

## PRESS RELEASE

# Zheng Chongbin: **Impulse, Matter, Form**

Curated by Britta Erickson

Opening Reception: May 26<sup>th</sup>, 4 – 6pm

Exhibition Date: May 26<sup>th</sup> – August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Press Preview and Artist Interview: May 18, 2013, 1 – 5pm

The newly established Beijing art gallery Ink Studio 墨齋 is delighted to announce its inaugural exhibition of ink on paper works by artist Zheng Chongbin.

Ink Studio is responding to new and exciting developments in the medium of ink painting currently emanating from China. In its upcoming exhibitions program Ink Studio will demonstrate how a group of important artists have, over the past decades, been highly active in researching and developing the immense contemporary creative possibilities of the millennia-old language of paper, brush and ink. These artists' work increasingly is attracting serious international critical attention. Ink Studio's mission is to present the best of this new work to the public in a closely curated exhibition program supported by in-depth critical analysis, scholarly exchange and bi-lingual publishing in Chinese and English.

Zheng Chongbin 郑重宾 (b. Shanghai, 1961) is one of the most notable artists in this emerging Chinese ink painting scene. Throughout his career, Zheng has systematically deconstructed and interrogated the origins of abstraction in both traditional Chinese and contemporary Euro-American artistic practices. Without abandoning his rigorous early 1980s training as an ink painter in China, Zheng has embraced precepts of American Abstract Expressionism, field painting and Minimalism. A fresh and dynamic synthesis of approaches from both traditions, Zheng's paintings resonate with both Eastern and Western art history, playing one against the other to break free of both. On the surface the two traditions would seem to be at odds, but there are deep affinities that make the synthesis work. For example both Zheng and the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollack rely on controlled chance; however, unlike Pollack, Zheng is able to anticipate the final outcome of his process with great accuracy because of his decades of immersion in the classical ink medium. His work proves the 21st century's powerful potential as a temporal site of transnationalism in the arts.

In 1984, Zheng Chongbin graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now the China Academy of Fine Arts) in the lake city of Hangzhou. Hangzhou remains, in many respects, one of the main inheritors of the classical Chinese aesthetic tradition. At the Academy Zheng was surrounded by some of the most notable teachers of traditional ink painting and enjoyed direct access to important historical masterworks which, the artist recalls, were objects of intense study and discussion. On graduation Zheng was invited to join the Academy faculty and went on to teach there for a further four years. This early Reform period of the 1980s in China was a time of particular intellectual excitement and debate. Zheng Chongbin is himself an artist of intense

curiosity and through this period he persistently questioned and challenged the very profound artistic tradition that he was teaching and studying.

It was at this point the artist first started to experiment with painting non-figurative ink works. Loosely, these could be described as abstract, but their function for the artist goes beyond an exploration of formal abstraction. Rather, the artist was seeking to isolate particular strands of the ink painting discipline, to magnify them and to examine their significance when not bound to narrative or historical allusion. In this process, Zheng was developing a distinctive painterly voice of his own—one based on abstraction.

A decisive shift for Zheng Chongbin came in 1989 when he won a fellowship at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he attained his Masters of Fine Art two years later. Over this period he realized with great excitement the enormity of the challenge facing him. He engaged closely with the radical transforming practices of conceptual art, installation, deconstruction and performance that he discovered in the United States. He struggled to discover ways in which this innovating Western intellectual tradition could have resonance with the philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings of his own painterly practice. Zheng Chongbin opted to remain in the United States in order to deepen his process of research, development and innovation and to this day divides his time between his home in the San Francisco Bay Area and a second studio in his native Shanghai.

Zheng Chongbin's current artistic production focuses on expressing contemporaneity using materials and techniques, some of which were formulated over a millennium ago. This has necessarily involved a continuous process of selecting, examining, discarding and transforming. Through his innovative employment of white acrylic along with ink, for example, Zheng affords white portions of his composition not just a positive value, but also a solid material presence. Because of its juxtaposition with the substantial acrylic, ink also comes to have an existence as a material rather than simply as a carrier of gesture or form. As a result, Zheng's paintings can be read not only as images residing in two-dimensional illusory space but experienced as material objects with real, physical presence.

Although his paintings are decidedly universal in their aesthetic language, Zheng never departs from one very profound principal of traditional Chinese painting, a principal which interestingly resonates with certain practices of radical contemporary performance. *Qiyun* 气韵 or "vital resonance" describes the way in which the artist may imbue the work he creates with the resonant energy of the subject itself. In turn, this energetic impulse is imparted directly to the audience through their sense experience of his creation. In this way the viewer becomes not only a passive receiver but also an active participant in the creative manifestation of the work of art.

Critics, collectors, scholars, artists and an interested public are invited to explore this for themselves at the artist's Ink Studio solo exhibition "Zheng Chongbin: Impulse, Matter, Form" or at the 2013 Venice Biennale exhibition "Culture, Mind, Becoming."

Zheng Chongbin has exhibited previously at Christie's New York (2013), the Hong Kong Art Center (2012), Saatchi Gallery (2012), Shanghai Gallery of Art (2011), Zendai Gallery (2010), the Asian Art

Museum of San Francisco (2010), the Doland Museum (2009), the Pacific Asia Museum (2009), the Pusan Museum of Modern Art (2008), the China National Art Institute (2008), and the Third Chengdu Biennial (2007).

Public and private collections include: the British Museum, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Daimler Art Collection and the DSL Collection.

Dr. Britta Erickson is an independent scholar and curator living in Palo Alto, California. She has taught courses on contemporary Chinese art for 15 years at Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley, including most recently a Fall 2012 upper-level seminar at Stanford University on contemporary Chinese ink painting. She has curated major exhibitions at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C. (*Word Play: Contemporary Art by Xu Bing*) and the Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford (*On the Edge: Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West*). In 2007 she co-curated the Chengdu Biennial, which focused on ink art. She was a contributing curator for the exhibition *Shanghai: Art of the City* at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco in 2010. Dr. Erickson is on the advisory boards of the Ink Society (Hong Kong) and Three Shadows Photography Art Centre (Beijing), as well as the editorial boards of *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* and *ART Asia Pacific*. In 2006 she was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to conduct research in Beijing on the Chinese contemporary art market. Publications include three books—*The Art of Xu Bing: Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words* (Seattle, 2001), *On the Edge: Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West* (Stanford/Hong Kong, 2004), and *China Onward The Estella Collection: Chinese Contemporary Art, 1966–2006* (Humblebaek, 2007)—as well as biographical entries for Grove Art Online (Oxford, 2005) and numerous articles and essays. She is currently producing a film series and book, *The Enduring Passion for Ink: A Project on Contemporary Chinese Ink Painters*.

To schedule an interview or for more information, please contact Lesley Sheng at the gallery:

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