

Zhao Zhao Solo Exhibition: One Second • One Year
Curated by Barbara Pollack
Tang Contemporary Art
August 8 – September 22, 2018

Tang Contemporary Art Hong Kong is proud to announce the opening of Beijing Artist Zhao Zhao's all-new exhibition "One Second • One Year" at H Queen's. This is Zhao's second solo exhibition with Tang Contemporary Art in Hong Kong after "Zhao Zhao Solo Exhibition" (2016). Curated by Barbara Pollack, professor of School of Visual Art, New York, this exhibition explores aspects of time and the way time alters our perception of the artworks on view.

Zhao Zhao entitled the pencil drawings and oil paintings "One Second", works that establish a dialogue about depictions of time. To create the "One Second" drawings, the artist held in one hand ten pencils and within one second marked a piece of paper with a grouping of lines. From these spontaneous works, he then went about meticulously translating the hyper-realistic image onto canvas in oil paints, a process that took almost a year to complete.

The pencil drawings and the oil paintings instill different sensations in the viewer. The pencil drawings encapsulate a visceral loss of control where Zhao Zhao acts on subconscious motivations to make a set of almost violent markings on white paper. In contrast, the oil paintings evoke a meticulous process, employing the ultimate restraint to achieve a verisimilitude of momentariness. To achieve this result, the traces left by the pencil on paper are enlarged and broken down into countless dots and marks. Then using brushes and oil paints, Zhao Zhao painstakingly recreates the drawing in reverse on a Prussian blue background. In so doing, the artist translates a depiction of instantaneous spontaneity into an image of eternal endurance, slowing down time for the viewer's appreciation.

This series of works - a new innovation for Zhao Zhao - raises a host of questions about how time impacts our lives and how time can be captured in art. Time may be the most important factor in our existence, but it goes unnoticed, except when we check a clock to register what time it is. Through these works, this artist refocuses our consciousness on time, translating the past, the present and the future into abstract lines. We witness the passing of a moment as an eternity and watch the passage of time become encapsulated in a single image.

This exhibition will also show Zhao Zhao's new installations "Jade-Constellations", in which time is also a key factor. For the past several years, Zhao Zhao has explored the theme of "Constellations", first by shattering glass with gunshots and then by translating these violent gestures into oil paintings. In the original series of Constellations, the pattern of bullet holes in the glass surfaces could be interpreted in multiple ways, either as a reference to current political crises or as a universal image of the night sky. Like with the dialogue between the "One Second" pencil drawings and oil paintings, the juxtaposition of the glass works with the oil paintings established a conversation between spontaneity and endurance, between visceral sensations and studied contemplation.

Zhao Zhao's "Jade Constellations" add to the original Constellations by introducing a new element - circles of jade - into the holes in the glass. For about 5,000 years, jade has been the most precious element in Chinese culture, cherished by Imperial dynasties and adapted as a ritual object. To create these works, Zhao Zhao searched for jade elements at their source in Gansu Province, uncovering examples that were centuries old. By adding these jade circles or *bi* to his glass works, he is introducing the notion of time into the artworks, transforming them from spontaneous gestures into reflections on ancient rituals. Suddenly, the Constellations are no longer about contemporary politics but are also reflections on 5,000 years of history.

As such, "Jade Constellations" speak to two different types/groups of audiences. For those aware of contemporary art practices, the installations are bold, dramatic statements, combining elements of minimalist art with specific Chinese characteristics. But for those keenly educated in traditional Chinese culture, the jade element conveys the qualities attributed to this material - honesty, benevolence, wisdom, integrity and bravery - since ancient times. Inserting this ritualistic material into the fragility of glass provokes viewers to contemplate certain universal truths in evidence throughout history, not least of which is the violent tendencies of regimes in power from Imperial times to the present. Also, given the rarity of the museum-quality examples of jade that Zhao Zhao has used in these installations, it is impossible not to think about the preciousness of his materials, leading to questions about prestige and value.

In addition to the "Jade Constellations," Zhao Zhao will include recent oil paintings and one tapestry on silk from the Constellations series. For the paintings, he has an uncanny ability to evoke the presence to shattered glass, even when we see we are staring at a canvas. In his typical use of Prussian blue on a white background, these paintings demonstrate his superlative skill as a draftsman, able to replicate any material in oil paints, no matter how complicated. Taking this practice to a new level, Zhao Zhao has added a new "Constellation," in which the image of fractured glass is rendered in intricate embroidery on silk. So exacting is this rendition that, again, it can convince viewers that they are seeing splintered shards of glass when on closer inspection it is clear that the composition is comprised of minute stitches of thread.

In these works, Zhao Zhao again reflects on the passage of time, using an image that had to be created in an instant as the basis for works that are durable and eternal. Contemplating these images, it is impossible to resist the notion that violence - an explosive disruption of time - may be an eternal condition, ever replicating itself in various manifestations every minute of every day. Or it could mean that even the most spontaneous act can be reevaluated and controlled, at least in the hands of a sophisticated artist. In either case, these are artworks of magnificent beauty, achieving stunning effects through the most painstaking process. At the minimum, we are in awe of Zhao Zhao's achievement, ever contemplating the time it took for him to create these results.

Zhao Zhao