

 Zhao Gang: Acquiring Identity

2018.5.16—7.10

Long March Space / Timezone 8 Restaurant & Bar, Beijing

“Acquiring Identity,” Zhao Gang’s first solo exhibition at Long March Space, presents a selection of new and old paintings by the artist through distinctive display methods taken at his own initiative. The works are divided between Long March Space’s gallery, and Timezone 8, a nearby café in Beijing’s 798 Art District. The paintings and their presentation tie together the idiosyncratic aspects of Zhao’s practice and identity, playing off of and further complicating the relationship between his role as an artist and his aura as a public figure in Beijing’s cultural community.

Shaped by his artistic beginnings as the youngest member of the avant-garde Stars Group in late 1970s China as much as the decades he spent in Europe and the United States, Zhao Gang’s paintings freely mix forms and imagery, juxtaposing perspectives redolent of Chinese court portraiture with the techniques of Impressionism, further destabilized by profane, even vulgar, subject matter. Along with new portraits of anonymous figures, “Acquiring Identity” is partially comprised of previously unseen works, featuring semi-abstracted nudes and Stalin’s disembodied head. Just as his previous paintings of failed Chinese revolutionaries dryly referenced his status as a émigré and returnee, here Zhao again deftly captures the condition of the individual captured within social and historical forces.

Inside Long March Space the 12-square-meter dormitory space Zhao Gang lived and worked in during the 1970s has been recreated to house rarely-seen paintings, recalling the phenomenon of so-called “apartment art” from 80s and 90s Beijing, when artists lacking formal venues surreptitiously organized exhibitions at home. In evoking this form now Zhao Gang calls draws parallels between eras, searching for moral bravery and autonomy in art. The placement of works in Timezone 8, speaks to Zhao Gang’s appreciation of the café as an echo of his old haunts in New York and his reputation as a bon vivant. Founded by American Robert Bernell as an art book publishing house in 2001, the venue takes on additional significance from the owner’s position as the potential inverse of Zhao’s personal journey. “Acquiring Identity” brings together Zhao’s life and practice, continuing his explorations into identity, history, and hybridity.

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About the artist

Zhao Gang (b. 1961, Beijing) currently lives and works in New York and Beijing. He made his artistic debut as a member of the Stars Group, one of the first avant-garde artist groups to open the era of contemporary art in China, when he was just 18 years old. Shortly thereafter he pursued art education in Europe and then New York, studying at the State Academy of Fine Art, Maastricht, Holland; Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, USA; MFA, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, USA. Afterwards, Zhao Gang lived overseas for over two decades, developing a diverse body of work as his perspective became distinctively international. Since returning to Beijing in 2006, Zhao Gang has turned his ever-expanding focus toward the entanglement of his personal past with Chinese history and his unique position, at once a native and a newcomer, in China today.

His selected museum solo exhibitions include: *The Road to Serfdom II*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago, Chile, 2016; *Paramour's Garden*, Suzhou Museum, Suzhou, China, 2015; *The Road to Serfdom*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China, 2015; *Sick Man: Zhao Gang*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China, 2011. His selected group exhibitions include: *The Door*, P.S.1 Institute of the Arts/Blum Helman Gallery, New York, USA, 1990. He has participated in important biennial/triennial exhibitions such as PERFORMA 07, the Guangzhou Triennial, and the Yokohama Triennial.

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