



Detail of *Canal Building* in progress, 2007-2008, ash, steel and wood

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Zhang Huan: Blessings

A two-venue exhibition of the Chinese artist's new work
on view at PaceWildenstein 25th and 22nd Streets

May 9 – July 26, 2008

Openings: May 8th from 6-8 p.m.

Canal Building, a new large-scale work, will be completed during the first weekend of the exhibition, allowing the public to see the artist's working methods

NEW YORK, April 24, 2008—One year following the announcement that Zhang Huan joined PaceWildenstein, the artist will have his first exhibition with the gallery. *Zhang Huan: Blessings* will be on view at PaceWildenstein's two Chelsea venues from May 9 to July 26, 2008. The artist will be in New York City working on the monumental installations prior to the openings. A catalogue with an essay by Daniel Kunitz and artist statements from a recent interview will be published to coincide with the exhibitions.

Opening receptions will be held on Thursday, May 8th from 6 to 8 p.m. The public is invited to take complimentary pedicab rides between the galleries on opening night and this transportation service will be provided on the first and second weekends of the exhibition.

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At **545 West 22nd Street, *Canal Building***, a painting of Chinese laborers made entirely of grains of ash from burned temple incense, will be created on site by the artist and his studio assistants in advance of the opening and during the first few days of the exhibition. The image, based on a vintage photograph, of workers digging a canal will completely cover the top face of an enormous slab of compressed ash. Measuring 5' 11" high x 19' 8" wide x 59' 1" in length, the proportions of the slab will only allow the image to be viewed from scaffolding which will be erected alongside the piece. In his essay, Kunitz likens this process to Zhang Huan's earlier performance pieces which first brought him renown in China and the West. Kunitz states that with this installation, ***Canal Building***, the artist has come full circle. "Zhang describes the work as representing 'who I am as an artist.' It is indeed a unification of who he is and has been as an artist; a unification of artistic modes; a concretization—in painting and sculpture—of a lifetime's performance. And one senses in it a circle being completed, the rebel punk artist who began with a performance in a toilet, and who needed to leave his country in order to find his history, has come back: the prodigal son has returned home."

At the 22nd Street gallery, two other monumental Ash Paintings, on canvas and hung on the wall, will be on view. All utilize propaganda photography created by the Chinese government in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s as their source material. The grain of the ash as well as its soft gray tones elicit the nostalgia of photography while juxtaposing it with impossibility of building these enormous images up by hand, speck by speck.

The artist first began developing his Ash Paintings upon moving to Shanghai in 2006, after eight years of living in New York City. Back in China the artist was struck by the number of Buddhist devotees who would pray to the deity for hours on end and burn incense as offerings. The ash soon became the medium for both his paintings and sculpture. Zhang Huan has spoken about how, for him, "all the dreams, aspirations, all the spiritual longings, all the ideas that people have" are infused into the ash. "It's the collective spirit and collective thinking, and collection wishes of the people in China."

Simultaneously at **534 West 25th Street, *Giant No. 3*** (2008), a colossal 15' figure made from cowhides, steel, wood, and polystyrene foam will be on view. Zhang Huan's notable performance work, documented in photographs, has evolved into painting and sculpture, often blurring the lines among different mediums. ***Giant No. 3*** consists of a small figure ascending the body of a larger pregnant one, relating the piece to ***My Rome***, a 2005 performance Zhang Huan held at Palazzo Nuovo at the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Clad in a sarong, he climbed, caressed, and reclined on the colossal 2nd-century marble statue of the river god Oceanus ("Marforio") in the famous Italian courtyard.

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Along with *Giant No. 3*, new works from the artist's Memory Doors series will also be on view at 25th Street. In this series, Zhang Huan utilizes discarded wooden doors from traditional houses found in the Shanxi Province. To create the series, the artist makes large-scale copies of photographs with themes ranging from military or labor to everyday life, pastes them to the surface of the door (one of the many historic examples of this traditional practice were the indictments and arrest warrants outlining crimes against the state which were pasted to the doors of offenders during the Cultural Revolution). Large swaths of these photographs are then torn off and the image replicated in exactitude by carving the scene, in relief, into the surface of the door. As the artist states, there is a long tradition of applying something to the surface of the doors, "It could be an image of the god of wealth, the god of love, and it's just to bring good luck and good fortune or to somehow protect from the evil spirits. So this is part of the Chinese tradition. And this is very, very important for Chinese people; as poor as you might be, you still need to manage to pay someone to write those tributes, so that you can put them by the doors, so people can see them. This is something crucial to the respect of every family."

