

# Bellini Colloquium

Wednesday 9 November at 3:30 in Washington 301

## Emily Wilcox

Visiting Assistant Professor of Chinese Studies

### **“Inheriting the Future: The Socialist Realist Legacy in Contemporary Chinese Performance.”**



Socialist realism presents a paradox for the referential understandings of representation upon which most conventional notions of epistemology are based. Rather than seeing language as describing things already in existence, socialist realism calls for a type of language that brings the things it represents into existence through the very process of representing them. As Miklós Haraszti writes, “Socialist realism’ is more than mere faithfulness to reality: it contributes to reality; it creates reality.” Likewise, according to socialist realism, the only way to know reality is to be in the process of making it. This generative representational epistemology of socialist realism has had an important legacy in China, particularly in the way “Chinese tradition” is conceived of, understood, and put into practice. In Chinese dance forms produced in the Mao and post-Mao periods, dancers consistently describe inheritance as a creative process, in which tradition is brought to life through its continued reinvention. Practicing a new kind of socialist realism strongly inflected with cultural nationalism, Chinese dancers “inherit the future,” in that they see Chinese tradition as something that can be inherited and known only through a future-oriented practice of its remaking.