

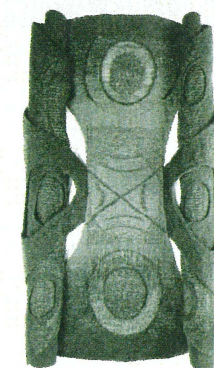
# 永动：万曼的生活和艺术 PERPETUAL MOTION: THE LIFE AND ART OF MARYN VARBANOV

马林·瓦尔班诺夫（万曼）和他的作品《Couronnnes》  
巴黎，1976，万曼家人惠允  
Maryn Varbanov with his work *Couronnnes*  
Paris, 1976, Courtesy of the artist's family.

对我来说，创造的过程就是追求完美……  
需要巨大的情感和生理投入、能量以及坚持。  
但是，一旦壁挂艺术成了你的命运，它就要求得到你整个存在。  
马林·瓦尔班诺夫（1932-1989）

For me the creative process is nothing but the pursuit of perfection ...  
Great emotional and physical effort, energy and persistence are required.  
However, if tapestry art becomes one's destiny, it requires one's whole existence.  
—Maryn Varbanov (1932-1989)

《Byzance》，1979，山羊毛和丝绸  
185 x 110 cm，万曼家人惠允  
*Byzance*, 1979, goat's wool and silk, 185 x 110 cm  
Courtesy of the artist's family



马林·瓦尔班诺夫（万曼）是中国以及国际艺术史上最具影响力的人物之一，但如今几乎没多少人知道他的名字。尽管如此，他的作品在艺术解放上取得了极大的成绩，让壁挂从墙上走下来，进入了雕塑空间。

万曼的祖国保加利亚有着深厚的壁挂制作传统，他第一次把织品艺术放入三维空间也是在保加利亚。但万曼最伟大的作品是他八十年代在中国生活期间完成的。而且他还在中国成立了壁挂研究所，指导了一代雄心勃勃的艺术家，包括谷文达、梁绍基、施慧，帮助他们找到各自切入前卫艺术的道路。

翻看万曼八十年代以来的项目书——用螺旋装订线圈和黏糊糊的塑料纸装订的老相册——让人心生敬畏。我们从中可以看到他的思维如何运作，如何不断地想象更出格、更大胆的雕塑形式。项目草图都是用普通的毡头笔或圆珠笔画在廉价纸上的，但每一张图本身就是一件艺术品。看着这些草图，你很快就不会再去想哪个项目实现了哪个没实现，转而好奇是什么样的大脑创造了它们，什么样的巧手能仅靠一支文具店买来的普通笔描绘出纤维的质感，同时表现不同大小形状的体量。值得注意的是，每张草图的作品里都画有一个小人，仿佛要把艺术家所描绘的作品安置于观众的现实里。万曼虽然善于观念思考，但他从未忘记人的尺度也至关重要。

Maryn Varbanov was one of the most influential figures in the history of Chinese and international contemporary art, but today almost nobody knows his name. Yet his works achieved a remarkable feat of artistic liberation, taking tapestry off the wall and moving it into the space commanded by sculpture.

Varbanov was born in Bulgaria where the tradition of tapestry runs deep, and it was there that he first took textile art into three dimensions. But it was in China in the 1980s that he created his greatest works, and here too that he founded a tapestry workshop which helped guide a generation of aspiring artists, including Gu Wenda, Liang Shaoji and Shi Hui to find their own paths into the avant-garde.

Leafing through Varbanov's project books from the 1980s—old photo albums with spiral binding and sticky plastic holding sheets—is an awe-inspiring experience. Here one can see his mind at play, imagining ever-bolder sculptural forms. The drawings are done with ordinary felt-tip or ball-point pens on sheets of low-grade paper, and yet each of these sketches for possible projects is itself a work of art. Looking at these sketches, one soon stops asking which were actually realized, wondering instead at the mind that produced them and at a hand that could convey the textures of fibers and the volumes of both monumental and modest forms using only a store-bought pen. Remarkably, each drawing contains a





宋怀桂和万曼, 北京, 1956年, 婚后, 万曼家人惠允  
Song Huai-Kuei and Maryn Varbanov,  
Beijing, 1956, after their marriage. Courtesy of the artist's family

宋怀桂以辫子为信号:  
梳一根辫子意味着当日可以见面,  
两根则意味着不能。

If she appeared with her hair  
in a single plait Varbanov  
knew they could meet that  
day; two braids meant no.

