

# GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

curated by\_Martin Germann

From...To...

ZHANG PEILI

4 SEP – 2 OCT 2021

Opening: Saturday 4 and Sunday 5, September 2021, Soft opening: noon – 6 pm

Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder is happy 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...* demonstrates how Zhang reacts to and reflects on the socio-political fabric of present-day global society from a Chinese point of view. 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. For this project, *The Annual Report of OCD*, Zhang had a digital scan made of his bones, several organs, and body data rendered in marble, travertine, and white onyx, accompanied by personal data and information that has also been translated into artworks. This literal "body of work," which he began in 2014, focuses on all statistically measurable data that constitute identity and uses cutting-edge technology of all sorts. The project reflects the principles of a world dedicated to permanent optimization and constant growth whose lowest common denominator seems to be the ethos of technological feasibility. In a time in which art plays the role of pure information in global popular culture, Zhang does just that: he translates pure information into art.

Zhang Peili has made significant contributions to the visual arts in China and beyond: as both a painter associated with the avant-garde movement '85 New Wave, and 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 as that of an artists' artist whose work comprises painting, performance, installation, video, and digital media. Zhang forms his works with an eye on art's commercialization, institutionalization, and ideological appropriation, exploring the intricate interplay between power and subversion that mediates between art, entertainment, and social, political, and cultural apparatuses. In his reflection on reality, he also examines the representational capacity of various media, including painting and video, and how swift these can transition from artistic to propagandistic objects, including for the propaganda of the market. Questions circling around the essence and social purpose of art make up the nucleus of Zhang's work, which explores the exposure of mechanisms of the representation and subversion of power as a leitmotif. Aesthetics of control, boredom, and absurdity are just as much artistic methods for this purpose as distance and subtle humor. Always reacting to specific contexts and concerns, Zhang's work offers a steady commentary on China's social, political, and cultural environment, particularly regarding its transformation from state communism to state capitalism and the role media and technology play therein.

*From...To...* makes clear Zhang's pioneering, present artistic trajectory through 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 that was originally drafted as a performance piece during a conference 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 the early 1990s. These will be shown along with *Uncertain Pleasures II*, 1996, a multi-screen installation in which fingers scratch body parts. This work, which was developed in the early days of the World Wide Web, represents the global transformation from a society of discipline to today's comprehensive 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 cofounder of the Hangzhou-based art group Chi She (Pond Society). In 1988, Zhang introduced video art to China. He has also been teaching art for more than 30 years. In 2003, he established the New Media Department at the China Academy of Art and helped found the first new media art study programs at Chinese art academies.

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 solo museum exhibition was 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).

Zhang Peili is represented in 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 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 senior curator and head of the artistic department of S.M.A.K., the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, Belgium. During his tenure, he established "From the Collection," a permanent, dynamic format for presentations of the collection. He also 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. Prior to this, he was curator at Kestner Gesellschaft Hanover (2008–2012) and worked for the 3rd Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art (2003–2004). He also directed the program of "Gagosian Gallery, Berlin" for the 4th Berlin Biennial of Contemporary Art (2005–2006). He has published many exhibition catalogues and monographies, and his writing has appeared in magazines such as 032c, Frieze, and Mousse. He is a board member of "Etablissement d'en Face" in Brussels and the I-AC Villeurbanne acquisition committee.

We would like to thank RÉN SPACE for their wonderful collaboration and valuable support.

