

L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht presents:

# Zhao Liang

## “videos and photo works”

July 18 to August 30, 2008

You and your friends are cordially invited to the opening on Friday,  
July 18, from 7 p.m.

This is the second time that we are presenting works by Zhao Liang, after his early video-work “City Scene” which was shown as part of the 2005 group exhibition titled “China: Reflections on the Everyday”. In the few years since then, Zhao Liang has become well recognized in Europe, showing his works at the Berlin Biennial and many film festivals, and eventually winning the 2007 *Montgolfiere d’or Award* at the Festival of Three Continents in Nantes/France for “*Crime and Punishment*”.

“Zhao Liang has endurance, an endurance that he shares with many of those who appear in his documentary films. The individual stories of the underprivileged are what interest him, and he makes this a starting point for his exploration of the general constitution of Chinese society. Zhao captures those sides of life that are ignored by official politics and, in so doing, acts as a chronicler of everyday life. Futility,

running idle, stubbornness, and stamina are motifs shared by all of his films, while the dramatic consequences of the rapid economic and structural transformation in China constitute the continuous backdrop to his work”. (*Quoted from the catalogue of the 2008 Berlin Biennial*)

Zhao Liang has already so many works that we can only show some examples during the exhibition.



Stills from the video “Crime and Punishment”, 2007, 122 min.



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## Overview of Zhao Liang's works

*Heavy sleepers* shows over 24 minutes of farm workers sleeping on a large bed under a red velvet tent; a second screen shows the empty beds. The human beings portrayed in Zhao Liang's documentaries belong to one of the most unique groups in society. He has been documenting their lives over the past decade, to the point where the subjects no longer notice the camera's presence. Moreover, Zhao has not adopted a patronizing or sociological perspective to his film. In the words of artist Xu Ruotao, his works present a feeling of "ambiguity". In documenting the everyday lives of these unique people, one finds a reason for survival as well as a unique aesthetic.

*Crime and Punishment* – the title taken from Fyodor Dostoevsky's famous novel – shows over 122 minutes of rural life in China. It is about real crime and real punishment, but can also be seen as criticism of the hard and not always fair living conditions. Zhao Liang, however, is not providing any comments; instead, he gives the viewer information and leaves it up to us to draw our own conclusions or interpretations.

*Water at first sight* shows beautiful colour photos mounted on China fabrics. The water however is polluted and dirty, and nothing is left of the romantic idea of Chinese gardens and landscapes.

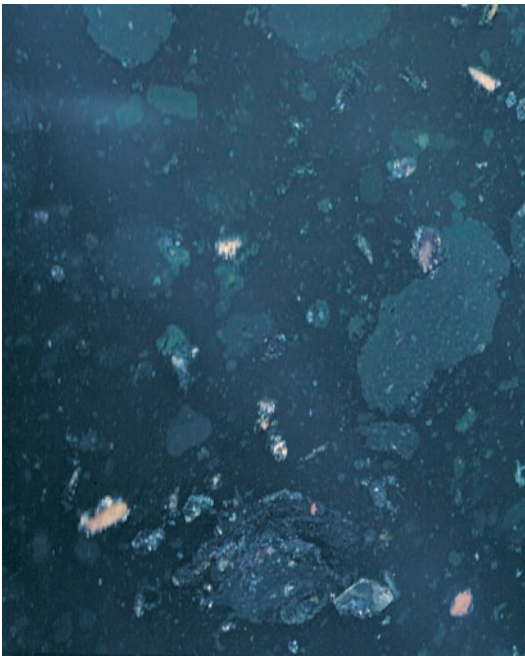
*Beijing Green* depicts sheets of green plastic net covering construction waste that reflects a sense of beauty and even a tinge of elegance in China's lush landscapes. However, the "calmness" of these images gave me a sudden feeling of desolation that naturally reminded me of Xin Yiji's famous verse, "*What a cool autumn day*".

*River*, video installation of ten channels, shows clips from Zhao Liang's filming of Beijing's foul gutters. These ten screens are lined up in a row on the ground to provide the audience with a view from above, as if they are on shore looking at a river slowly drifting away. Floating on its surface are waste materials disposed from our everyday lives: plastic bags, compost, colourful school bags, dead fish, animal gizzards, etc. The video was filmed from ten different locations, yet without any intent of making it an environmental survey. The filthiness in the gutters has not been purposefully highlighted, instead it takes on the perspective of those living in the vicinity, who see it everyday and perhaps don't even notice it. It reveals a sense of helplessness that is somewhat poetic. The scene offers the traces of life, likening it to filthy water and its gloomy green water algae, air bubbles bursting on the surface. These signs of life seem to have gotten used to this environment – numbed to its vileness – reminding us of life's insignificance and negligible "impermanence".

*Narrative Landscape* is a piece about the Great Wall. In comparison to raindrops on a lotus leaf or other videos of the quotidian, this one resembles filmic poetry. It commences with mountain ranges in grim tones, vast and obscure, an image of desolation. With the bird's chirping, we gradually see the flowing Great Wall on the spine of the mountains. As the camera draws closer, we see there is nothing but remnants of the ruin. As the wind picks up, trees and wild grass dance with the wind. In the distant sky, a sandstorm rushes towards this direction, and the wind gusts relentlessly towards the microphone, making this sandstorm in the distance resemble a roaring cavalry marching forward. The final shot is a close-up of the remnant ruins: a feeble flower swings with the wind, one can still hear the vague chirping of the birds, spring seems to be on its way, but the sky and the mountains are nevertheless desolate. The technical mistake of hearing gusting wind against the microphone in this case compliments the images of the work.