从1932年在多瑙河畔出生到1989年病逝于北京协和医院, 万曼走过的路非常奇特。他曾经在索非亚、巴黎甚至悉尼(一座平行城市)生活, 但最终定居中国, 21岁那年在这里遇到了他一生的挚爱。

说到万曼, 就不可不提他的妻子宋怀桂。1954年, 万曼作为一名交换生到北京中央美术学院求学。宋怀桂当时年方十八, 学习刻苦, 是她作家父亲的好帮手。二十多年后, 她将成为风姿卓越的宋女士, 也是八十年代北京首家马克西姆西餐厅的创始人。但在1954年, 她的衣着和发型仍然中规中矩, 是新中国值得信赖的好女儿, 因此校方毫不犹豫地比照东欧留学生的任务交给了她。

腼腆的万曼很快吸引了宋怀桂的注意力。不多久, 两人开始秘密见面。宋怀桂以辫子为信号: 梳一根辫子意味着当日可以见面, 两根则意味着不能。这段地下恋情最后曝光说起来有点儿像言情小说里的情节。有一次, 宋怀桂去夏令营, 期间写了一封家书给父亲和一封充满激情的长信给万曼, 还在信中说“真希望你在这儿”。但她不小心把信封搞混了, 秘密因此泄露。这段禁忌之恋迅速变成了一起外交事件。

生性倔强的宋怀桂给当时的外交部长周恩来写了一封信。经过四个月的焦灼等待, 宋怀桂终于收到了周总理的回信。总理在信中说, 中国并无法律禁止和外国人通婚, 但他建议宋怀桂慎重考虑自己是否已做好准备接受另一半的文化。她准备好了, 两人于1956年12月完婚, 婚礼由央美校长主持。这是解放以来第一桩“跨国婚姻”。

万曼当初来中国就是想做一名壁挂艺术家。位于黑海边上的保加利亚继承了希腊和斯拉夫两边的编织传统, 同时也沿袭了奥斯曼土耳其的地毯制作工艺。万曼在央美学习期间, 将保加利亚的编织工艺与中国传统纺织技术进行对比, 后者的材料范围非常广泛, 从松羊毛到精纺丝绸都可以成为原料。这期间, 万曼开始了解让·吕尔萨(1892-1966)的作品。吕尔萨和马蒂斯、毕加索、布拉克同时代, 也是第一拨把

single human figure placed within the work, as if to anchor the project it describes to the audience's reality. For all his conceptual musings, Varbanov never forgot the importance of human scale.

It was a strange trajectory that took Maryn Varbanov from his birthplace on the banks of the Danube to his death in the summer of 1989 in the Xiehe Hospital in Beijing. Between the two, he lived in Sofia, Paris, and even Sydney but in the end he settled in China, where he had met the love of his life at the age of 21.

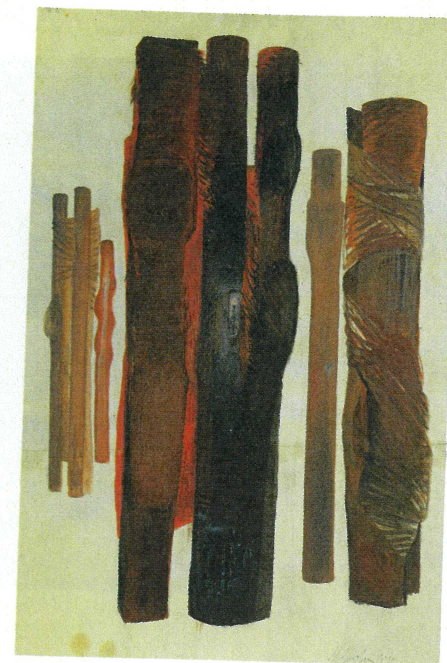
It is impossible to talk about Varbanov without talking about his wife Song Huai-Kuei whom he met when he arrived as an exchange student at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1954. She was then just eighteen, a studious girl who acted as a secretary to her writer father. Song Huai-Kuei would grow up to become the glamorous figure known universally as Madame Song, the creator of Maxim's of Beijing in the 1980s. But in 1954, with her neat appearance and prim hairdo, she was a trusted daughter of the new China to whom the authorities had no hesitation in assigning the task of caring for a group of young Eastern Bloc students.

Song immediately focused on the painfully shy Varbanov. Soon they were arranging secret meetings, Song using her seemingly innocent braids as a signal. If she appeared with her hair in a single plait Varbanov knew they could meet that day; two braids meant no. Finally, in what would seem like a plot twist in a romance novel if it were not true, the relationship was discovered: from a summer holiday camp, Song had written a dutiful daughter's letter to her father and a passionate "wish you were here" missive to Varbanov. But she mixed up the envelopes, and the secret was out. The forbidden entanglement soon became a diplomatic incident.

