

PRESS RELEASE

## Song Dong

### *Song Dong Doing Nothing*

510 & 534 West 25th Street, New York

January 18 – February 16 & 23, 2013

Opening reception: Thursday, January 17, 6 to 8 PM



Pace is pleased to present *Song Dong Doing Nothing*, a two-venue exhibition surveying twenty years of work by the Chinese artist Song Dong. The gallery at 510 West 25th Street will focus on Song's recent work, including a new installation related to his projects for Documenta 13 and the Kiev Biennial. The gallery at 534 West 25th Street will feature eighteen of Song's performances, photographs, videos, and installations made between 1994 and 2012.

*Song Dong Doing Nothing* is on view at 510 West 25th Street, New York from January 18 through February 16, 2013, and at 534 West 25th Street from January 18 through February 23, with an opening reception for the public on Thursday, January 17, 6 to 8 pm, at both galleries.

For over two decades, Song Dong has been at the forefront of Chinese contemporary art, embracing performance, installation, video, sculpture, painting, and calligraphy, and often combining mediums within a single work. Using modest, quotidian materials, Song confronts notions of impermanence, the reality of living in contemporary China, ideas of waste and consumption, the transformation of China's urban environment, and the value of self-expression, even when it leaves no trace. Simultaneously poetic and political, personal and global, his work often explores larger social and cultural issues by drawing on deeply intimate, biographical experiences. The title of the exhibition, *Song Dong Doing Nothing*, references the Taoist concepts of "non-action" and "non-intention," requiring a respect for natural order and a modest, humble way of leading life. Both ideas infuse Song's work and inform his maxim: "That left undone goes undone in vain; that which is done is done still in vain; that done in vain must still be done."

At 510 West 25th Street, Pace will present the U.S premiere of *Doing Nothing Mountains*, a landscape of mounds covered with ceramic household tile and collaged with remnants from Chinese homes, including windows, doors, electrical outlets, and doorknobs. The works continue Song's interest in the "wisdom of the

poor”— the resourcefulness of Beijing’s poorest citizens as they create improvisational, sometimes bizarre living spaces to expand their cramped corridors and improve living conditions. A smaller version of the installation was shown at the inaugural Kiev Biennial of Contemporary Art in 2012. A video of Song’s installation *Doing Nothing Garden*, a centerpiece of last summer’s Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany, will also be on view. The work consisted of a twenty-foot-tall hillock in the middle of Kassel’s Karlsaue Park. Covered in new weeds and flowers and dotted with neon signs that read “Doing” and “Nothing” in Chinese characters, the hill was actually made from composted trash, reflecting Song’s interest in the ability to create something from humble materials, while also addressing ideas of consumption, waste, and regeneration.

An artist book, published by Hatje Cantz to accompany the Documenta installation, will also be on view. Song wrote a sentence about the act of doing nothing, and had it translated into English by various professional translators, lay speakers, and Google translator. Though the Chinese characters are identical on each page, each translation varies considerably and contains an individual perspective on the value of human activity.

The gallery at 534 West 25th Street will present a survey of Song Dong’s most important installations and performances. Because many of Song’s performances were evanescent and witnessed by almost no one, photography and video became the most important media for their expression. Often personal responses to everyday experiences embedded with absurdity and humor, the works span from 1994 to the present.

Among the earliest works is *Breathing* (1996), for which Song lay on the stone pavement of Tianenmen Square and used his own breath to create a pad of ice on freezing ground, allowing himself to make a fleeting personal impact on a site that is a symbol for power of the masses. Song repeated the performance in Houhai, a lake in Beijing, where he breathed on the icy surface for forty minutes but was unable to create a change. The show will also include *Throwing a Stone*, an ongoing performance that Song began in 1994, in which he picks up a stone randomly, writes on the stone the time that he found it, throws it far away, and walks to find it again, repeating the process until he cannot find it anymore.

Many of the works on view explore the absurdity of action without tangible reward, including *Song Dong Facing the Wall* (1999), for which he traveled to India and imitated the Indian Zen monk Dharma, quietly sitting on a bed, facing a wall for ten days. Other works document the ordinary but often forgotten routines of daily life, including *Eating Drinking Shitting Pissing Sleeping* (1999) and *A Pot of Boiling Water* (1996), which preserves Song’s daily walk from his home to his mother’s house with water for her tea.

The exhibition will also include four videos from Song’s series *A Blot on the Landscape* (2010), for which he constructed “landscapes” out of food. The works reflect Song’s intervention and satire of traditional art, integrating the humble cultural material of food with the elegance of traditional Chinese landscape painting. In this way, material life is combined with spiritual pursuit in a sardonic manner. As Philippe Verge, art historian and director of the Dia Foundation, wrote of Song’s work, “It crystallizes a sense of tradition, calls into play strategies sprung from a history of avant-garde performance, emphasized an aspect of the urban Chinese ‘everyday’ and questions the status and visibility of art and culture in the world today and the strength of the creative.”<sup>i</sup>

Song Dong (b. 1966, Beijing) has emerged from a strong Chinese avant-garde performing arts community and developed into a significant contemporary art figure in the progression of Chinese conceptual art. Song

graduated from the fine arts department of Capital Normal University in Beijing in 1989. He has been the subject of solo exhibitions at international museums including the Barbican Art Gallery, London (2012); Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2011); Vancouver Art Gallery (2010); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2009); and the Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai (2008). He has been included in prestigious group exhibitions including Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); the Venice Biennale (2011); the Yokohama Triennale, Japan (2011); the Liverpool Biennial, U.K. (2010); the Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2002); and *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998) at the Asia Society and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York.

Song lives and works in his native Beijing with his wife and frequent collaborator, the artist Yin Xiuzhen

For more information about Song Dong, please contact Pace's public relations department at [212.421.8987](tel:212.421.8987). For general inquiries, please email [newyork@pacegallery.com](mailto:newyork@pacegallery.com); for reproduction requests, email [reprorequest@pacegallery.com](mailto:reprorequest@pacegallery.com).

Image: Song Dong, *Facing the Wall*, 1999. Photograph and wallpaper, 31-1/2" x 47-1/4". © Song Dong.

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<sup>i</sup> *Song Dong* (exhibition catalogue). Shanghai: Zendai Museum of Modern Art, 2008.