

# ArtSway

Contemporary Visual Art in the New Forest



## MA YONGFENG: The Cretaceous Period

28 July – 16 September 2007

### Teachers' Pack

In collaboration with:



**Chinese Arts Centre**

华人艺术中心

**ArtSway** Station Road Sway Hampshire SO41 6BA **Internet:** [www.artsway.org.uk](http://www.artsway.org.uk)

**Tel:** +44 (0)1590 682260 **Fax:** +44 (0)1590 681989 **Email:** [mail@artsway.org.uk](mailto:mail@artsway.org.uk)

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# MA YONGFENG: The Cretaceous Period

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MA YONGFENG

**THE CRETACEOUS PERIOD**

*The Cretaceous Period* is the first UK solo exhibition of photographs and video works by Ma Yongfeng, engaging with a geological period of transition during the earth's history, and the depiction of this history in museums through recreation and simulation.

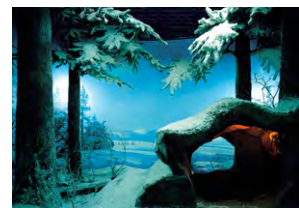
In ArtSway's main gallery space, you will see three photographic works. On the right is ***Parakannemeyeria Brevirostris*** (2007) a panoramic photograph that depicts a fossil of the same name that is in the collection of the Beijing Natural History Museum. This important fossil, which is more than twice the size of the photographic print, was found in the Xinjiang province of west China, and contains the fossilised remains of nine individual pre-historic creatures. The fossil on display in the museum is a modelled recreation, as the original fossil is too delicate to be on public display. The image represents a moment of ecological failure from the past, bringing to mind the possibility of a similar event in the future. The photograph looks like an apocalyptic scene or a mass grave, and gives **a taste of the earth's sublime**



**power to cause destruction** **in order to regain balance.**

On the far wall of gallery 2 is ***Volcano*** (2007) a photograph of a model volcano created in the artist's studio. Inspired by a visit to the mouth of a dead volcano that was filled with water, the artist attempted to create a simulation of a volcano's eruption - something that could not be directly experienced without great danger. The volcano is treated as a painterly object, rather than the scene of a violent disaster, and encourages the viewer to consider the process of creation behind the image.

***Volcano*** and ***Hibernation*** (2007) on the left of the gallery, both **consider the natural history museum as an imaginative space in which people, particularly children, consider the earth as it once**



**was, and experience this through simulation**

The glittering wintery scene in *Hibernation* is an obvious construction or museum diorama - the sides of the sets are apparent and the glowing hide is too cosy - but **we are asked to consider whether these recreated environments are preferable to the real.**

In the smaller gallery 3 to the left, are two silent video works entitled ***The Cretaceous Period*** (2007). One video features the model volcano eruption, and the other a gentle wave. Both pieces are inspired by displays in museums, such as the Science Museum in London, in which children are encouraged to make their own waves by turning a wheel. The combination of these two elements (fire and water) interested the artist after seeing a water-filled volcano mouth, as the balance and combination of elements (fire, water, earth, metal and air) is central to ancient Chinese culture. These video works explore the relationship between fire and water, both of which were instrumental in the geological changes during the Cretaceous Period. The earth's ability to adapt and change the balance of these elements, through flooding, tsunami, climate change, earthquakes and volcanos, is a subject that is increasingly important in the modern world, not least in China, which is developing industrially and technologically at an enormous rate. The model volcano's explosion was created using a plasma television screen placed at the volcano mouth, playing a recording of a volcano exploding, and it is these layers of mediation and theatrics that allow these violent events to be experienced as considerate and beautiful: a wave that is as rhythmic as a piece of fluttering silk and an explosion that is a play of sparkling light and pixels.

**Ma Yongfeng came to international prominence** with his notorious work, *Swirl* (2003), exhibited at MOCA in Los Angeles, and PS1 in New York, in which six coy carp were subjected to a fifteen minute wash cycle in the drum of a washing machine. The work raised a debate about the human treatment of animals both within and outside of an artistic context. Ma has continued to explore the relationship between humans and natural history displays, photographing empty dioramas and 'natural habitat' enclosures in zoos and museums. His new work has developed from the photography of these enclosures to the recreation of these sites as 'sets' in his own studio, creating what he terms "an installation after an installation".

**Ma Yongfeng is a Beijing-based artist** who has received international recognition for his photographic and video pieces examining the ways that human beings position themselves in relation to the natural world. Hosted at the Chinese Art Centre in Manchester for three months and in residency at ArtSway for a further two, Ma Yongfeng has spent a total of five months researching and developing this exhibition. During his residency in Manchester, Ma visited numerous zoos and museums and conducted research relation to all aspects of Natural History.