Undeterred, Song wrote a direct appeal to Foreign Min-

左 LEFT  
《圆柱》, 系列草图, 1976  
纸上蛋彩, 30 x 21 cm  
万曼家人惠允  
*Study for the series "Columns"*  
1976, tempera on paper, 30 x 21 cm  
Courtesy of the artist's family

右 RIGHT  
《对》, 1970年代末期  
天然山羊毛毡毡, 200 x 400 cm  
万曼家人惠允  
*Pair*, late 1970s  
natural goat's wool felt  
200 x 400 cm  
Courtesy of the artist's family



壁挂变成当代艺术形式的艺术家之一。万曼评价吕尔萨“复兴了编织艺术, 将其从绘画和无意义的插图中解放出来。”

万曼在回顾他的艺术生涯时承认祖国编织艺术对自己的影响, 同时也确信需要超越这个传统。他写道: “我们保加利亚人对自己的编织艺术传统感到非常自豪, 因为它有非常深厚的历史渊源。”但正是这种历史的负债让他觉得现代壁挂艺术家应该“大气而且富有创造力地重新审视(传统)并赋予其新的意义。”

万曼和宋怀桂在央美待了一段时间, 1958年, 他们带着刚出生的小女儿宋小红去了保加利亚首都索非亚。这一时期, 他完成了早期一些主要的编织作品。他开始尝试“软雕塑”, 改装纺织机, 以便创作可以不必挂在墙上而能够进入人们穿行和生活的空间的纺织作品。他也开始考虑壁挂不仅可以成为雕塑的搭档, 也可以与建筑合作。

他和宋怀桂1969年共同创作的一件作品成为万曼的突破口。这件作品的题目非常未来主义, 叫《作品2001》。整个编织物呈螺旋结构, 悬挂在天花板上, 同时体现了固态和流动性。《作品2001》在洛桑纺织艺术双年展上引起巨大反响。和万曼的很多其他作品一样, 这件作品也已佚失: 宋小红回忆童年时曾在家里门厅看到过, 但搬离索非亚之后这件作品就不知去向。

这个时候的万曼已经清楚地认识到他需要掌握这门传统工艺, 但目的只有一个, 就是超越它。他后来写道:

“这时候, 民间艺术完备的真理令我兴奋不已。但还应该指出的是, 我同时也感到失望……因为我发现了其他更加根本的真理。这种失望通常来自传统模式与我们这个时代真正的挑战和精神之间的矛盾……把握传统的冲动必须发展一种新的动力, 用作个人创造力的发挥。”

1974年, 万曼在索非亚举办大型个展, 推出了他自1960年以来创作的三十件作品。展览引起了很大轰动, 巴黎国际艺术城的驻地邀请接踵而至。1975年, 万曼携妻小以及他1962

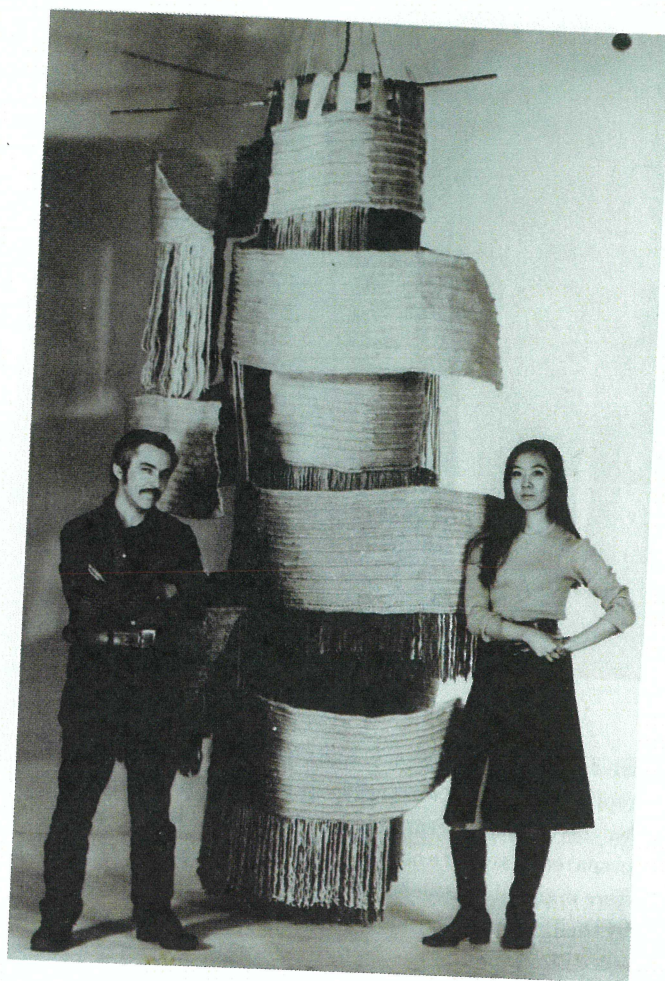
ister Zhou Enlai. After an anxious four-month wait Zhou replied that there was no law preventing mixed marriage, but he counseled Song to consider whether she was really prepared to accept another's culture. She was, and the couple were married in December 1956 at a ceremony presided over by the President of CAFA. It was the first "mixed marriage" since Liberation.

