

# GAGOSIAN GALLERY

October 21, 2015

## PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY  
555 WEST 24TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
GALLERY HOURS:

T. 212.741.1111  
E. [newyork@gagosian.com](mailto:newyork@gagosian.com)  
Tue–Sat: 10:00am–6:00pm



## ZENG FANZHI:

### *Paintings, Drawings, and Two Sculptures*

Friday, November 6–Wednesday, December 23, 2015

Opening reception: Friday, November 6th, from 6:00 to 8:00pm

Gagosian New York is pleased to present paintings, sculpture, and works on paper by Zeng Fanzhi. This is his first exhibition with the gallery in New York, following major exhibitions at Gagosian Hong Kong (2011) and Gagosian London (2012).

Zeng is at the forefront of a generation of Chinese artists who have achieved national and international prominence in the wake of the Cultural Revolution of the 1970s. Over the past three decades he has probed the place of the unconscious in the construction of human experience while reflecting on the collective national psyche in the face of broad and accelerated change. In his formative years, he was particularly inspired by the works of German Expressionism and French Romanticism, in which he found precedents for exploring the psychology of selfhood in the throes of societal flux. His searing *Hospital Triptych No. 1* (1991), an early example of his virtuosic application of historical styles and techniques to interpret contemporary national realities, was shown in the pivotal exhibition “China’s New Art, Post-1989” at the Hong Kong Arts Center in 1993.

With time, Zeng has tempered the direct impact of Western Expressionism with the local influence of traditional *guohua* painting methods. His eloquent and confrontational work is charged with melancholy, unfolding in a succession of dystopic themes, both introspective and overtly socially critical. After the nightmarish *Hospital* paintings came the visceral *Meat* paintings that juxtapose figures with butchered flesh; then the enigmatic *Mask* paintings that treated social alienation; and the densely skeined landscapes with their obscured figures, alluding to the Taoist perception of human transience within nature’s boundless permanence. With the painting *From 1830 till now No. 4* (2014), exhibited at the Musée du Louvre last year, Zeng depicts Eugene Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) as a neglected stone monument in an overgrown thicket.

Recent paintings include large-scale nocturnal landscapes, some populated by anonymous figures or identifiable historical subjects; and smaller, more abstract canvases in which schematic black branches stand out in sharp relief against backgrounds of sweeping horizontal brushstrokes. In the landscape paintings, traditional techniques blend seamlessly with modern abstraction: in an idiosyncratic method originally adopted out of necessity due to injury, Zeng sometimes works with multiple brushes in each hand, undermining his own precision through a process that has become a continuous cycle of creation and destruction. The “abstract landscape” paintings evolve as if autonomously through the rhythmic processual vitality with which Zeng approaches his persistent motifs. Invoking a lineage beginning with Song Dynasty depictions of idyllic, imaginary vistas rendered in calligraphic strokes, he envisages vast scenes of bleak terrains spontaneously lit with bright pinks and blues, and eclipsed by jagged black branches, graphic in their concise and sinister silhouettes.

(Continue to page 2)

# GAGOSIAN GALLERY

In the cast metal sculptures, the tree, a symbol of growth and aspiration, is reduced to the melancholic figure of a single gnarled and wintry limb. For the first time, Zeng will show related mixed-media drawings, developed over many years.

Other paintings juxtapose carefully adapted art-historical subjects with spontaneous brushwork, oscillating between a meticulous cut-and-paste sensibility and gestural mark-making. An exacting close-up of Laocoön's head—an homage to the classical Western depiction of agonizing ordeal—is cast against a mercurial, nebulous sky; while a Nativity scene is partially obscured by yellow paint drips against a dark landscape. Depicting Greco-Roman and Christian subjects and motifs within fields that merge restrained traditional Chinese techniques with the unleashed energies of action painting, Zeng has forged a poignant, potent, and topical expressionism that reaches across culture and history.

A fully illustrated book will be published to document the exhibition.

**Zeng Fanzhi** was born in Wuhan, China in 1964, and lives and works in Beijing. Solo museum exhibitions include "Zeng Fanzhi: Idealism," Singapore Art Museum (2007); "Zeng Fanzhi," Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Etienne de Metropole (2007); "Zeng Fanzhi," Fundación Godia, Barcelona (2009); and "2010: Zeng Fanzhi," Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2010). Zeng's work was the subject of a major retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2013–14. In a specially commissioned exhibition at the Musée du Louvre in 2014, his painting *From 1830 till now No. 4* (2014) was shown alongside Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830). Zeng's work was included in the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009); "The World Belongs to You," Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2011–12); "Passage to History: 20 Years of La Biennale di Venezia and Chinese Contemporary Art," Arsenale di Venezia and Museum of Contemporary Art Chengdu (2013); "Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China," Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2013–14); and "Post Pop: East Meets West," Saatchi Gallery, London (2014–15).

For further information please contact the gallery at [newyork@gagosian.com](mailto:newyork@gagosian.com) or at +1.212.741.1111. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

## Press Enquiries

Blue Medium, Inc.  
T. +1.212.675.1800  
[www.bluemedium.com](http://www.bluemedium.com)

Contact: Andy Ptaschinski  
E. [andy@bluemedium.com](mailto:andy@bluemedium.com)

Please join the conversation with Gagosian Gallery on Twitter (@GagosianNY), Facebook (@GagosianGallery), Google+ (@+Gagosian), Instagram (@gagosiangallery), Tumblr (@GagosianGallery), and Artsy (@Gagosian-Gallery) via the hashtags #ZengFanzhi #GagosianW24St.

Image: *Blue*, 2015, oil on canvas, 157 1/2 x 275 9/16 inches (400 x 700 cm) © Zeng Fanzhi Studio

---

*Gagosian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagosian.*

555 WEST 24TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10011 T. 212.741.1111 F. 212.741.9611  
NEWYORK@GAGOSIAN.COM WWW.GAGOSIAN.COM