## Page 4: Themes and Ideas for Lessons and Workshops

The following themes and ideas are highlighted green in the **Exhibition Information section of this booklet** – which is based on a gallery handout that accompanies Ma Yongfeng’s exhibition at ArtSway, a document that is intended to provide visitors insight into his work and ideas.

Below are suggestions and ideas that are designed to stimulate working with your students in general art & design classes, as well as across other subjects – such as design and technology and science. All of the ideas below are loosely linked to suggestions for areas of work that can be found on the National Curriculum website.

**a taste of the earth’s sublime power to cause destruction in order to regain balance.**

Ma Yongfeng identified the Cretaceous Period as a time in Earth’s history that was of great significance and importance to the evolution of the planet. His recreations in his Beijing studio – evidence of which can be seen in *Volcano* and *Hibernation* – are his own subjective imagining of a time in history that no human could possibly have witnessed or recorded.

- ***Lead a discussion with your pupils about severe weather, and their experiences of such phenomena as: tornados, thunderstorms, tsunami, and heavy snowfall. How does this compare to the cataclysmic events of the Cretaceous Period? Ask them to draw their own diorama, or imagining of the Cretaceous Period.***

**consider the natural history museum as an imaginative space in which people, particularly children, consider the earth as it once was, and experience this through simulation.**

Ma’s work focuses on natural history museums – such as the Science Museum in London – and how we interact with the artefacts and dioramas on display. Ma has taken the sense of wonder he felt as a child when he visited natural history museums – and set about creating an example of his own, as can be seen in *Hibernation*, an idealised diorama that he created in his studio in Beijing.

- ***Using a variety of materials – and the drawings from the suggestion above – lead your pupils in the creation of a large-scale diorama. This could be in a corner of the classroom, or in the school foyer. Perhaps choose the most interesting drawing – in consultation with your pupils, or take elements from each one.***

**we are asked to consider whether these recreated environments are preferable to the real.**

The notion of ‘simulation’ is an important part of Ma Yongfeng’s work – and asks questions of what we consider truthful or false. Ma’s work is very subjective, and perhaps could be seen as being utterly fantastical, and perhaps even ‘other worldly’.

- ***Taking the diorama that has been created from the previous suggestion – ask your students what they prefer: the real world of the cretaceous period, or the world that they have created?***

combination of elements (fire, water, earth, metal and air) is central to ancient Chinese culture

This section could ideally be linked to the science areas of key stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum. It is also an opportunity to learn about a different culture – in this case China, and how that compares to Britain, and in particular England.

- ***Ask your students to think of facets of British – or English – culture, or perhaps certain things they do (such as hobbies, sports, etc) that mean something to them. Ask them to draw a representation of the cultural area they have identified (or hobby) and then present it to the class.***

The earth's ability to adapt and change the balance of these elements, through flooding, tsunami, climate change, earthquakes and volcanos, is a subject that is increasingly important in the modern world

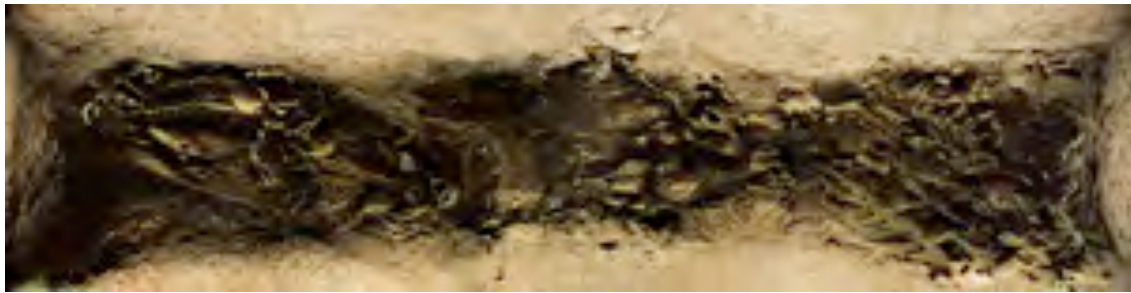
This segment from Ma's text is perhaps the most important concern in modern society for future generations.

- ***Lead a discussion in class with your pupils with regards to their knowledge of climate change – and global warming in particular.***
- ***Ask them what they would do about climate change: do they or their parents recycle? Do they turn off lights, and their televisions at night?***

Page 6: **Images from Ma Yongfeng: The Cretaceous Period**



Ma Yongfeng, *Hibernation*, c-type print mounted on aluminium, 2007



Ma Yongfeng, *Parakannemeyeria Brevirostris*, c-type print mounted on aluminium, 2007



Ma Yongfeng, *Volcano*, c-type print mounted on aluminium, 2007

## Page 7: **FREE Guided Tours and Workshops at ArtSway**

ArtSway is keen to welcome school groups visiting the gallery. Please see the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet for more information. **Please note:** we would only be able to accommodate between 20 and 25 children in the galleries per visit.