Varbanov had come to China with the idea of working as a tapestry artist. His homeland of Bulgaria, located on the Black Sea, was heir to both the Hellenic and the Slavic traditions of weaving and to the rug-making traditions of the Ottoman Turks. At CAFA he was able to compare Bulgaria's weaving traditions with those of China, where weaving materials ranged from the roughest of unspun wool to the finest silk thread. During this period Varbanov became aware of the work of Jean Lurçat (1892-1966), a contemporary and colleague of Matisse, Picasso and Braque who was one of the first artists to re-imagine tapestry as a contemporary art form. Varbanov wrote of Lurçat that he "revived the art of the weaving loom and freed it from the shackles of painting and from the banality of meaningless illustration."

Reflecting on his own development as an artist, Varbanov acknowledged his artistic debt to his homeland, while confidently asserting the need to transcend it. "We Bulgarians" he wrote "are proud of the traditions of our weaving art because it originates in remote antiquity." But it was just this sense of indebtedness that he believed called on modern tapestry artists "to profoundly and creatively re-examine [tradition] and to give new meaning to it".

Varbanov and Song stayed on at CAFA for a while but by 1958 they had moved with their infant daughter Boriana to the Bulgarian capital Sofia. This was the period of his early major woven works. He began experimenting with "soft





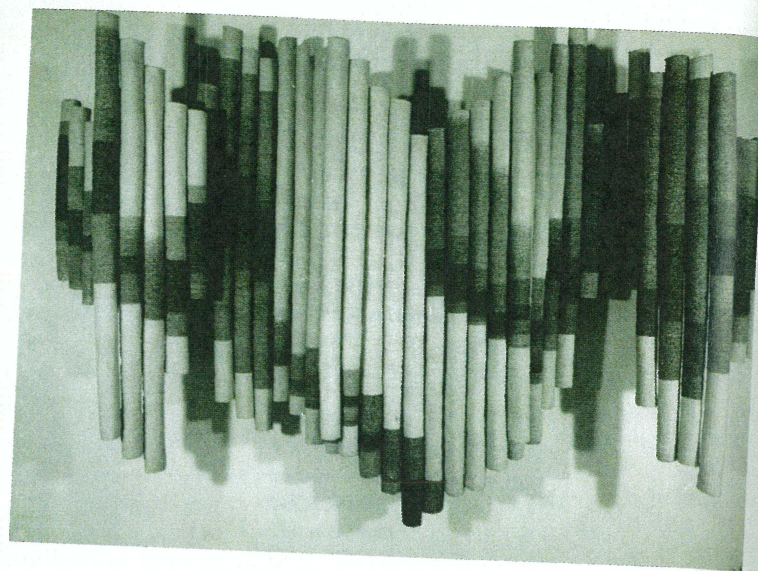
年出生的弟弟菲尼克斯搬去了巴黎，在那里一住就是八年。

1979年，万曼在大皇宫举办个展，1980年又参加了巴黎国际当代艺术博览会。博览会上，这位已经获得广泛承认的雕塑家遇到了皮尔·卡丹。皮尔·卡丹很喜欢他的作品，也深深折服于宋怀桂的气质。当时卡丹碰巧正在寻找进入中国市场的机会：时值改革开放政策刚刚确立，这位嗅觉敏锐的法国商人看到了一个很好的商业机会。他希望借助仪态优雅的宋女士之力，打进中国。1980年冬，双方达成协议，宋怀桂将回到中国，帮助皮尔·卡丹打点在华业务。1983年，万曼一家搬回北京。

宋女士回国后，立即不遗余力地帮卡丹打天下。她最主要的工作是担任卡丹的餐厅——北京巴黎马克西姆的总设计师。1983年，马克西姆在北京崇文饭店内正式开张。餐厅豪华的顾客群和新艺术风格的室内装潢征服了整个北京城。在接下来的很多年里，到马克西姆吃顿晚餐成为北京风格的终极盛宴。

