

Madhusree's Blog

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Giant paper boat installation by Chinese artist Zhu Jinshi attraction at Miami during Art Basel



Rice Paper Boat

India-Art/Asia

Hong Kong, Dec 2 Chinese contemporary artist Zhu Jinshi, who experiments with diverse mediums and materials to create avant garde art inspired by reality and world schools of aesthetic thoughts, will be the attraction of an exhibition, “28 Chinese” at the Rubell Family Collection opening December 4, 2013, to coincide with Art Basel at Miami in United States.

He has sculpted a monumental 12-metre walk-in installation of a boat — using bamboo, cotton and 8,000 sheets of Xuan (rice) paper — to create synergies and new links between materials, art, history and journeys of cultures across the globe. It is the Boat’s first journey to America.

Artist Jinshi describes the “Boat” as “a symbolic journey”. The multiple layers of Xuan paper walls gently block out the world outside as each viewer moves through the length of the paper tunnel of the boat. The Xuan paper is considered to be the first-material ever invented specifically to write and paint—steeped in history and tradition.

The installation is significant because of the artist's cultural background. Zhu was a participant in the underground and literary activity during the cultural revolution — and emerged in the late 1970s as a member of the ground-breaking “Stars (Xingxing)” — an avant garde artists' group along with artists like Ai Weiwei and Ma Desheng.

After fleeing China in the 1980s, Zhu was exposed to German expressionism in Berlin. He combined the 21st century contemporary European expressionism with the speed and spontaneity of his “xie yi” ink and brush paintings. Zhu will also exhibit “a series of heavily-impastoed” oil paintings, for which the artist has been recognized internationally.

Zhu's sculptural installation and his abstract work express a rigorous dedication to material — and his lifelong commitment to pure abstract form. The artist's large-scale canvases, laden with multi-coloured oils, create a dialogue between western and Chinese abstraction, referring to works by artists like Wassily Kandinsky and the western tradition of abstract expressionism — which emerged from the US in the late 1960's.

Pearl Lam, the founder of the Hong-Kong based Pearl Lam Galleries said his gallery had supported and worked Zhu Jinshi for many years. “The selected works which will be on show at Miami trace the relationship between China and west— the core of the galleries' mission. From the heavily impastoed canvasses laden with oil paint to the delicate yet dominating ‘Boat’— viewers will experience new insights into the Chinese culture,” Pearl Lam said.

Jinshi, born in Beijing in 1954 began to paint abstract canvases after working as an artist-in-residency in Germany and teaching in the department of architecture at the Berlin Technical University. He showed his works at the “Stars (Xing Xing)” group exhibition – the first-ever contemporary art exhibition after the cultural revolution.

When China was led by Mao Zedong between 1950s and 1970s, the new visual encouraged by the Communist power was “part of a broader national programme of modernization”. Artists were told to make art that reflected the revolutionary spirit of the time— for the people. A paper published by the Asia Society as a introduction to an exhibition, “Art and China's Revolution” in 2008-2009 says “oil painting in a socialist realist style replaced ink painting — which had previously been one of the most revered art forms in China.

Revolutionary heroes such as workers, soldiers and peasants replaced traditional subjects such as landscapes, birds and flowers”.

Respected older artists, whose ink paintings were in demand pre-cultural revolution — were looked down upon as “examples of bourgeois decadence”. Many artists saw their works destroyed. Some of them were arrested and found their works criticized in “black painting” exhibitions, the paper says. A section of committed creative expressionists went underground. Zhu belongs to this group of artists, who chose stay out of the public eye during this “tumultuous” period.

Zhu's international repertoire is formidable. He has exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions including “Chinese Contemporary Abstract, 1980s until Present: MINDMAP (2012)” at Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, “Power and Jiangshan (2008)” at Arario Gallery in Beijing and “On the Road (2002)” at Prague City Museum, Czech Republic.

Zhu's work is represented in many private and public collections across the globe, including Canada where his rice paper installation “The Tao” of Xuan Paper (1997) is on permanent display at the Vancouver Art Gallery. In May 2013, to coincide with the first edition of Art Basel in Hong Kong, Zhu presented his first Hong Kong solo show at Pearl Lam Galleries.

--Staff Writer
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