Chinese Art Scholar Wu Hung Named 2011 Kirk Varnedoe Visiting Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU

Wu Hung, Harrie H. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, has been named the 2011 Kirk Varnedoe Visiting Professor. He will lecture and teach on contemporary Chinese art, exploring its development and narrative since the late 1970s, reflecting on how its story is told in its domestic and global contexts. He will be in residence at the IFA from January to May 2011.

Professor Wu’s scholarly interests are directed at both early and contemporary Chinese art. As an historian of early Chinese art, he is recognized for his innovative approach to investigating relationships between visual forms—such as architecture, bronze vessels, and painting—and their social implications as expressed through ritual, social memory, and political discourse.

In the mid 1980s Professor Wu became actively involved with contemporary Chinese art. He curated a series of exhibitions at Harvard University’s Adams House that gave a number of prominent Chinese artists their first opportunity to exhibit in the U.S. Since then he has continued to curate contemporary art and photography exhibitions. In 2006 he served as Chief Curator of the 6th Gwangju Biennale and in 2009 he organized “Contemporary Sculpture from China” for Millennium Park in Chicago, which featured the large-scale sculpture of Sui Jianguo, Zhan Wang, Shen Shaomin, and Chen Wenling. He has also curated solo exhibitions of important contemporary Chinese artists, including Xu Bing, Rong Rong and Song Dong. Currently he is a consulting curator of the Smart Museum of Art at The University of Chicago.

His extensive writing on contemporary Chinese art includes two notable books, Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century (University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space (Reaktion Books and University of Chicago Press, 2005), in which he focuses on Tiananmen Square, an iconic space associated with the Forbidden City, and traces its evolution from a proscribed imperial space to a public arena of political expression that mirrors the larger cascading shifts in political and visual change in China today.

The Kirk Varnedoe Visiting Professorship brings a distinguished scholar to the Institute each year to teach give a series of public lectures. The Professorship was endowed in 2006 by the late Professor Varnedoe’s friends and colleagues to honor and perpetuate his legacy of innovative teaching, mentoring, and scholarship.

The Institute of Fine Arts has played a defining role in the disciplines of art history, archaeology, and conservation since its founding in 1932. It is unique in its integration of those fields and in its focus on research-led graduate teaching. With its close ties to the major museums and collections of New York City, its participation in NYU’s global network, and its excavations in Sicily, Egypt, Turkey, and Greece, the Institute offers a distinctive program of object-based study.