与此同时，万曼也在积极探索着这座在他离开期间已经发生巨大变化的古老城市。中国前卫艺术刚刚觉醒，首都到处都是新思潮的涌动，万曼一头扎了进去。三里屯那时还是一片农田，在如今喜来登长城饭店所在的位置，万曼发现了一座废弃不用的地毯厂。他召集了一群年轻的美院学生，开始了一系列规模宏大的创作计划。

闲暇之余，他会退到北京饭店里的一家小咖啡馆，画画



sculpture,” by rigging his loom to allow him to create pieces that did not have to hang on the wall and could move into the space where people walk and live. He began to think of tapestry as a partner not just to sculpture, but to architecture.

The breakthrough came with a piece that he and Song created in 1969. Futuristically entitled *Composition 2001*, the work hung from the ceiling in a woven spiral that expressed both solidity and fluidity. *Composition 2001* had a huge impact at Lausanne's Biennale of Textile Art. Like so many of Varbanov's works, it has since been lost: Boriana recalls it hanging in the entrance of their apartment when she was a child but has no idea what happened to it after they left Sofia.

This was the period in which Varbanov saw clearly that he needed to master traditional technique with the sole purpose of moving beyond it. He later wrote:

“During this time I had enthralling encounters with the established truths of folk art. However, I should also mention the disappointments ... because there I discovered other more essential truths. The disappointment often originated in the conflict between the routines of tradition on the one hand and the real challenges and spirit of our time on the other ... the urge to master tradition must grow into a new drive for individual creative realization.”

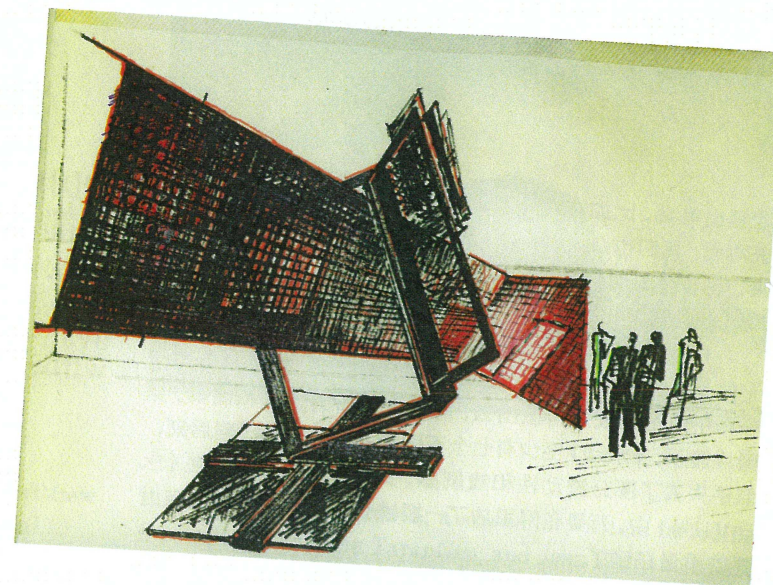
In 1974 Varbanov held a major exhibition in Sofia, featuring thirty works he had made since 1960. The show created a sensation and led directly to Varbanov being invited to take up residence in Paris at the Cité Internationale des Arts. He moved there in 1975 with Song and Boriana and her younger brother Phoenix who was born in 1962. Paris was to be his home for the next eight years.

In 1979, Varbanov held a major exhibition at the Grand Palais and then at the FIAC art fair in Paris in 1980. It was at FIAC that the now established sculptor met Pierre Car-

左1 FAR LEFT  
万曼和宋怀桂在《作品2001》前  
万曼家人惠允  
Maryn Varbanov and Song Huai-Kuei  
with their work *Composition 2001*, 1969  
Courtesy of the artist's family

左2 LEFT  
《管风琴》，1970年代末期  
天然山羊毛毡，200 x 400 cm  
万曼家人惠允  
*Orgue*, late 1970s, goat's wool, 200 x 400 cm  
Courtesy of the artist's family

右 RIGHT  
某项目草图，1987/88，纸水墨  
21 x 30 cm，万曼家人惠允  
Study for a project, 1987/88  
ink on paper, 21 x 30 cm  
Courtesy of the artist's family



