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Podcast Script

Explosive. To me, the word conjures up images of destruction, heralded by terrible noise and punctuated with bright billowing flames.

To the mind of artist Cai Guo Qiang, the word means something entirely different.

A product of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, young Qiang would come to question the validity of his homelands oppressive attitudes toward self-expression.

Moving to Japan in the mid 1980's, Qiang found his inspiration in his cultural roots, voicing his ideas through a remarkably unique Chinese medium – gunpowder.

Originally used in ancient China as medicine and a spiritual reagent, it would soon be utilized for both military technologies and celebratory fireworks.

Recognizing the dual potential of this substance, Qiangs work reflects on the creative possibilities of what could be seen as destructive or dangerous, conveying his traditional concepts through incendiary performances and fantastic images, all created from varying applications of gunpowder and pigment.

Qiang has received international renown for his distinct offerings, boasting showings at galleries such as the MASS MoCA and the Guggenheim, though he is still best known for the volatile pageantry enacted well outside of those prestigious walls.

For them, that's probably a good thing.

Image Sources

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