

JI DACHUN, QIU ANXIONG, ZHENG GUOGU

July 4–September 5, 2019

In our summer exhibition we are showing a selection of typical works by Ji Dachun, Qiu Anxiong, and Zheng Guogu. Common to all three of them is that their work reflects the economic and sociocultural upheaval that China has experienced in recent decades. By reflecting on the Chinese cultural tradition and yet responding to the influence of the Western world, they offer us an opportunity to approach a millennia-old advanced civilization.

Ji Dachun has developed a distinctive visual language in his painting. Linked to the classical Chinese pictorial tradition, he also intensively explores Western modernism and contemporary painting, ranging from Philip Guston to Victor Man. Without imitating Western contemporary art, he achieves a natural synthesis that leads to unexpected pictorial discoveries.

As in so-called Shan shui painting, the Chinese tradition of landscape painting that emerged in the fifth century, the subject of Ji Dachun's pictures is of secondary importance. He is instead interested in the process of painting itself, in composition, and in finding the appropriate form for what moves him. In contrast to Western pictorial conventions based in one-point perspective, a space opens up here for the mind and imagination. Instead of using ink wash and a brush on paper, he paints in a gestural and patose manner in acrylic on canvas. Amorphous and organic shapes join representational motifs to give shape to pictorial realms all their own.

Since Ji Dachun moved from Beijing to Berlin, his white or dark *Landscapes* from 2018 and 2019 have entirely given way to an abstract all-over painting. His images are permeated by a dreamlike atmosphere and evoke the contemplativeness and inner emotion of Chinese literati painting.

Qiu Anxiong is known for his multiple-award-winning animated films that make conscious reference to Chinese ink wash painting and classical role models. The transposition of traditional elements to a contemporary context is what distinguishes his work. The several years Qiu Anxiong spent studying in Germany at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, up to 2003, changed his view of China and led him to explore his own Chinese identity as well as Chinese mythology and philosophy.

For his film *The Temptation of the Land*, 2009, Qiu Anxiong borrowed image sources from the *Young Companion*, an illustrated magazine similar to the American magazine *Life*, which since 1926 had a large circulation in Shanghai. The content ranges from politically and socio-critically controversial subjects. His selection of appropriated pictorial documents illustrates China's rapid transformation, beginning from the founding of the republic in 1911, following the end of the Qing dynasty, to the Cultural Revolution.

The narrow friezes featured in the exhibition refers formally to Chinese scroll painting. Each pictorial composition in acrylic on canvas acts as a template for a film shot, for which the artist, in subtle painterly interventions, makes changes to the compositions via successive deleting and adding. In its painterly realization, Qiu Anxiong's subjective sensibility for the particular historical moment becomes visible. In painting that ranges from figurative to freely abstract, he embarks on an at once aesthetic and historical quest for traces. He works against the forgetting of ancient traditions, values, and moral concepts as well as the loss of his own Chinese identity.

Zheng Guogu is interested in global consumer culture and its influence on China's cultural tradition. The artist lives and works in Yangjiang, the small city where he was born in southern China. His most renowned project is the design of *Liao Garden*, a Chinese landscape garden that he has continually redesigned for years following historical models. Many of his art projects have developed out of his local and personal surroundings. His photographic work *Me and My Teacher*, 1993, which depicts the artist with a mentally disabled person, is symbolic of Zheng's experimental art practice.

The mass media inspired Zheng to make his series *Computer Is Controlled by Pig's Brain*, 2006-2007. Using stencils, he paints text fragments, advertising logos, or passages from Hong Kong's entertainment magazines in Chinese characters, mixed with English words, in bright colors on cloth and felt. Against the colored background they join together into a richly varied composition, proudly recalling the impressions of so-called "leisure seals" found in classical Chinese painting.

With his to date incomplete photographic piece *Ten Thousand Customers*, Zheng Guogu has provoked the elite art establishment since 1997. Although unique objects, the photographs are produced in an ongoing series projected at ten thousand images and, despite their complex creation, possess aspects of mass-produced goods. In them, current television imagery is superimposed with negative-sized photos depicting models of small toy cars, subsequently edited, and meticulously reassembled. The results are blurred images that comment ironically on the over stimulation and ephemerality of the media and the mass production of cheap goods. The buyer cannot choose from among the images; they are allocated to her. She thus has a share in a Gesamtkunstwerk whose duration and extent are not fully known to her.

Ji Dachun, b. 1968 in Nantong, Jiangsu province, China, lives and works in Berlin and Beijing. In 1994 he graduated from the department for oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China.

Selected exhibitions: 56th Venice Biennale, 2015; Museum Marta Herford, 2015; Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, 2015; Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2014; The 1st Xinjiang International Arts Biennale, Urumqi, China, 2014; MACRO Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Rome, Italy, 2013; Soka Art Center, Beijing, 2013; Biennale Special Exhibition, Gwangju, South Korea, 2012; Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, 2011; Kunstmuseum Bern, 2007; Shanghai Art Museum, 2007.

Qiu Anxiong, b. 1972 in Chengdu, Sichuan province, China, lives in Shanghai and teaches at the Shanghai Normal University. He studied at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute and the Kunsthochschule Kassel.

Selected exhibitions: MAB Modern Art Base, Shanghai, 2018; MOCA Yinchuan, 2017; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, 2017; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2016; Kunsthaus Graz, Austria, 2015; MOCA Shanghai, 2014; Arken Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2013; OCAT Contemporary Art Museum, Shenzhen, 2011; Istanbul Modern Art Museum, 2011; Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, USA, 2010; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2008; Museum d'art modern Grand-duc Jean, Luxembourg City, 2008; Sydney Biennale, 2008; Shanghai Biennale, 2008; China Power Station I, II, and III, Serpentine Gallery, London, 2006-08, and other dates; Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, Oslo, 2007; Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, 2007.

Zheng Guogu, b. 1970 in Yangjiang, Guangdong province, China. Zheng Guogu studied at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts.

Selected exhibitions: MoMA PS 1, New York, 2019; MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, 2019; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2019; Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2018; The Queensland Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2018; OCAT Shanghai, 2017; Mirrored Gardens, Guangzhou, 2017; Ubiquitous Plasma, OCAT Xi'an, 2015; 10th Shanghai Biennale, 2014; 3rd Guangzhou Triennial, 2008; Documenta 12, Kassel, 2007; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2007; 50th Venice Biennale, 2003.