草图，思考问题。这是当时北京为数不多的允许中国人和外国人见面接触的几个地方之一。在这里，他碰到了年轻的批评家侯瀚如。两人一起酝酿出了一个新计划：把万曼的作品带进中国艺术圣地——中国美术馆。1985年，万曼作品展在中国美术馆开幕，激起强烈反响。同期在北京举办展览的罗伯特·希滕斯坦评价说，首都最好的展览不是他自己的个展，而是万曼的展览。两场展览的影响都是爆炸性的，中国艺术家们趋之若鹜，这些作品完全超出了他们自身的想象。

1985年，中国美术学院给了万曼一个他渴望多年的机会：创建一家壁挂研究所。研究所的创立（该机构至今仍然存在）确保了万曼的另一份遗产——他对学生和同事的深刻影响，而曾经和他一起工作和学习的这些人即将成长为新一代的中国艺术家。

其中包括如今的国际知名艺术家谷文达。万曼刚到杭州的时候，谷文达在中国美院教传统国画，同时全面倒向后来被批评家高名潞称为“八五美术新潮”的前卫思潮。谷文达后来回忆道：“万曼启发我超越传统的水墨画。”他接着解释了万曼如何一步步引导他做出了那件“突破性”的作品——两张糅合了国画与编织材料的独立壁挂。谷文达认为是万曼促使他创作出所谓的“第一件三维的中国国画作品。”（1988年，这件作品参加洛桑双年展，谷文达的国际艺术生涯就此踏上正轨。）

谷文达说：“那时大多数中国艺术家都想学习西方的技法和风格。但万曼知道，你可以用现代的材料和技法，但你也必须找到自己独特的中国语言。”他继续讲道：“现在艺术家谈到跨越东西界线和文化交流已经不新鲜了，但对当时的很多前卫艺术家来说，关键是要接受西方，扔掉传统。但他看问题的方式不一样。他两边都看到了。他是一个先锋。”

万曼这一时期的笔记本和论文充分显示了他的两个梦想——艺术和研究所——占据了他的整个创造生涯。这些资料里充满了从未实现过的项目草图，有的他在构思时可能根本没考虑过可行性，但各种各样的新奇想法还是源源不断

din, who loved his work and was equally captivated by Song Huai-Kuei. As it happened, Cardin was looking for a way into the China market: it was the early days of Deng Xiaoping's Open Door policy and the canny Frenchman saw a business opportunity. He looked to the elegant Madame Song to help him find a way in. By the winter of 1980 it was agreed that she would return to China to run his business for him, and by 1983 the whole family was back in Beijing.

Madame Song worked ceaselessly to bring Cardin's business to life. Central to this was her work as chief designer of Cardin's restaurant Maxim's de Paris à Pékin, which opened inside the Chongwen Hotel in downtown Beijing in 1983. Its glittering clientele and ravishing Art Nouveau interior electrified the city, and a night out at Maxim's was to remain the acme of Beijing style for many years to come.

Meanwhile, Varbanov was exploring a Beijing transformed from the city that he had known as a student. These were the early years of the Chinese avant-garde. The capital was bubbling over with ideas and Varbanov plunged in. He discovered a disused carpet factory in what was then rural land in Sanlitun near where the Great Wall Sheraton now stands. He gathered a group of young art students around him and started on a series of monumental works.

In his leisure time, he would retire to the small lobby café of the Beijing Hotel to sketch and think. This was one of the few places in Beijing where Chinese and foreigners could meet, and it was there that he encountered the young critic Hou Hanru. Together they hatched a plan for Varbanov to show his new works in the hallowed National Art Museum of China. Varbanov's 1985 NAMOC exhibition was a sensation. Robert Rauschenberg, who was staging his seminal show in Beijing at the same time, remarked that the best exhibition in the capital was not his, but Varbanov's. The effect of both events was explosive, as young Chinese artists flocked to see



地涌出笔端，比如在杭州西湖上用纺织物制造一座小岛。今天再看，我们也许可以用光或者激光来实现该计划，如此一来，既不需要动用太多人力物力，岛屿又可以在天亮的时候消逝于无形。

在他生命的最后几个月，万曼将所有精力都投入到一件大作品——《永动》里。这是一张巨大的网，艺术家像渔夫一样不断把网收拢再撒出去，得出各种新的形状和图案。据照片显示，《永动》至少有七个不同版本。作品进行到后来，似乎失去了部分流动性和戏剧感，变得越来越疲惫。在《永动VII号》中，万曼在网里放了一根铁链，仿佛在展示它被世界的重量压倒了。