Stills from the video: "Heavy sleepers", 2006, Two channel Video, 24 min.



"Water", 2006-7, C-Prints

His video *City Scene* eschews functioning as a typical documentary while undeniably "documenting" a side of China that has hitherto largely escaped being captured on film. In a series of short, filmic vignettes, his composite picture of Beijing and its residents – who let themselves be massaged in front of a huge construction site, brutally beat one another until blood flows, lose themselves in drunkenness, or dance to playback music on a bridge over the city expressway – is a strangely poetic portrait of the contemporary Chinese metropolis. His subjects seem to react aggressively or stoically to the changed urban and social conditions in scenes that at first may appear ambiguous and often only come into focus moments before one vignette is replaced with the next. Zhao examines the new China, with its episodes of irrational violence and sudden glimpses of tolerance, in accidentally found (metaphorical) scenes of everyday life. He never com-

ments on what he has shot but places the various images of contemporary Chinese society alongside one another, leaving the judgment to the viewers". (*From the catalogue of the Berlin Biennial 2008*)

*Crowd* shows waiting crowds – a crowd waiting for the bus, a crowd waiting to witness the ceremony of raising or lowering the national flag, and a crowd waiting to review the troops. Zhao Liang shoots these common sights with a keen "sense of occasion", revealing a specific psychological state: as one waits, one hesitates with anxiousness, displaying fear out of vulnerability or even ignorance. Yet all these emotions are depicted through the most common, everyday scenes that make me feel as if I am standing in the crowd too, provoked by the same emotions and psychological states of excitement and fear. As these emotions abate, what follows



Stills from the video: "Havey sleepers", 2006, Two channel Video, 24 min.



Still from the video "Crime and Punishment", 2007, 122 min.

the stimulating sense of fear and excitement is a sense of perpetual dismay. As one wakes up from the nightmare, the scenes seem to carry on. The significance of this everyday waiting lies in the effacement of that philosophical, aimless waiting in *Waiting for Godot*.

*Let Nature Take Its Course* consists of three large projections depicting a lotus leaf in the rain. As a light rain trickles down the leaf drop-by-drop, it gathers into a small pool without being noticed. As the raindrops accumulate, the lotus leaf can no longer bear its weight and the water overflows – a most trivial scene is made exquisite and poetic through Zhao Liang's lens. This poetic sentiment brings about different impressions for different audiences. Perhaps another work in the same space will leave a similar impression: three TV monitors screening scenes of a criminal interrogation under a velvet curtain. It may incite some people, but these stories are taking place every day and yet we still perfunctorily aestheticize them.

Zhao Liang's works show desolation. As a result of modernization, society, like a machine, is becoming more refined and accurate, manifesting itself in our everyday lives to the point where we can no longer find the specific subject on which to lament our sentiments. Gradually, as we notice our insignificance, we are unable to pinpoint the reasons for our anger, desolation, and sorrow. The dismay felt from the quotidian constitutes the major characteristic of Zhao Liang's work.

*Text derived in part from writings by Li Xianting.*

**Zhao Liang**, born 1971, graduated at the Luxun Academy of Fine arts and studied at the Beijing Film Academy, he works and lives in Beijing Filmography (selection): 2007: "Crime and Punishment", 2006: "Heavy Sleepers", 1996–2006: "Farewell yuan Min Yuan", 1996–2008: "Complaint", 2004–2005

## PREVIEW

### L.A. Galerie, Frankfurt:

- Peter Bialobrzeski *"Lost in Transition"*, Sept. 5–Nov. 1, 2008
- Julian Faulhaber, Nov. 14, 2008 – Jan. 10, 2009

### Exhibitions

- Liu Ding *"Go China"*, Groninger Museum, Netherlands, March 23–Oct. 26, 2008, *"Far West"*, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK, June 27–Aug. 31, 2008, *"Avrum, Gold in Contemporary Art"*, CentrePasqueArt, Biel, Switzerland, Sept. 14–Nov. 30, 2008
- Naoya Hatakeyama *"Heavy Light"*, Center of Photography, NYC, through Sept. 7, 2008
- John Hilliard *"True Romance–Allegorien der Liebe von der Renaissance bis heute"*, Kunsthalle zu Kiel, until Sept. 7, 2008
- Ken Lum *"Shanghai Biennial 2008"*, Sept. 9–Nov. 16, 2008
- Tracey Moffatt *"Under Influence"*, Kunsthau Dresden, Germany, Aug. 2–Oct. 11, 2008, *"Just Different"*, Cobra Museum, Amstelveen, The Netherlands, June 14–Sept. 21, 2008, *"True Romance, Allegories of Love from the Renaissance until today"*, Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Germany, through Sept. 7, 2008

### New books:

- Liu Ding *"Products"*, Publ. Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
- Peter Bialobrzeski *"Lost in Transition"*, Hatje Cantz Verlag
- Christian Wolter *"Blühende Landschaften"*, Kehrer Verlag

### Art fairs:

- Art Melbourne, Australia, July 30–Aug. 3, 2008
- ShContemporary, Shanghai, China, Sept. 10–13, 2008

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