During the run of *Zhang Huan: Blessings* new large-scale, unique woodcuts by the artist will be on view at Pace Prints Chelsea, 521-523 West 26th Street. Zhang Huan's *Tui Bei Tu, No. 2*, 2006, a large original woodcut of a deer with feather additions, is also part of the current group exhibition *Multiplex: Directions in Art, 1970 to Now* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York through July 28, 2008.

Zhang Huan: Altered States, organized by Melissa Chiu at Asia Society, New York and featuring 55 of the artist's major works produced over the past 15 years in Beijing, New York, and Shanghai, will travel to Vancouver Art Gallery from June 7 through October 5, 2008. *Zhang Huan: Altered States* is accompanied by a fully illustrated hardcover 177-page catalogue that includes scholarly essays by Chiu and art critic Eleanor Heartney, first-hand accounts of Zhang Huan's early performance works in Beijing by the artist Kong Bu, and an essay by Zhang Huan who provides his own perspective on his art and life.

In 2009, Phaidon will publish a comprehensive monograph on Zhang Huan as part of their Contemporary Artist series. Yilmaz Dziewior, director of the Kunstverein in Hamburg, and Robert Storr, Dean of the Yale School of Art, will contribute essays, and an in-depth interview with the artist will be conducted by curator and critic RoseLee Goldberg.

Zhang Huan is widely considered to be one of the most vital and influential contemporary artists working today. He was born in 1965 in a small town called Anyang in Henan Province just prior to the Cultural Revolution. At one year of age, Zhang Huan went to live with his grandparents in a tiny village in the countryside known as

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Tangyin County. At age fourteen, he started his artistic training in the so-called Su-style or Soviet style and traveled by bus each day for his lessons. Zhang enrolled in undergraduate studies at the Art Department, Henan University, Kaifeng to concentrate on Chinese ink painting, drawing, oil painting and art history in 1984. Upon completion in 1988, Zhang was an instructor of art and Western art history at Zhengzhou College of Education for three years. He studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing from 1991 to 1993, and it was during this period that he first started experimenting with performance art. Zhang Huan's first public performance was called *Angel*, which he staged on the front steps of the National Art Museum of China (China Art Gallery) as part of a group exhibition for students at the Central Academy. *Angel* was openly critical of the Chinese government's controversial "one child" policy and it resulted in the entire exhibition being closed by the museum's director.

During this same period, a group of young Chinese artists, including Zhang Huan, established the "Beijing East Village." It was in this community that Zhang developed his early performance practices and many of the works that would soon bring him international attention. Conceived as both existential explorations and social commentary, performances like *12 Square Meters*, in which the artist sat for an hour, covered in honey and fish oil, in a fly infested public latrine or *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain*, where nine people lay on top of one another to raise the summit by a meter. These performances and many others came to be known by their photographic documentation, which are now considered the artist's first iconic works.

A year later, Zhang was invited to perform outside China for the first time, at the China Art Festival in Munich. Ultimately the festival was canceled because of conflicts that arose between China and Germany, but Zhang Huan still managed to travel to Munich, and subsequently Paris, where he saw masterpieces by Millet, van Gogh and Courbet in person for the first time.

In the fall of 1998, Zhang Huan was included in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* organized by Asia Society and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center. It was during this exhibition that he relocated to New York City. Over the course of the next eight years, Zhang Huan created 13 performances and exhibited in 5 solo exhibitions and more than 60 group shows throughout The United States. The artist moved back to China in 2006, settling in the southern Min Hang district of Shanghai, where he opened Zhang Huan studio and returned to a more traditional object-based practice. Today, Zhang Huan employs approximately 100 studio assistants to help him realize his prolific and, often monumental, works.

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Zhang Huan's work is part of nearly 40 public collections worldwide, including the Bard College, Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Center of Contemporary Art, Malaga, Spain; Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris; Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Denver Art Museum, Colorado; The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida; Philadelphia Museum of Art; S.M.A.K., The Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art Gent, Belgium; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, among others.

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Giant No. 3, 2008, cowhides, steel, wood and polystyrene foam

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