

PearlLam Galleries

Shanghai

WATER • QUINTESSENCE:

Zhang Jian-Jun solo exhibition



ZHANG JIAN-JUN b. 1955, *First Drop of Water #35*, 2016, Ink, oil paint, acrylic, and rice paper on canvas, 120 x 100 cm (42 1/4 x 38 3/8 in.)

Exhibition Dates
Venue

19 March–28 May, 2016 Monday–Saturday, 10:30am–7pm
Pearl Lam Galleries, 181 Middle Jiangxi Road, G/F, Shanghai, China 200002

Shanghai—Pearl Lam Galleries is pleased to present *Water • Quintessence*, its first solo exhibition by Zhang Jian-Jun, on show from 19 March–28 May with an opening reception on 26 March, 2016. The exhibition centres on the subject of water—both its physical forms and connotations that flit through the kaleidoscope of daily life, and as the epitome of classical Chinese philosophy, which Zhang describes as *yi*—the true realm between reality and ideal, or the pursuit of quintessence (in Western terminology) in the most simplified and sensible way. The show features the artist's latest oil and ink paintings, and it will also comprehensively showcase an array of mixed media works, sculpture pieces, and archival documentations dating from the 1980s to the present.

For the first time in nearly three decades, the Shanghai native, one of the representative artists for the earliest abstract art in China, will hold a solo show featuring current artwork in his hometown. Zhang Jian-Jun's works pose questions about existence, the origin of the universe, and the eternalness and transformative nature of time. Deeply influenced by Daoism, Zhang approaches his art through a philosophical way of thinking and regards his practice as a form of "contemplation of the pure, and manifestation of the simple". In his comprehension of Dao, Zhang instinctively implements the common metaphor of water that merges reality with abstraction in his art.

Zhang Jian-Jun will exhibit a piece from his acclaimed series *Noumenon (Existence)*, which establishes his conceptual pursuit in art. *Noumenon (Existence)* is ultimately a conversation between the artist and the macrocosm on the essence of being. Monochromatic, circular, and made from natural materials, each piece from the series is subtle without abrupt shifts, just as Dao is "the form of the formless and image of indeterminacy." Renowned art critic Gao Minglu considers Zhang's works as "rational paintings", which inquire into the origin, essence, and progression of metaphysics. This 1980s avant-garde movement is a crucial component for the development of contemporary art and culture in China.

Water • Quintessence debuts several new paintings from Zhang's *Flowing Water* series, in which he applies ink with oil paint to symbolise the flow of Chinese traditions into the contemporary world, fusing together the physical flow of water and the idea of "Everything in and as a Process". If Daoism advocates for opposing elements to operate in a mutually transformative manner, then the harmonious union of the mediums of oil and ink, representing Zhang's lived experiences in New York and Shanghai, on canvas is a realisation of a Daoist way of life. Other new works are from the artist's *First Drop of Water* series which encapsulates how he imagines the origin of life. The circular shape in his early 1980s work has extended into this series, but with its embodiment of 'essence' becoming more physically fluid and visible. The blossoming of a drop of water, a visualisation of the same spiritual connotation from Zhang's *Noumenon (Existence)* series, is an elaborate moment that captures the diverse movements of water. The contrast between a singular drop and a boundless ripple is dramatic yet poetic through the instantaneousness and eternalness of time.

Accompanying the black-and-white *Flowing Water* series is *Red Mountain* (2015), a red-pink sculpture cast in silicone rubber. Shaped after scholars' rocks, which have a history of being collected by Chinese literati since a thousand years ago, *Red Mountain* is artificial in its material and colour. The sculpture itself is a contradiction that sparks a dialogue between tradition and modernity, implying that society's transition from the past to the present has not always been smooth.

