

GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

curated by_Martin Germann

From...To...

ZHANG PEILI

4 SEP – 2 OCT 2021

Opening: Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th of September 2021 - Soft Opening: noon – 6 pm

Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder is glad to announce a solo exhibition by the Chinese artist Zhang Peili (born 1957 in Hangzhou). With a selection of works bridging the last thirty years of his practice, *From...To...* shows how Zhang reacts to and reflects on the socio-political fabric of the present-day global society as seen from China. In the exhibition, a selection of Zhang's early epochal video works produced between 1988 and 1996 is echoed by excerpts of a recent project premiering in Europe: namely, a full scan of the artist's skeleton, organs, and body data rendered in marble, travertine, and white onyx, along with further translations of individual data and information into representations. This literal "body of work" questions the global status of the individual the same way it makes use of cutting-edge technology of all sorts. At the same time, the project also reflects a world dedicated to permanent optimization and constant growth. Its last common denominator seems to be the ethos of technological feasibility and measurability.

Zhang Peili has made significant contributions to visual arts in China and beyond: First, as a painter associated with the avant-garde movement '85 New Wave, then as a conceptual artist. Widely known as the "godfather of Chinese video art", he remains one of the most autonomous and elusive artists working in China. His position can be described of that of an artists' artist. His work – comprised of painting, text, video and digital media – has repeatedly played a pioneering role in shaping the histories of Chinese visual art.

The artist has formed his work conscious of art's commercialization, institutionalization, and ideological appropriation. Accordingly, he explores the intricate interplay between power and subversion that mediates between art, entertainment, and social, political, and cultural apparatuses. In his reflection on reality, Zhang examines the representational capacity of various media, including painting and video, and their swiftness in transitioning from artistic to propagandistic objects, including the propaganda of the market. Questions circling around the essence and social purpose of art make up the nucleus of Zhang's artistic practice.

These mechanisms between the representation of power and its subversion unfold as a leitmotif in Zhang's oeuvre. Embodied by restraint and repetition, his aesthetics of control, boredom, and absurdity function as methods for exposing perceived realities and media conventions obscured by hidden forces. What appears to be comedic on the outside is a factual reality for those who live in a totalitarian state in which political conditions overshadow human rights. Always reacting to specified contexts and concerns, Zhang's work offers a steady commentary on China's social, political, and cultural environment, in its change from state communism to state capitalism and the unique role media and technology play in that respect.

From...To..., the artist's second monographic exhibition in Europe after his show at S.M.A.K. Ghent, mirrors Zhang's pioneering, present artistic trajectory in a historical selection of works, such as *30 x 30*, 1988 in which he repeatedly drops a mirror and glues the pieces back together again – a work, which was originally drafted as a performance piece during a congress on the future of Chinese contemporary art. Other iconic works are also on display, such as *Document on Hygiene No. 3*, 1991 in which Zhang spends a long time washing a chicken in a bowl of soapy water, along with *Water: Standard Version from the Cihai Dictionary*, 1991. These works further contain a socially critical undertone that refers to such phenomena as national hygiene campaigns and ritualistic and empty news reporting in periods of indoctrination. These will be shown along with *Uncertain Pleasures II*, 1996, a multi-screen installation in which fingers scratch body parts – a work that, on another level, represents China's slow transformation from a society of discipline into today's global society of control.

Martin Germann

ZHANG PEILI was born in 1957 in Hangzhou, where he still lives and works. He studied oil painting at the Zhejiang Academy of Arts (later the China Academy of Art) from 1980 to 1984. After graduating, Zhang became one of the pioneering artists of the avant-garde movement '85 New Wave and co-founder of the Hangzhou-based art group Chi She (Pond Society). In 1988, Zhang introduced video art in China. Since 2002 he has been running the Embodied Media Studio at the School of Intermedia Art, a department of the China Academy of Art, which is the first contemporary art education in China. Zhang has held solo exhibitions at the Minsheng Art Museum in Shanghai (2011), the Art Institute of Chicago (2017) and recently at the Beijing Center for the Arts (2021). His first European museal solo exhibition at S.M.A.K. Ghent (2018). His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, such as the Busan Biennial (2019), the Gwangju Biennial (2019), Micro Era at Kulturforum Berlin (2019), Art and China after 1989: Theatre of the World at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2017), From a Poem to the Sunset at Daimler Contemporary, Berlin (2015), Thingworld – International Triennial of New Media Art at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2014) and Harmonious Society: Asia Triennial 14 at the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester (2014).

Work by Zhang Peili are collected by institutions all over the world, including Tate Modern, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, M+ in Hong Kong.

The artist is represented by RÉN SPACE Gallery in Shanghai.

MARTIN GERMANN works as independent curator and lives in Cologne/Germany. Recently he co-curated "Another Energy: Power to Continue Challenging - 16 Women Artists from around the World" together with Mami Kataoka at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, and a solo exhibition with Thomas Ruff at the National Museum of Fine Arts Taiwan, focusing on work produced after 1989. Upcoming projects include a comprehensive solo show with Oliver Laric at OCAT Shanghai, and the first museum presentation in Asia of late Belgian painter Raoul De Keyser at M Woods in Beijing. Martin Germann also serves as a Curatorial Advisor for the Aichi Triennale in 2022.

From 2012–2019 he was leading the artistic department of S.M.A.K., the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, Belgium, as senior curator. During his tenure could establish "From the Collection", a permanent and dynamic format for collection presentations and worked on major acquisitions, as well as numerous solo and thematic group shows. For 'Lili Dujourie: Folds in time' (2015), he received an AICA award for Belgium's best exhibition. In earlier stages he was curator at Kestner Gesellschaft Hanover (2008–2012). Before this, he worked for the 3rd Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art (2003–2004), and directed the program of 'Gagosian Gallery, Berlin' for the 4th Berlin Biennial of Contemporary Art' (2005–2006). He published many exhibition catalogues and monographies, and his writing has appeared in magazines such as 032c, Frieze, or Mousse. He is board member of "Etablissement d'en Face" in Brussels and I-AC Villeurbanne's acquisition committee.

We would like to thank RÉN SPACE gallery for the great cooperation and their valuable support.

