

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

Wang Keping

Érotique

September 9 – November 14, 2026

91, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris 8^e



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Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *Érotique* in Paris, a solo exhibition by Wang Keping at 91 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Following exhibitions devoted to his work at the Musée Guimet and in the gardens of the Musée Rodin in 2022, at the Domaine national de Chambord in 2023–2024, and in the gardens of the Château de Fontainebleau in 2025, the artist brings together some forty works created between 1988 and 2026. Spanning nearly four decades of artistic practice, the exhibition foregrounds a pioneering dimension of his work: the representation of the body—and of the desires that move through it—as the expression of a freedom that must constantly be reclaimed.

The exhibition brings together sculptures in wood, bronze and Corten steel. Wood appears in the full diversity of its species: yew, cherry, ash, acacia, cedar, cypress, holm oak, maple, chestnut, elm, walnut, beech, plane and parasol tree. Sourced from French forests, these species attest to Wang Keping's attention to the specific qualities of each material, from its grain and density to its colour and the irregularities produced by its growth.

Across the works on view, motifs echo from one piece to the next without ever being repeated in exactly the same form. Couples embrace, wings unfold, while bodies, backs, bellies, breasts, buttocks and genitals curve, rise or merge. At times, the embraces are so complete that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish the individual elements within the material. Yet there is no mistaking the erotic charge that asserts itself before the viewer, residing at the heart of the works as much as in the intervals between them. This deliberate emphasis has its roots in the artist's personal and political history: that of a man who grew up in a society where bodies and their desires were constrained and subjected to constant control.

Born in 1949 near Beijing, China, Wang Keping lived through the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976. Throughout that decade, private life was closely monitored, while any representation of the nude was prohibited and regarded as a sign of moral depravity. "I lived in a society where sexuality was subject to extreme control," the artist recalls today. "Totalitarian rulers always seek to control the minds and sexual organs of the people."¹ In 1979, three years after the death of Mao Zedong, Wang Keping co-founded the Stars, China's first avant-garde art movement. Alongside Huang Rui, Ma Desheng and Ai Weiwei, among others, he asserted the freedom of individual expression in opposition to the Socialist Realism imposed by official institutions. The group's first exhibitions, held in Beijing in 1979 and 1980, were acts of artistic and political emancipation alike. As Philippe Dagen writes, the nude became "an ideological issue and the symbol of freedom"²: the freedom of bodies as well as that of the artists who represented them. For Wang Keping, this freedom also finds expression through humour. Some works elicit a smile through their play on form and their overtly erotic references. The artist recalls that, beneath "the great and glorious red flag," "countless dark jokes"³ already flourished, laced with lascivious innuendo—a means of outwitting repression and giving the imagination free rein.

As Ai Weiwei writes, Wang Keping "used the natural, original form of primitive materials to create an oeuvre that remains indefinable, expressing, beneath what seems to be likenesses, his subconscious and allowing free rein to his inexhaustible erotic imagination."⁴ Since his earliest works, created in China in 1978–1979, Wang Keping has made wood his material of choice. Based in France since 1984, he sources trunks and branches from local species. Each piece is unique: it retains the living memory of an organism

¹ Wang Keping, artist's note, translated from the Chinese, Paris, June 2026.

² Philippe Dagen, "Wang Keping: Sculpture, Eroticism, Freedom," essay in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Érotique*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, 2026.

³ Wang Keping, artist's note, translated from the Chinese, Paris, June 2026.

⁴ Ai Weiwei, "Preface," in *Wang Keping*, written in Berlin in 2019, Paris: Flammarion, 2022.

that grew and withstood the elements. "Wood is alive. It grows, thickens, swells with knots, drinks, feeds, moves with the wind and changes with the seasons," Philippe Dagen writes. Because wood and the body are both forms produced by nature, there is naturally between them "a kind of kinship [...] sap and blood, bark and skin, wood and flesh."⁵

This close relationship with the material directly engages the artist's own body. Sculpture emerges from a sensual, solitary and intimate physical encounter, inscribed in every gesture—whether touching, caressing or splitting. Here, a vocabulary of desire comes to the fore: removing the bark lays the tree bare; the first cuts cleave the material; gouges, chisels and mallets expose its inner irregularities. The patina Wang Keping achieves by lightly charring the surface before subjecting it to a long process of polishing further extends this ambiguity. Light settles upon and glides across the black, lustrous surfaces, tracing their curves and accentuating their veins and reliefs. In the presence of Wang Keping's sculptures, vision becomes tactile. Sculpted wood resembles an epidermal envelope, akin to skin or flesh, arousing in the viewer's hand "an irresistible urge to caress,"⁶ as Yannick Mercoyrol observes. It is in this shift from sight to touch that eroticism resides: the eye experiences the material without ever being able to reach it.

