

L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht presents:

# Zhao Nengzhi "Faces"

June 1 to June 24, 2006

You and your friends are cordially invited to the opening on Thursday, June 1, at 7 p. m.

The artist will be present.

A catalogue is published for the exhibition.

## "The Barren Plain of the Body -- An interpretation of Zhao Nengzhi's work" By Li Xu

Swollen and hysterical shapes with ambiguous emotions, vague and empty grey background, entangled and knotted touches: a series of works by artist Zhao Nengzhi, dominated by human faces and called "Facial Expression," started unfolding in the late 1990s. The works persistently articulated ambiguous, undefined emotions with richly varied language. Many have tried to explain and attribute such emotions to the contemporary sense of distance and absurdity. Inter-



Zhao Nengzhi, "No. 8", 2003, Oil on Paper, 109 x 79 cm

estingly, the artist himself has often denied such explicit literary understanding of his work. In pure art work, form often runs smoothly along content. But in the artist's reality, the body is often so absurdly at odds with the spirit. This opposition morphed into a series of barren and hallow facial expression in Zhao Nengzhi's work; we have bodies

similar to our Maker, but our spirits could never reach the level of God – this is, after all, the awkwardness (impossibility) of creation. The splitting between body and mind probably came out of this.

The viewers who have just come into contact with Zhao Nengzhi's work, especially those who seek realistic meaning from it, may find it boring, monotonous, because they lack the more sensory understanding of this type of art. If someone attempts to classify Zhao Nengzhi, the attempt would fail miserably: Is he a portrait artist? Is he a realist? Yes,



Zhao Nengzhi, "No. 20", 2005, Oil on Canvas, 180 x 230 cm

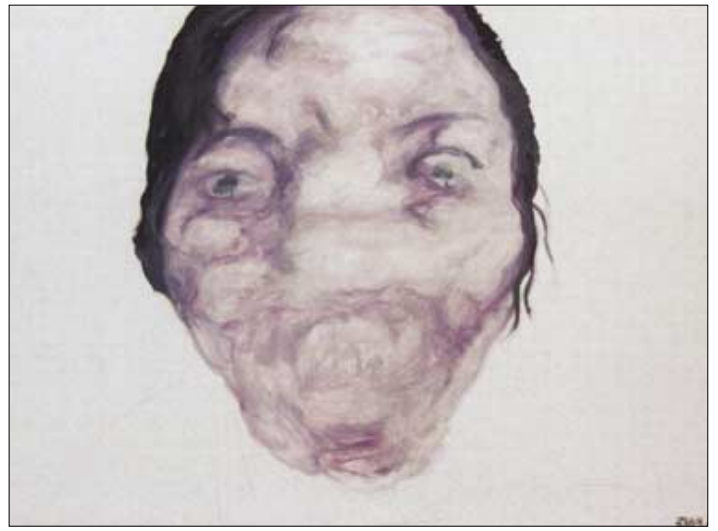
you can see his work as "human figures" or "portraits", and of course you can see the images as "clouds" or "landscapes". You may even see the strokes in the paintings as strokes, or that they were assembled to look like something like a head. What was painted, however, isn't actually important; how it is painted is the more essential question.



Zhao Nengzhi, "No. 21", 2005, Oil on Canvas, 180 x 230 cm

Zhao Nengzhi is a rational, reflective artist as much sensory as he is in his work. He once wrote in his notes: "I believe art is independent; paintings are paintings. They don't record; nor do they comment or narrate. They are only visual form, color and texture that trigger memory. Art is about gazing, and not pondering; about vision, and not about reason. It displays and not describes. I reject those elements that can be easily defined and implications that can be easily interpreted, but instead seek the variation of language, ambiguity of meaning and potential for growth. Art should argue for the difficulty in comprehension."

Words like these clearly show how Zhao Nengzhi emphasizes the painting itself and attempts to escape the psychological-sociological tendencies of interpretation. Up to this point at least, he has been very attentive to the forms of language. Those barren faces and hollow expressions are no more than signs for his visual expression, displaying fully for us the creativity of the visual rhythm and melody with their color, shades, strokes and texture.



Zhao Nengzhi, "No. 4", 2003, Oil on Paper, 119 x 89 cm

No matter how their images and models change, the emotional foundation of these works remains the same. The images in the paintings were not created as concrete human figures and are often distorted by the wide angle views. They are no longer the accumulation of the strokes needed to shape the contour of a human face. Zhao Nengzhi's human figures look strange and unfamiliar in their magnified and fuzzy details. Though some may call his human figures portraits, they are extremely abstract, with no body temperature, no breathing. The bodies they are attached to are plains being eroded and rendered barren.

