

***Cai Guo-Qiang: Radiance of Spring***

Salle des Hotes: Artwork Descriptions



***Mont-Saint-Michel***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**183 x 366 cm**

This painting is Cai's response to the medieval abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel and the serene landscape of Normandy. Inspired by the mysterious scene that emerged in the early morning mist during the artist's first site visit in 2025, the work depicts the tides, flowers, plants, and flocks of sheep unfolding slowly in time, while the abbey appears suspended in a hazy reverie, touched by the first light of dawn. As the opening work of the exhibition, it is also a tribute to the singular wonder of Mont-Saint-Michel



***Pierre Bonnard's Balcony with Fireworks***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**183 x 366 cm**

Inspired by three paintings in which Pierre Bonnard looked out from his home toward the Seine, this work also draws on Bonnard's rejection of painting from life and his embrace of a painting method rooted in memory, emotion, and the experience of color. Cai rubbed colored gunpowder onto the canvas with his fingers before igniting it. A sweep of vermilion across the upper part of the composition echoes a moment from Cai's daytime fireworks "sky painting" over the Seine in Vernon at the exhibition opening, offering a humorous call across time to Bonnard.

*Cai Guo-Qiang: Radiance of Spring at Mont-Saint-Michel Exhibition Text (English)*

“Painters want elements of many artists to coexist within a single work, while also hoping that they themselves might burst forth unexpectedly, with a presence unmistakably their own... This is the hard-earned skill and the struggle of a lifetime, but also the happiness of a lifetime.” — Cai Guo-Qiang



***Purple Flora***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**183 x 366 cm**

Inspired by Cai’s 2024 visit to Monet’s home in Giverny with his family, this work draws on the vivid purple tones of the late-summer garden, blooming with sage, lupine, pansies, daisies and irises. In making the gunpowder painting, the artist experimented freely with both old and new techniques. In addition to using water-washing, he employed his “yin-yang explosion” method: for each ignition, he stacked two canvases face to face. The lower canvas became *Purple Flora*, while the abstract traces left on the upper canvases—like spiritual imprints—formed the basis of *Color Triad* and *Water Lily Pond* in this exhibition. As Cai often says, “Each painting is a draft for the next.”



***Monet's Cemetery***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**130 x 162 cm**

*Cai Guo-Qiang: Radiance of Spring at Mont-Saint-Michel Exhibition Text (English)*

On the centenary of Monet's passing, Cai went to the Church of Sainte-Radegonde in Giverny to pay tribute to Monet, who rests there. Before Monet's grave, Cai brought canvases and gunpowder to sketch; the drifting strands of colored smoke embody the sentiment he has carried for Monet since his youth.



***Giverny Study***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**130 x 162 cm**

This is one of the works Cai created on site in Giverny before the exhibition opened. During his Fondation Cartier residency in 1993, he visited Monet's garden with his wife, also his close painting companion from his hometown.

After the Paris Olympics in 2024, he returned with his daughters. Cai recalls: "I took many photos, gathering a great deal of material and intending to come back and create paintings on the theme of Monet's garden. I never expected that just a year later I would be invited by the Normandie Impressionniste festival. It truly felt like destiny!"



***Water Lily Pond***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**183 x 366 cm**

*Cai Guo-Qiang: Radiance of Spring at Mont-Saint-Michel Exhibition Text (English)*

*Water Lily Pond* derives from the second upper canvas used in the “yin-yang explosion” technique for *Purple Flora*. The explosion left behind an apparitional base that became the starting point for envisioning this subtle, ethereal scenery. Onto the already exploded canvas, the artist sprayed water, allowing soluble pigments to diffuse naturally and form broad reflections for the pond and floating waterlilies. The work echoes the increasingly abstract tendencies of Monet’s late *Water Lilies*.



***Cosmic Garden***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**183 x 366 cm**

This work presents Cai’s cosmic garden, with each exploding floral form derived from flowers and plants he photographed in the gardens of Giverny and around Mont Saint-Michel.

In creating it, the artist first arranged Japanese tissue paper on the canvas, then scattered gunpowder on top before igniting it. The energy and colored smoke of the gunpowder spread evenly through the fibers of the paper, which also tempered the violent restlessness of the gunpowder. The effect is one where the flowers drift in a weightless void, gentle and pure.

