



## VANCOUVER BIENNALE LEARNING FROM ART

### Meeting

Wang Shugang (Beijing, China)

**WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE?** *Meeting* was made by the Beijing-based artist Wang Shugang. Though born in Beijing, China in 1960, Wang Shugang lived for ten years in Germany's Ruhr region. He returned to live in China in 2000 at age 40. Beijing is considered the centre of contemporary Chinese art in China, and is therefore home to a number of contemporary artists, many living and working in the Dashanzi neighborhood. This is where Wang Shugang has his studio-workshop and is an area with many galleries, artist studios, designers and stores. Wang Shugang figurative sculptures have been influenced by both the Western art tradition and contemporary twentieth-century realism while also expressing Buddhist iconography combined with Chinese everyday culture.



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**EACH CROUCHING FIGURE IS 92 CM (3 FT.) TALL AND WEIGHS 100 KG (220 LB).**



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**HOW WAS THIS SCULPTURE MADE?** Generally when making a large sculpture the artist begins by making a smaller model. This model is often made from plaster, clay or another material. Sometimes a full-size model is made, from which a mould can be constructed. These eight figures were all cast from one mould made from a life size model. It was cast repeatedly in bronze until 8 identical forms were produced. Moulds can be used to make one, or more of the same piece. The repetition reminds us of serially produced industrial products.



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This process of casting in bronze has a very long history. European, Middle Eastern and Chinese artists from ancient times knew, and used this technique for casting bronze items which still exist today in museums. The ancient Chinese, dating to 1200 BC used both lost wax and mould casting. Large ritual vessels with beautiful surface decorations have been found from the Shang Dynasty in tombs in China. This painted bronze material is still the most popular metal for casting contemporary sculptures today.



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**WHY IS THIS SCULPTURE PAINTED RED?** The artist Wang Shugang generally uses only a few colors on his sculpture - painting them solid red, white, black or bronze. These colors have become a kind of language or a trademark of the artist. Meeting is painted a particular red that is known as Chinese Red. This red ranges from a vivid red to a red-orange made from Vermilion, sometimes referred to as cinnabar. This red elicits multiple cultural meanings in China. Historically red was a color representing happiness, but it was also the colour of terror during the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the color most associate with the Chinese Communist Party. The book written by Mao Zedong leader of the Cultural Revolution was titled “The Red Book.”

“Today red is the colour of the faded lettering praising Mao on the ceilings of the factories. The Chinese flag, the walls of the temple, which coats the Buddhist monks, but also the clothes of a bride in red. But it is rather the Chinese, glowing red of communism, which I use.” Wang Shugang Communism has been identified with the “Socialist red” of the flag of the former Soviet Union with the red star being a common Communist emblem. China was referred in the past as “Red China” with part of the military called the “red guard”. The fear communism by the West was called “Red Peril”. To learn more find out what the color red means in other cultures. Look the meaning of the phrase ‘Red Peril’. Read more about the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong.



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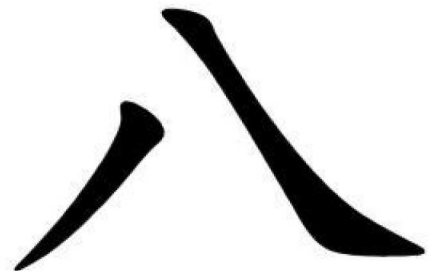
**IS THERE ANOTHER REASON THE ARTIST MADE EIGHT FIGURES?** Almost all cultures have beliefs about numbers. In the west the number 13 is considered unlucky; some buildings do not have a 13th floor. The study of the meaning of numbers is called numerology, which is defined as: “Any of the many systems, traditions or beliefs that there is a relationship between numbers and fate.”

In Chinese culture the number 8 is a significant number and is believed to bring luck or be auspicious because it is pronounced ba’ which sounds very close to the Chinese word “prosper” or wealth, which is pronounced fa’ and the shape of the 8 is perfectly symmetrical (whatever way you fold it is a mirror image). Because pronunciations vary in different dialects, the significance of the number 8 does not apply everywhere in China. Buddha was born on the 8th day of the month in the Chinese calendar, and the Buddhist Lotus flowers have eight petals.

When the 2008 Beijing, Olympics opened at 8pm on the 8.08.08 it immediately became apparent to the world that the date had special significance for the people of China.

The date chosen to open the event would be particularly fortuitous for them. The Chinese belief in the “good luck” in the number 8 extends into everyday life. Things with the

**WHY DID THE ARTIST MAKE EIGHT OF THE FIGURES CROUCHING?** The sculpture Meeting was first exhibited during the G-8 summit meeting of world leaders in Heiligendamm, Germany in 2007. The placing of the figures in static sitting positions with cupped hands is not without irony, as Shugang has pointed out. “Would there be important results from their meeting? Wasn’t it really just a few people carrying on some formality while wining and dining away? “The idea of the Group of 8 actually began as a dinner for six when the then Presidents of Germany and France invited the heads of state from the world’s most influential economies; the USA, Britain, Italy and Japan to a Chateau near Paris in 1975 for dinner and informal discussions about issues such as the problems brought on the an oil embargo in 1973 and other issues related to global monetary exchange rates. In 1976 Canada was included and in 1998 Russia was asked to formally join the group. Over time the meetings of the group have become longer and larger.”



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number 8 are in high demand and sought for phone numbers, addresses, car license plates, and bank accounts. Car license plates which contain the number 8 have been auctioned for thousands of dollars. The telephone number 8888-8888 is reputed to have sold for \$270,723 as the luckiest telephone number to have. Throughout the world thousands of couples chose to marry on the 8th of August in the hope of bringing good fortune to their marriage.

#### TO LEARN MORE:

Visit <http://www.walshgallery.com> to see other work by Wang Shugang

## Glossary

**AUSPICIOUS & FORTUITOUS**—Something positive, lucky or fortunate produced by chance or attributed to good luck.

**BRONZE**—Bronze is a metal called an alloy, which means it is a metal made up a several different metals. Bronze is made up of mostly of copper and not more than 10% tin.

**CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION**—The Cultural Revolution started in Beijing, China in Aug. 8, 1966, but had been coming to surface since the failure of the Great Leap forward in 1959. The well known Chinese Political figure Mao Zedong masterminded the Cultural Revolution.

**CINNABAR**—a bright red pigment made out of mercuric sulphide that occurs in red crystals, it is the principle ore of mercury.

**ICONOGRAPHY**—Symbolic meanings attached to things, images or objects.

**SHANG DYNASTY**—The imperial dynasty or family ruling China from about the 18th to the 12th centuries BC.

**MAO ZEDONG**—1893–1976, Chinese Communist leader: chairman of the People’s Republic of China 1949–59; chairman of the Chinese Communist party 1943–76.

**NUMEROLOGY**—The study or belief that there is a relationship between numbers and objects and events. People who practice numerology use the meaning of numbers to determine the best time for activities in life such as what day to marry, change jobs or travel. The word Numerology comes from the Latin word for number, and the Greek word “logos,” which means word, thought, and expression.

**SHANG DYNASTY**—the imperial dynasty ruling China from about the 18th to the 12th centuries BC

**VERMILION**—a bright red pigment made from mercuric sulphide initially from cinnabar but now produced by a chemical process using mercury and sulfur. It was a pigment that was in-soluble in water. Most naturally produced vermilion comes from cinnabar that is mined in China, giving rise to its alternative name of China or Chinese red.