1989年春天的一个晚上，他爬到工作室的一块高地准备再次撒网，希望有一次流畅的落地，结果不小心摔倒。到北京医院做X光检查的时候，医生发现他的肺部有一块阴影。接下来的几个月对他的家人来说是最难熬的一段时间。医院窗外暖春变炎夏，而家人一直守在协和医院万曼的病床边。1989年7月10日，万曼病逝，享年56岁。他的女儿宋小红忆及父亲逝世之后令人几乎难以忍受的几个月，家人沉浸在悲痛之中。

万曼在杭州的同事维持了研究所的运转。他在中国美院创立的工作室至今仍然鼓励着一届又一届学生从事织品艺术实验。研究所由他以前的学生施慧——中国美院院长许江的夫人——负责。去年，中国美院举办了万曼逝世以来首场最全面的回顾展。据此编撰的一本书目前也已准备出版。

宋怀桂对万曼的创作影响很大。夫妇两人都热爱纺织品。宋怀桂也以自己的方式把这种材料用于创作，先是把马克西姆变成了一个风格的展示场，后来又设计了一系列中国古代服饰，分别对应历史上的五个朝代。这是她个人献给祖国纺织品艺术的一曲赞歌，最终变成展览，在世界各地巡回展出。从九十年代直到新千年初，包括奥利弗·斯通、昆汀·塔伦蒂诺、约翰·加利亚诺在内的许多文化名流都去马克西姆拜访过宋怀桂，她总是穿着一身皮尔·卡丹的高级定制时装，周身没有一丝漏洞，坐在酒吧一角。直到2007年逝世，她的优雅始终保持不变。

现在看到万曼作品的机会仍然不多。他的家人把小部分作品捐给了杭州中国美术学院。最近，798的HT画廊总监韩筱武策划了一场小型展览，展出万曼的一些草图和小作品。这些作品中有一部分目前正在北京O画廊展出，展览将持续到今年夏天。

万曼至死都在努力超越自己所选媒介的物理极限以探寻真理。他曾经写道：“如果一种艺术创作实现中的技术效果控制了作者，那么他创作发展的循环就闭合了。这就是为什么我相信艺术家在创作时的任务总是找到他自己：这是衡量他下一步的基本单位，也是他在自己短暂的一生中始终必须贯彻的工作，同时会在受到他启发的其他人的作品里永久存活下去。”

中国前卫艺术刚刚觉醒，  
首都到处都是新思潮的涌动，  
万曼一头扎了进去。

These were the early years of the Chinese avant-garde. The capital was bubbling over with ideas and Varbanov plunged in.

work from beyond the edge of their own imaginations.

In 1985 the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou gave Varbanov the opportunity to do something he had wanted to do for thirty years: found a tapestry school. It was his work establishing this school (which still exists today) that secured Varbanov's second legacy—his profound influence on students and colleagues who would join a new generation of Chinese artists.

Amongst these was the now internationally acclaimed artist Gu Wenda. When Varbanov arrived in Hangzhou, Gu was teaching traditional ink painting at the Academy by day, while being totally swept up in the avant-garde currents of what critic Gao Minglu later dubbed the '85 New Wave. "Varbanov inspired me to go beyond ink painting," Gu recalls today, while explaining how Varbanov guided him towards what would be his "breakthrough" work—two freestanding tapestries incorporating ink painting with woven materials. Gu Wenda credits Varbanov with pushing him to create what Gu describes as "the first ever 3D Chinese ink work." (It was the exhibition of this work at the 1988 Lausanne Biennale that launched Gu Wenda's international career)

"At that time," Gu recalls, "most Chinese artists just wanted to embrace Western techniques and styles. But Varbanov knew that you can have modern materials and modern techniques but you also need to find your own unique Chinese vocabulary." He continues, "today it's normal for artists to talk about bridging East and West and cultural exchange, but for many avant-garde artists the key point was to embrace the West and throw out the traditional. But he saw something different. He could see both sides. He was a pioneer."

Varbanov's notebooks and papers from the period show how his twin dreams—his art and his school—filled his creative life to the point of exhaustion. The books are crowded with sketches for projects that were never realized, and some that perhaps were never meant to be, but which sprang from his pen all the same, like his idea for a woven island floating in Hangzhou's famed West Lake. Gazing at it today, one can imagine it as a project of lights or lasers, where the labor of

creation would be avoided and the world it created would fade as the new day breaks.