“The ease, freedom, and openness of the Impressionist masters inspires me to pursue a kind of *xieyi* expressiveness: to live in nature and to move within perception.” — Cai Guo-Qiang



**Color Triad**

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**183 x 366cm**

*Cai Guo-Qiang: Radiance of Spring at Mont-Saint-Michel Exhibition Text (English)*

The base of this triptych originates in the “yin-yang explosion” technique used for *Purple Flora*: two canvases were stacked and ignited, and the traces left on the upper canvas in the explosion became the starting point for this work. The primary colors of painting—red, yellow, and blue—each dominate a section of the composition, bursting forth from a vast, chaotic ground marked by gunpowder smoke. They surge toward the viewer as if opening a portal into another time and space.

“When Monet painted flowers, he was also capturing changes in color and visual sensation across time; similarly, when I take flowers as my subject, I am trying to capture and express their cosmic and vital energy.” — Cai Guo-Qiang



***Monochrome Flowers***

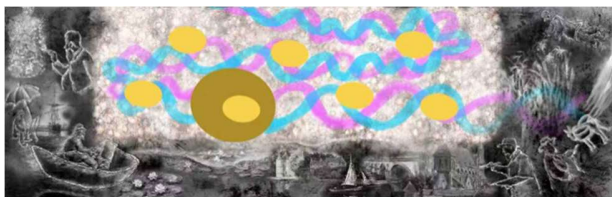
2026

Gunpowder on canvas

183 x 366 cm

This work is inspired by the white wild clematis commonly found in Normandy, known in English as “Traveler’s Joy.” This poetic name dates to the sixteenth-century herbalist John Gerard, who gave it this name because its long, beard-like tendrils evoke the weathered appearance of a traveler. With *Monochrome Flower*, Cai responds to the natural ecology of Normandy and to the spirit of the pilgrimage route that has, for centuries, led to Mont-Saint-Michel—evoking his odyssey of leaving home and traveling afar over the past forty years.

While making the work, Cai wielded a glowing incense stick, rapidly igniting black gunpowder across the canvas—an act faintly reminiscent of the way he made quick sketches in his youth. The resulting roughness and simplicity stand in contrast to the colorful paintings in the exhibition.



*Cai Guo-Qiang: Radiance of Spring* at Mont-Saint-Michel Exhibition Text (English)

***Gunpowder Drawing for Radiance of Spring* (image to be changed May 27)**

**2026**

**Gunpowder on canvas**

**183 x 366 cm**

The largest work in the exhibition, this painting is Cai's conceptual drawing for *Radiance of Spring*, the daytime fireworks "sky painting" realized over the Seine in Vernon on May 31, 2026. It was completed through an on-site ignition in Vernon.

Around the edges of the painting, black gunpowder outlines the silhouettes of Impressionist predecessors moving along the Vernon riverbank. At the center are nine palettes, symbolizing the enduring painting legacy and the pioneering, passionate spirit of artists such as Boudin, Pissarro, Monet, Renoir, Seurat, Bonnard, whose influence linger in this "Valley of Impressionism."

"My gunpowder paintings do not use a palette; colors collide and merge directly on the picture surface... Impressionism reminds us to patiently await new possibilities for expressing the world. The world is complex and fragile, yet Impressionist works still warm and delight people across cultures and through more than a century of storms—encouraging later generations to positively embrace the pleasure of artistic adventure."— Cai Guo-Qiang

Chapelle St. Madeline

***Creation of Gunpowder Paintings for Radiance of Spring***

**2026**

**Directed by Shanshan Xia, produced by 33 Studio and Cai Studio**

A documentary video presents the making of Cai's new gunpowder paintings for the exhibition *Radiance of Spring*, offering visitors deeper insight into the artist's creative process and his ongoing dialogue with Impressionism.

Chapelle St. Martin

***Blossoms in the Fading Light***

**2026**

**Gunpowder on porcelain**

**80 x 150 x 8 cm**

As the final work in the exhibition, this porcelain floral sculpture ignited with gunpowder echoes the 2026 Normandie Impressioniste festival's theme of A Possible Garden, leaving visitors with an unexpected and delightful final bloom.