**Accidental Aesthetics**

Tang Contemporary Art is proud to announce the opening of “Accidental Aesthetics”, a solo show for noted Chinese artist Zhu Jinshi, on April 23, 2022, in the gallery’s Seoul space. The exhibition will focus primarily on the artist’s abstract paintings made since 2005, presenting more than 30 works from his “thick painting” series and his recent body of acrylic work.

As an important Asian contemporary art practitioner who rose to prominence in the second half of the 20th century, Zhu Jinshi has experimented with a wide range of mediums and methods. Amidst the historic Eastern and Western cultural currents of the Cold War, he tirelessly promoted and became part of the Asian experience. In 1979, Zhu participated in the “Stars”, China’s first contemporary art movement, and in the 1980s, he explored abstract painting and “apartment exhibitions”. In 1986, he moved to Germany and witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the 1990s, he started his installation practice, and after the year 2000, he engaged with Chinese abstract neo-expressionist painting and large-scale installation.

Abstract painting has always been a focal point in Zhu’s practice, but he has engaged with the aesthetic fissures and tectonic shifts between the many different artistic mediums and movements that emerged in the postwar period. While reconciling and resisting abstraction, orientalism, installation art, conceptual art, and land art, he holistically considered ways in which painting could be contemporary. Zhu Jinshi is not a conceptual artist; he is an inventor of formal aesthetics. The seams, the thickness, the viewing perspective, the fluidity, the compression, the materiality and spatiality of the paint, and other visual forms have shaped his distinctive painting style. Zhu constantly seeks out new visual frontiers and creates accidental aesthetics.

The exhibition primarily showcases Zhu Jinshi’s trademark thick paintings. He applies large blocks of thick oil paint to the canvas with a range of tools; he is constantly piling, mixing, and pressing the paint to highlight the exaggerated thickness, the intense markings, the three-dimensional sense of space, and the materiality of the paint. The overloaded aesthetic and dimensional perspective alter the relationship between oil paint and canvas, presenting an accidental aesthetic that is rooted in time, the sensation of falling, and the study of gravity. This accidental quality, in turn, challenges the overload of paint. The works almost magically offer unexpected ways of looking and unique aesthetic experiences. In this way, Zhu makes the transition from a vertical to a trapezoidal aesthetic, which is also the manifestation of a contemporary breakthrough in painting.

In recent years, Zhu Jinshi has created a series of small-scale thick paintings. He believes that small works offer more data points to study, strengthening his painting system. As he has said, “If an artist only paints several hundred works in his lifetime, they invariably express emotions or become mired in the iteration of a single detail. In the small works I’ve made over the last three years, I no longer emphasize thickness; this has already become a norm or a habit. I focus more on the complexity of the image, the size of the brushstrokes, the direction of the work, the brightness of the colors, and the gaps or vertical dislocations between the paint. They decide the linguistic structure.”

If the smaller oil paintings represent Zhu’s study of a finely detailed painting style, then his acrylic paintings indicate his desire to retain the maximum refraction of color. He applies undiluted acrylic paint directly to the surface, and several repeated layers intensify the lacquered, reflective quality of the material. The paint makes a strong impression on the retina, with its fluid colors and layered effects. Particularly when they appear in architectural spaces, the grandeur of these massive acrylic paintings accentuates the qualities of the acrylic paint, one of the three major synthetic materials, but also references today’s industrial, screen-based, multi-media, and highly saturated visual environment.

Accidental aesthetics represent linguistic collapse and material nirvana. As Southern Song poet Beijian Jujian wrote, “Material things always meet their end, but the Dharma is never exhausted. Because there are pearls, there are also ashes.” In the complex and unknown present, people want to return to simplicity and all things have their voices heard. Art’s accidental possibilities, chance meetings, and pleasant surprises may provide a source of healing and hope.

Fiona Lu

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