

Press release



Zhao Mengjun, The couple lingers at the autumn lake.
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Bernet Bertram

ZHAO MENGJUN - PAINTING PARADISE
A Dream of Nantang

Original animal painting from China

March 30 - May 11, 2019

Preview: Friday, March 29, 2019, 6 - 9 pm
Goethestraße 2-3, 10623 Berlin, Charlottenburg

GALERIE BERNET BERTRAM is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of **Zhao Mengjun** in Berlin. We are thus continuing our collaboration with artists from China, which we began last year with the double exhibition of Zhao Mengjun and Li Zhi.

In addition to his abstract-expressionist works, Zhao Mengjun, who lives in China and Germany, has for years been intensively artistically engaged with the life of animals in the great outdoors. In doing so, he ties in with the living tradition practiced in China of letting certain animals, often with symbolic content, flow into his picturesque work. Until the late 19th century, these were canonized animals such as tigers, herons, roes, dragons or eagles, but modern times also saw the addition of less noticed animals such as camels, water buffalos, birds, rabbits and shrimps. Zhao Mengjun extends this spectrum by another species: the wild ducks, to which he has a special affection. For three years Zhao lived in their community, studied their behavior, observed them drifting in water and wind, between heaven and earth, and in countless works he attributed them almost human qualities - whether on pictures, porcelains or fans.

The exhibition shows selected recent works in various, even very large formats, applied with ink and the art of the Chinese brush strokes. His series "*A Dream of Nantang*" resembles a dream journey into blessed realms, to a fantasy lake, a lovely place where the duck community spends its life in the changing seasons. A dream of boundless freedom, which not only the artist but also his creatures dream of; which beautify the world, which *Bewitch the Gods*, as one of the titles of the pictures reads.

Zhao Mengjun's work has much to do with the teaching of Dao, which is revealed in the attitude of Ziran, the "The self-sufficient-so-being" of nature. Ziran stands for naturalness, spontaneity, mutability and intuition.

“When you take the brush in your hand, you have to take your sight back, dismiss all your thought and concentrate on spiritual reality. If the mind is still and the breath harmonious, then the work will penetrate into the finest” (Yu Shih-nan, 7th century A.D.)

In fact, in Zhao Mengjun’s universe, we find ourselves in an image realm where everything becomes a sign. His creatures know this and communicate it in their poses, gestures and formations. Their microcosmos reflects the macrocosmos of simple life in nature. And so in Zhao Mengjun’s paintings truth and fiction, thought and dream find each other and give the viewer arresting serenity: *The gods amuse themselves*, as an exuberant bathing scene is called.

Such calligraphic lettering is added by the artist at the end of each work. They are often humorous comments on the situation portrayed, then again they resemble shorts poems or haikus: *Waves rock, the lotus does not yet bloom*. The characters are part of the poetic oeuvre, they are themselves art, as it is also the artist’s signature, that small red stamp that sums up his commitment.

Text: Christian Bertram



Zhao Mengjun, born 1961 in Xixia, Shandong Province, China, first studied at the Shandong College of Arts until 1985, then at the Institute of Art and Design at Tsinghua University in Beijing until 1993. For over 28 years he worked also as an art publisher and art director for the large Shandong Media Group and is now one of the most respected painters in China. Works by Zhao Mengjun have been and continue to be shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions of contemporary art, e.g. at the Chinese National Gallery in Beijing, in Seoul (South Korea), in Jinan and Shanghai.

**Special event to be hosted by the gallery:
Thursday, April 11, 2019, 8 pm
Artist talk with Zhao Mengjun. Moderation: Christian Bertram**

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Opening hours:

Tuesday - Friday 1 - 6 pm, Saturday 1 - 5 pm

Longer openings times during Gallery Weekend Berlin 2019

Friday and Saturday, April 26 and 27, 1 - 9 pm; Sunday, April 28, 1 - 5 pm

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