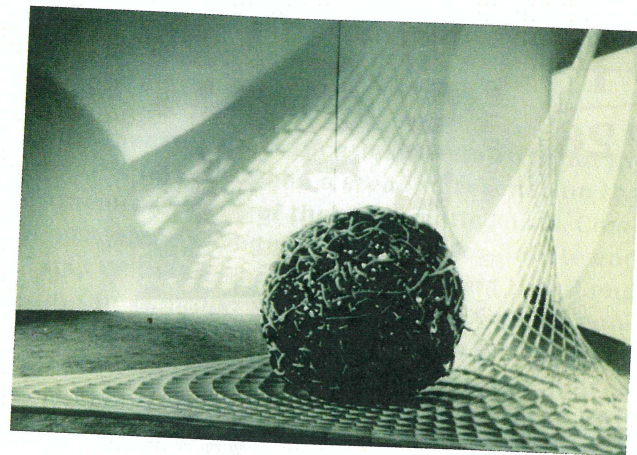
In his final months Varbanov labored on one great work—*Mouvement Perpetuel* (Perpetual Motion). The piece was a giant net, which Varbanov pulled up time and again, casting it like a fisherman and drawing it in to create new shapes and patterns. Photographs show *Mouvement Perpetuel* in at least seven configurations. As the work moves into its final iterations it seems to lose some of its fluidity and drama and become increasingly worn. In *Mouvement Perpetuel No. VII*, he introduces a chain into the net as if to show it weighed down by the world.

One night in the spring of 1989 he climbed to a high place in his studio for one more cast of the net, looking for the perfect fluid landing. Instead he fell. In hospital in Beijing an x-ray found a shadow on his lungs. The next months were agonizing for his family, as they gathered around his bedside in the Xiehe Hospital while outside a hot spring turned to a sweltering summer. On July 10, 1989, Maryn Varbanov died at the age of 56. His daughter Borianna recalls the almost unbearable months after his death, as the family grieved while other events sank China into a period of isolation from the world at large.

Varbanov's colleagues in Hangzhou ensured that his school continued. The atelier he created there continues to encourage student experimentation with textile forms to this day, headed by his former pupil Shi Hui, wife of Academy director Xu Jiang. Last year the China Academy of Art mounted the first complete retrospective of Varbanov's work since his death. A book based on that retrospective is now being readied for publication.

Song Huai-Kuei was an important influence on Varbanov's work. They shared a love of textiles which Song pursued in her own work, firstly in making Maxim's into a showcase of style and later in creating a marvelous collection of reproduction Chinese costumes embodying the styles of five dynasties of Chinese history. This was her personal paean to the textile arts of her own country, eventually forming the basis for a show that toured around the world. Throughout

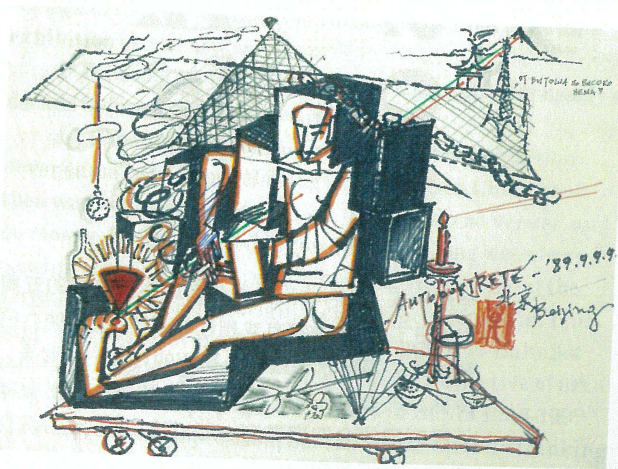
《永动V》，1989，弹力带，尺寸可变  
万曼家人惠允  
*Mouvement Perpetuel V*  
1989, elastic bands, size variable  
Courtesy of the artist's family



the 1990s and early 2000s, a stream of visitors including Oliver Stone, Quentin Tarantino, and John Galliano called on Song at Maxim's where she sat at the corner of the bar in her impeccable Cardin couture almost up until the day of her death in 2007.

As for Varbanov's work, opportunities to see it remain frustratingly few. His family have donated a small number of pieces to the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou and a small show of his drawings and minor works was recently curated by the director of Factory 798's HT Gallery, Han Tsungwoo. A few of those works are now on display at the O Gallery in Beijing and will be until the end of this summer.

Varbanov died trying to seek truth by reaching beyond the physical limits of his chosen medium. He once wrote: "When the technical effects of the realization of an artistic creation get control of the author, then the circle of his creative development closes. And that is why I believe that in creative work, the artist's quest is always to find himself: it is the unit of measure of his next step." It was a quest that filled his brief life to the very end, and lives on to this day in the work of those he inspired. ■



《自画像》，1989，纸上水墨，21 x 30 cm，万曼家人惠允  
*Self Portrait*, 1989, ink on paper, 21 x 30 cm  
Courtesy of the artist's family