

Zhao Zhao: Parallel Affinity

March 12 to April 16, 2022

Curator: Cui Cancan

Tang Contemporary Art Seoul

About the Exhibition (Seoul Release)

“Parallel Affinity,” a solo show presenting nearly 30 important recent works by Chinese artist Zhao Zhao, will open on March 12 in Tang Contemporary Art’s new space in Seoul’s Gangnam neighborhood.

As an important figure in the new generation of artists, Zhao Zhao crosses time and space to connect history with new trends in our current reality. He has broken barriers that are otherwise difficult to overcome, using them in contemporary art to create a distinctive artistic style and way of working.

Zhao Zhao was born in Xinjiang, China. Considered Central Asia in ancient times, Xinjiang was a rich region of changing civilizations, and modern production relations led to the spread of humans and civilizations. Beginning in junior high school, Zhao Zhao had to participate in the voluntary labor of picking cotton during every autumn harvest for six years, so he has deep thoughts and feelings about cotton. In “White” (2020), he built a labyrinth of cotton, which pushed concrete images informed by childhood memories toward a broader global history of cultural plunder. In his new work *Spread*, cotton continues to serve as a guide, offering another spiritual direction for the color white and a metaphysical, mysterious mode of perception. When white burns, it becomes black, and the old world’s deeper meanings and interactions burn with it. Here, material is transformed into spiritual power. In this way, the life of cotton connects to a more compelling presence.

In his early *Constellations* series, Zhao Zhao shot a gun at a pane of glass, and the radiating cracks that resulted looked like constellations. Later, he reinterpreted these markings in oil painting and embroidery, and his installation *Jade Disks: Constellations* added jade disks to the original series. Jade is a symbol of Chinese aristocratic culture and a ceremonial material revered in ancient China. In Gansu, an area that has produced an abundance of jade vessels, Zhao Zhao has sought out jade objects several hundred years old, so that his *Constellations* will transcend politics and expand to encompass reflections on five thousand years of Chinese history and culture.

In a very restrained way, Zhao Zhao’s *One Second* fosters dialogue about ways of depicting time. Holding a pencil tightly in one hand, he quickly leaves a linear mark on the paper in one second. The pencil drawing is dictated by the subconscious, reflecting the disorder and lack of control in the depths of the human heart. In contrast, *Control* involves gourds, which have been vehicles for the human spirit and secular desires at various points in history. As they grow, they are often subject to man-made correction and control.

Zhao Zhao’s *Buddha Statue* and *Heavenly Gates: Dragon and Man* transcend temporal and geographic limitations to offer a new understanding of ancient art. He has studied ancient Chinese culture for many years and collected numerous cultural artifacts from around the world. He brings together a wide range of vocabularies and civilizations from different times and places in these works. Distant histories will always be forgotten and stories from a specific time and place will fade away. In art, only when a spiritual form is connected to a story can it become eternal.

In the transformation between light and heavy, fleeting and eternal, Zhao Zhao has created art that belongs to this era but could also resist it. He has developed the possibilities of many different mediums, touching on different geographies and bringing together historical contexts and a range of artistic styles. He presents a unique sense of space and time, while building a kind of parallel affinity in a complex world.