

PASSENGER OF SILENCE

MY QUEST FOR THE ANCIENT ARTS IN POST-CULTURAL REVOLUTION CHINA

Text by Fabienne Verdier. Afterword by Corinna Thierolf

An artist defies the Cultural Revolution to learn the secrets of Chinese painting

Was it really reasonable to drop everything overnight and go off alone into the depths of Communist China in search of the forgotten secrets of ancient Chinese art? Fabienne Verdier never stopped to ask herself: in the early 1980s, the brilliant young Beaux-Arts student thought of nothing else but her desire to learn the art of painting and calligraphy – something that had been devastated by the Cultural Revolution.

And when, a foreigner in the province of Sichuan, she found herself in an art school run by the Party, she was determined to adjust to the situation: the language and the mistrust of the Chinese, the unbearable lack of privacy, the poverty and disease and an inquisitorial administrative system. Blocking the West from her mind, Fabienne Verdier became the pupil of great artists working at the margins of society, who introduced her to the secrets and techniques of an age-old art form.

This unique experience amounted to a true adventure story, leading eventually to Verdier's fascinating artistic practice that combines east Asian inspiration with contemporary painting. *Passenger of Silence*, an autobiographical travel journal by turns gripping and wholly moving, is an expanded English edition of the original French language text published by Albin Michel in 2005. New colour photographs supplement the already richly illustrated volume, with over 100 images alongside a newly written glossary of aesthetic terms.

Throughout her career as a painter, **Fabienne Verdier** has engaged with schools of thought and science from different cultures and eras. Her various areas of research have been the subject of several fascinating books published by 5 Continents Editions in recent years, including *ÉCHO. Camets d'atelier (2017-2022)*, *Sur les terres de Cézanne*, *The Song of Stars – Le chant des étoiles* and *Rainbow Paintings. Fabienne Verdier* (by Corinna Thierolf).

Corinna Thierolf is an art historian and freelance curator. Until 2020, she was chief curator at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, whose profile she shaped over twenty-five years through many exhibitions, acquisitions, and publications, for example on Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Dan Flavin, Anselm Kiefer, Walter de Maria, and Andy Warhol. A focus of her current activities is the relationship between private and public collections.