Exploring the role that water has played in Zhang Jian-Jun's artistic development, *Water • Quintessence* includes archival images of the artist's various art installations and performances, as well as two series from the 1990s. The works in Zhang's *Pond* series (1990) have added dimension and depth due to the veiling of a translucent layer on the abstract ink sketches. The delicate and rhythmic paintings seem to shift from stillness to movement. The minimalist composition continues in his Chinese ink on paper *Water • Fire* series (1992)—painted with water and burned with fire—that focuses on two seemingly conflicting but rather complementary elements from the five substances in Chinese philosophy. The circles are *yin* and *yang*, which cannot exist without one and another. It is *yi* that keeps them interrelated.

The exhibition will also screen videos that document Zhang Jian-Jun's creative explorations of the concept of time through water. In the documentary of his outdoor installation *To Fuse* (1994), Zhang adds water and dry ice to a pool of ink. Gradually, the fog rises as the man-made ink transforms into another physical state. The cultural and natural aspects of this work fuse together, and the performance itself is ultimately a way of Dao. In the video *Rubbing Sun* (2014), Zhang rubs the outline of the sun (the fire) with water instead of ink on a piece of suspended Xuan paper on the beach in Venice, California. The finished work is "pure", as no trace was left after the water dried, while the process is a reflection of humanity within nature and the nature within humanity. Immersing himself and his art between the transient and the eternal, the small and the grand, the physical and the metaphysical, the simple and the profound, as well as appearance and essence, Zhang Jian-Jun balances and synthesises these polarities as his works flow through space and time.

About the Artist

Zhang Jian-Jun was born in 1955 in Shanghai. He received his Graduate Degree in Fine Arts from the Art Department of the Shanghai Drama Institute in 1978, and he moved to the United States in 1989. Currently, Zhang is a professor at New York University, Shanghai. He lives and works in both Shanghai and New York City.

Zhang's work consists of various media, from photography, ink installation, and video performances to painting, embodying a sense of change and process of time. His works are representative of rational painting, a genre of art that concerns itself with issues of existence, time, and space. His work appears in major collections, including the Brooklyn Museum, New York; San Francisco Asian Art Museum, California; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; Guangdong Museum of Art, China; Shanghai Art Museum, China; and Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China.

Zhang Jianjun has held solo exhibitions in New York, Germany, Japan, Singapore, and China, including at the Shanghai Art Museum, Harvard University, Guangdong Museum of Art, and Pace Prints in New York. Group exhibitions include *Myth/History II: Shanghai, 1980s: Jian-Jun Zhang's Artwork (1978–88)* (2015), Yuz Museum, Shanghai; *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* (2013), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; *Wu Ming, Form is Formless: Chinese Contemporary Abstract Art* (2011), Pearl Lam Galleries, Shanghai; *Yi Pai: Thirty Years of Chinese Abstract Art* (2008), Madrid; *Flowing River: 30 Years of Chinese Oil Painting* (2005), National Art Museum of China, Beijing; International Arts Festival Dusseldorf (1995); *China Modern Art Exhibition* (1989), Beijing; and *'83 Experimental Painting Exhibition* (1983), Fudan University, Shanghai.

Zhang received an Asian Cultural Council Fellowship, two Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants, a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and more. He was Assistant Director and Head of the Curatorial Department of the Shanghai Art Museum (1986–89) and has participated in the International Curatorial Program at MoMA in New York.

Selected publications include the retrospective catalogues *Water: Zhang Jian-Jun* and *Zhang Jian-Jun: Vestiges of a Process*, as well as *Contemporary Brush Strokes: New York Artists from China*. Zhang's works have also appeared in art history books, including *Chinese Contemporary Art History* and *Chinese Painting: 250 Years*. His art has been covered in ARTnews, Art in America, Art Forum, Asia-Pacific Art, The New York Times, and many other international publications.

About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China.

Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects, and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, Pearl Lam Galleries is dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

The four branches of Pearl Lam Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore represent an increasingly influential roster of contemporary artists. Chinese artists Zhu Jinshi and Su Xiaobai, who synthesise Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries has also introduced leading international artists, such as Jenny Holzer, Leonardo Drew, Carlos Rolón/Dzine and Yinka Shonibare MBE, to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region, collaborating to produce thought-provoking, culturally relevant work.

Press Enquiries

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