### **Free Guided Tours**

One of the best ways to experience an artist's work, as opposed to looking at images in books and on the Internet, is to actually visit a gallery to see their work in the flesh. ArtSway has hosted many school group visits in the past, offering Guided Tours around the gallery by the Curator, Exhibitions and Education and Audience Development Officer.

The tours sometimes involve PowerPoint presentations, but usually consist of ArtSway's staff taking the students from work to work, explaining the origins and content of the works on display. A tour will usually end with a question and answer session.

On some occasions it may be possible to have the artists present for a school visit.

### **Free Workshops**

ArtSway employs a wide range of artists to lead workshops. However, they are all professional artists who will charge a fee to lead a workshop. If a school is interested in scheduling an artist to lead a workshop, please contact the gallery. Contact details are in the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet. In some instances we will provide an artist free of charge.

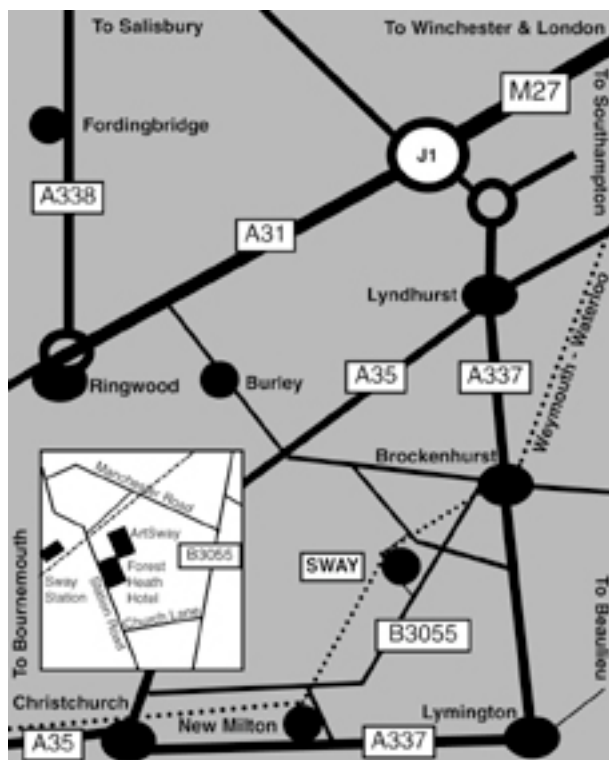
There are a series of **FREE** one-hour workshops available. These workshops take place after the tour of the exhibition, and involve simple drawing and paintings techniques and are based on the themes outlined in the **Themes for Lessons and Workshops** section of this booklet.

### **A Timetable of a Typical School Visit to ArtSway**

- 10.00am – 10.10am: **Introduction and welcome to ArtSway.**
- 10.10am – 10.30am: **Tour of the exhibition.**
- 10.30am – 11.30am: **Workshop activities.**
- 11.30am – 11.45am: **Discussion and round up of activities.**
- 12.00pm: **End of workshops and school visit.**

The following is information for school groups visiting ArtSway for **Guided Tours and Workshops**.

### Getting to ArtSway:



**By Rail:** Sway Station is on the London Waterloo to Weymouth Line.

**By Car:** Follow signs to Sway from Brockenhurst, Burley or Lymington, then follow signs for Village Centre & Train Station. ArtSway is just behind the Forest Heath Hotel on Station Road.

**Access:** All parts of the gallery are accessible via level access.

**Parking:** ArtSway has its own car park that is reached along the access drive between the surgery and chemist on Station Road in the centre of Sway.

### Etiquette and Good Behaviour in the Galleries

Works of art are very fragile and cannot be touched. We ask that children visiting the gallery take care both of their own safety and of the artworks on display. Teachers and their assistants are responsible for their groups. At the beginning of the tour the relevant ArtSway staff member will give a brief explanation to the visiting children of what they can and cannot do in the gallery.

### Contact Details for ArtSway

If you would like to discuss a visit to ArtSway, or what we could offer in terms of educational resources, please contact:

**Exhibitions and Education Officer Peter Bonnell on Telephone: 01590 682260 (extension 14), or Email: [peter@artsway.org.uk](mailto:peter@artsway.org.uk)**

**Address:** ArtSway, Station Road, Sway, Hampshire, SO41 6BA  
**Telephone:** 01590 682260 **Fax:** 01590 681989

**Email:** [mail@artsway.org.uk](mailto:mail@artsway.org.uk) **Web:** [www.artsway.org.uk](http://www.artsway.org.uk)

**Opening Times:** Tuesday to Sunday, 11am – 5pm. **Admission is FREE.**