When looking at Zhao Nengzhi's paintings, viewers not familiar with pure painting may want to see the human figures as stand-ins for the artist and the emotions sipping out of the paintings as those of the artist, feelings of hurt, repression, cruelty, rage, withdrawal and even perversion. There is nothing wrong with that, for the "meaning" of art is wide open for interpretation after the work is created. Every interpretation is subject to the sense and sensibility of the



Zhao Nengzhi, "No. 16", 2005, Oil on Canvas, 180 x 450 cm



Zhao Nengzhi, "No. 6", 2002, Oil on Canvas, 150 x 200 cm

recipient of the art work. Zhao Nengzhi is clever. While he seems to hand over the rights to the interpretation, these seemingly simple paintings are full of riddles.

Zhao Nengzhi started his experiment with colors with his paintings on paper in 2004, breaking away from the grey that had lasted for years. A series of gigantically sized work done since 2005 present to the viewers an extremely stunning visual effect with unprecedented colors: the abstract figures are becoming concrete, yet the lonely and hysterical bodies are becoming more desolate. Some of his recent works are like film stills. A person is caught by a close-up shot and enlarged. The background with its details is deleted, leaving only a frozen facial expression, the concrete liveliness of which evaporates when the viewer wants to look closer and more into it.

Those barren bodies have not veered away from the language in which they have spoken over the years. Zhao Nengzhi's bodies are still barren, desolate plains, no matter that they now have clothes on and a seeming identity, and that the colors drop hints – however ambiguous – at time and location.



Zhao Nengzhi, "No. 4", 2001, Oil on Canvas, 200 x 250 cm

We have seen many human faces in contemporary Chinese art since the 1980s. Zhao Nengzhi, after Geng Jianyi, Zhang Xiaogong, Fan Lijun, Yue Minjun, Zhen Fanzhi and Yang Shaobin, has found his own language, constructing his own lexicon. Various faces of today's society are presented in relatively abstract forms in his painting and made into the specimen of the contemporary spirit. Together with the above mentioned artists, Zhao Nengzhi is painting portraits of Chinese society at the beginning of the 21st century. (Translation from Chinese by Xiaolu Hsi, Ph.D.)

### Zhao Nengzhi

born 1968 in Nanchong, Sichuan Province.  
Graduated from Sichuan Institute of fine Arts.  
Lives and works in Beijing and Chengdu

#### Exhibition

- 2005 - Mahjong, the collection of Ulli Sigg, Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland
- Chengdu Biennial, Chengdu

### PREVIEW

#### L. A. GALERIE, FRANKFURT

- Liu Ding "Samples from the Transition", June 29 until July 22, 2006
- Julian Faulhaber, July 27 until August 26, 2006

#### ART FAIRS

Art Melbourne, August 2 until August 6, 2006

#### EXHIBITIONS

Tracey Moffatt

- "Don Juan", Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria, March until April, 2006
- Spazio Oberdan – Museum for contemporary photography, July 27 until September 27, 2006

Oliver Boberg

- "Full House – Faces of an collection", Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany, April 2 until September 7, 2006

Naoya Hatakeyama

- "Berlin – Tokyo / Tokyo – Berlin", National Gallery, Berlin, Germany, June 8 until October 3, 2006

Peter Bialobrzewski

- "Relations of present Art with Reality", Patio Herrariano, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Español, Valladolid, Spain, June 2 until September 10, 2006
- Deutsche Börse, Frankfurt, Germany, from June 8, 2006
- "Shining Buildings", Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Germany, June 9 until October 1, 2006
- "Die Liebe zum Licht", Kunstmuseum Celle, Germany, from July 23, 2006

Robert F. Hammerstiel

- "Forget Mozart...", Museum der Moderne Rupertinum, Salzburg, Austria, May 5 until July 9, 2006

L. A. GALERIE, BEIJING

No 319., Cao Chang di, Cui Ge Zhuang Village, East End Art Chaoyang District, Da Shanzi 71# Mail Box, Beijing 100015, P.R. China  
phone: 0086-10 64325093, 64325073  
info@la-gallery-beijing.com  
www.la-gallery-beijing.com



Sponsored by:

www.china-wein.com