art as a means to communicate and forward environmentally conscious ideas, Chen is effusive in his opinion that works like those on show at *Deep Blue* can have an impact on the public. "For my way, we use art, maybe story-telling and we can create a public space like this so people can see things and think about them and discuss. We try to create this kind of atmosphere and people can start from there. I think that is a good start. It's not the same as in the West where we can protest, this is the Chinese way."

He goes on to discuss how environmental issues are becoming more pervasive in major Chinese cities, such as Shanghai, saying, "These issues have begun to emerge as they begin to threaten people's health, so I think for now, especially this year, we've started to categorize rubbish in Shanghai. It's a movement. Also, thinking about the ocean and animals and electronic devices, consumerism, what we have started to realize, more and more Chinese people, especially the younger generation have begun to think about this issue and change their daily life habits, to be more eco-friendly."