

Speaking Notes, Exhibition Opening, Hong Kong, June 9, 2012

In this week that began on Monday with the 23rd anniversary of Tiananmen Square, I'd like to begin by speaking directly to Liu Xia and Liu Xiaobo.

You are not silenced. You are locked up, but you are not silenced.

And you are not alone or forgotten; I can personally attest to the fact that you are constantly thought of and, acknowledged, in the PEN community around the world and, by many people in this room today, deeply missed as dear friends and close colleagues. Your absence matters.

On March 20 this year, PEN members and other writers around the world read aloud your poetry, Liu Xiaobo: a single poem was translated into more than 15 languages and presented in more than one hundred readings, on one day, in forty countries. On that day, those of us who read aloud your poem, *You Wait for Me with Dust*, stood in your rooms, imagined the bookcase, the pen, the carpet (many of the images we see today in Xia's photographs). We were invited into the love of two people for one another, a love forged and sustained under seemingly impossible circumstances. (One of the extraordinary aspects of your coupled role in public discourse about the future of China is this fusion of intellect and feeling, big ideas and small, intense poems, public statements about democracy and the tiny gestures of dolls...I'm struck by the immediacy and intimacy of these small figures overwhelmed by a stack of books.)

When I was in Beijing last July, on a PEN International mission, we wanted desperately to try to see you, Liu Xia. We imagined ourselves arriving by taxi at your apartment block and announcing ourselves to the *guobao*, knowing full well that we'd be led away, politely or perhaps otherwise interrogated, and then finally told, that if Liu Xia wished to see you, she would have invited you. This Kafkaesque ritual has been played out many times outside the gates of your apartment compound by foreign visitors and diplomats, but to my knowledge, no one is allowed in. We were politely discouraged from even trying.

Similarly, we are denied knowledge of your condition, Liu Xiaobo. How is your health, who visits you, what do you know of the outside world?

But both of you, in your absence, continue to speak loudly and clearly. We are surrounded today by the images created by Liu Xia, each photograph a work of art, a composition, a statement rich with meaning and feeling. And the English-speaking world has recently been finally introduced to the important essays of Liu Xiaobo, in *No Enemies, No Hatred: Selected Essays and Poems*.

One of the essays in that book is called *Long Live the Internet*. It was written in 2006 and proposed the idea of a kind of "freedom of assembly" that the Internet seemed to make possible even then. But especially within this past year, and I speak only as an observer

from afar, it seems that Sina Weibo and other microblogging networks have become without doubt the Achilles Heel of the current regime in China. Beginning with the high-speed train collision in Zhejiang Province last August, through the various ingenious online campaigns for individuals like Ai Weiwei and Chen Guangcheng, more recently with the complex story of the downfall of Bo Xilai, Chinese citizens have used the Internet to express outrage, disbelief, compassion, criticism, and desire for change. It's not surprising that Sina Weibo recently introduced a bizarre new "tattletale" user credit (purification) policy, which I have no doubt will be quickly undermined and circumvented by China's sophisticated and resilient citizens. It's also not surprising that at the moment the government censors were doing everything imaginable to erase the idea of Tiananmen Square (even the image of a candle) from the Internet on Monday that tens of thousands of individuals somehow ended up in Hong Kong's Victoria Park in a candlelight vigil of remembrance.

It is the combination of these two forces—the singular intelligence and artistry of individuals such as those we celebrate today, Liu Xia and Liu Xiaobo, *and* the burgeoning, irrepressible authority of civil society that the Internet supports—that will move China towards the democracy desired by so many.

I am here today on behalf of PEN International. Founded in 1921, PEN is the world's oldest human rights and literary organization. Our programs celebrating literature and promoting freedom of expression are carried out by 145 centers in more than 100 countries. I'm very proud to chair the flagship program of PEN International, the Writers in Prison Committee, which in 2011 celebrated 50 years of advocacy for persecuted writers and freedom of expression around the world. We work especially closely with our colleagues who are engaged in on-the-ground campaigning in countries where creative freedom and free expression are at risk, among them, ICPC. As I stated last December before a Congressional Executive Committee in Washington, DC, *securing Liu Xiaobo's release from prison is one of PEN's highest priorities.*

So I am very honoured to be here today, with the friends and colleagues of Liu Xia and Liu Xiaobo.

Marian Botsford Fraser
Chair, Writer in Prison Committee



(This is the text of a short talk given as part of the opening ceremony for the exhibition "The Silent Strength of Liu Xia" sponsored by the Independent Chinese PEN Centre at the City University of Hong Kong on June 9, 2012. Copyright © 2012 by [Marian Botsford Fraser](#). All rights reserved.)