In Wang Keping's work, the feminine and the masculine are never entirely fixed. While certain titles—*Réunion*, *Couple*, *Fesses*, *Fantasme*, *Les Trois Grâces* and *Cupidon*—clearly direct the viewer's gaze, others, such as *Ailes*, *Open Your Book*, *Maybe Bird* and *Double-je*, keep the forms suspended in ambiguity. Depending on the angle from which it is seen, a curve may suggest a torso, genitals, buttocks or two intertwined bodies. The untitled works allow these images to emerge even more freely from the lines and irregularities of the wood.

"Lovers do not repeat their embraces; they begin them anew,"⁷ Philippe Dagen writes. In the same way, each tree represents a new beginning for Wang Keping: his desire to sculpt is renewed through contact with a material yet to be discovered. In these bodies made of wood, bronze and steel, freedom assumes its most physical form: that of a work that lives, desires and at last offers itself to the gaze.

— Marie Chappaz, editorial writer

All quotations by Philippe Dagen are taken from "Wang Keping: Sculpture, Eroticism, Freedom," an essay written for the exhibition *Érotique*, presented at Galerie Nathalie Obadia in 2026, and forthcoming in the accompanying catalogue.

⁵ Philippe Dagen, *op. cit.*

⁶ Yannick Mercoyrol, "L'horizon de la caresse," in *Wang Keping: Duos*, exhibition catalogue, Domaine national de Chambord, 15 October 2023–17 March 2024, 2023. In this essay, the curator relates this sensation to a "haptic" dimension, in the sense in which Deleuze uses the term in *The Logic of Sensation*: the philosopher shows how, in Bacon's work, the viewer's relation to the painting involves a shift from the optical to the haptic. Yannick Mercoyrol emphasises this primacy of touch and the desire for contact seemingly aroused by the skin-like surface of the wood shaped by the artist, guiding the viewer's hand towards a caressing gesture. "At the very surface of the wood, the caress becomes my horizon for apprehending the work, its erogenous tremor," the curator writes.

⁷ Philippe Dagen, *op. cit.*

Born in 1949 near Beijing, Wang Keping has lived and worked in Paris, France, since 1984.

Wang Keping's career in France and internationally has been marked by major institutional solo exhibitions and monumental installations. In 1989, the Asia University Museum of Modern Art in Taichung, Taiwan, presented his first solo museum exhibition, followed in 1990 by the Chinese Modern Art Center in Osaka, Japan; in 1993 by the Aidekman Art Center in Boston, USA; in 1994 by the Museum für Kunsthandwerk in Frankfurt, Germany; in 1997 by the HKUST Center for the Arts in Hong Kong and the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen, China; and again in 2009 by the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen. In 2010, the Musée Zadkine in Paris dedicated a solo exhibition to his work. In 2013, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing presented his first major retrospective in China. In 2018, he unveiled LOLO, a monumental sculpture commissioned for the inauguration of the Fondation Carmignac on Porquerolles Island, France. In 2021, he created *La Vénus de l'Étang*, a sculpture over four metres high, for the Domaine des Étangs in Massignac, France. In 2022, he was featured at the Musée Rodin with an open-air studio installation and exhibited at the Musée Guimet in Paris. In 2023, his work was presented at the Château de Chambord. He was also the guest of honour of *Grandeur Nature II. L'esprit de la forêt* at the Château de Fontainebleau during the summer of 2025.

Wang Keping has also participated in numerous landmark group exhibitions, several of which have highlighted the significance of his work within the history of modern and contemporary art. These include exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum, New York (1983); the Centre Pompidou, Paris (1996); the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart (1998); the Modern Art Museum, Chengdu (1999); the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (2001); the Kunstmuseum Bern (2005); the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2007); the Musée Maillol, Paris (2008); the China Institute, New York, and the Musée Cernuschi, Paris (2011); Asia Society Hong Kong (2013); the Busan Biennale, South Korea, M+, Hong Kong, and the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, France, where he presented monumental sculptures (2016); and most recently, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (2019). In 2021, several of Wang Keping's historic works were included in the inaugural exhibition of Hong Kong's new M+ museum. In December 2024, his works were featured in an exhibition dedicated to the historic Stars (Xing Xing) group at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Wang Keping's works are held in numerous prestigious public and private collections worldwide, including the Centre Pompidou and the Musée Cernuschi in Paris; the Centre d'Art et de Nature at the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire; the Châteaux de Chambord and Fontainebleau; the collections of the City of Paris and the Seine-Saint-Denis Department in France; the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, United Kingdom; the Aidekman Art Center in Boston, USA; M+ in Hong Kong and the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen, China; the Museum of Modern Art in Taichung, Taiwan; the Museum of Asian Contemporary Art in Osaka, Japan; and the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seoul, South Korea. In 2016, twenty-seven years after the Centre Pompidou first exhibited *Silence*, Wang Keping's sculpture *Étreinte* (Embrace) entered the collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre Pompidou through the generosity of the International Circle of the Société des Amis du Centre Pompidou.

Since 2017, Wang Keping has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels.

Paris Saint-Honoré

Wang Keping
Érotique
September 9 – November 14, 2026

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

Clément Cogitore
Ferdinande
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Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

Robert Kushner
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