

Acts of faith

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STAFF REPORTER



Zhang Huan,
12 Square Meters.
PHOTO COURTESY OF MOCA, TAIPEI

Amitoufo provides an in-depth look at the artistic transformation of Chinese artist Zhang Huan, from his early performance art works to his later Buddhist-inspired sculptures and paintings



Zhang Huan,
My New York.
PHOTO COURTESY OF MOCA, TAIPEI



▲ Zhang Huan, *Pilgrimage — Wind and Water in New York*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOCA, TAIPEI

Chinese contemporary artist Zhang Huan (張洹) garnered an early reputation as somewhat of an enfant terrible of Beijing's art world. In his breakout *12 Square Meters* he examined the tortures of existence by smearing his naked body with fish oil and honey after which he sat for an hour in a bug-infested latrine. The 1995 *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (為無名山增高一米) consisted of 10 naked bodies piled on the summit of Miaofengshan (妙峰山) west of Beijing, with nine artists later the same day simulating intercourse with a nearby peak.

Videos of these performance works are currently on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, and form part of a retrospective of Zhang's oeuvre under the title *Amitoufo* (阿彌陀佛). The show provides a solid overview of the artist's career, from his early existential investigations and social critiques to his later Buddhist-inspired sculptures and ash on linen paintings.

Trained as an oil painter at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts, Zhang became disenchanted by the limitations of the medium and began experimenting with performance art. At this time, Zhang and other like-minded Chinese artists established the Beijing East Village, which enabled the burgeoning artist to explore his new direction.

But audiences and critics generally met his penchant to perform naked with bafflement or derision, so in 1998 Zhang moved to New York, an environment more amenable to his performance art.



▲ Zhang Huan, *Taiwan Buddha*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOCA, TAIPEI

Two videos at MOCA are representative of his New York period. The 1998 *Pilgrimage — Wind and Water in New York* (朝拜—紐約風水) shows a naked Zhang lying face down on a Ming-style bed that is covered with thick blocks of ice, while *My America (Hard to Assimilate)* (我的美國) features a naked Zhang sitting on a stool as 60 volunteers, also naked, pelt him with loaves of bread.

The videos suggest the isolation of recent immigrants to New York and subtly poke fun at the city's (and America's) multicultural presumptions.

Zhang returned to China and opened a studio in Shanghai in 2006. It was at this time that he became a practicing Buddhist — a spiritual transformation that has informed his work ever since.

Amitoufo's curator, Yang Shin-Yi (楊心一), does a superb job of showing this remarkable change by juxtaposing Zhang's revelatory performance videos with his religiously inspired sculptures.

Buddhist influences are manifest in

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Amitoufo — Zhang Huan Solo Exhibition (阿彌陀佛—張洹個展)
WHERE: Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei (MOCA, Taipei), 39 Chang'an W Rd, Taipei City (台北市長安西路39號)
WHEN: Until March 28. Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 6pm.
TEL: (02) 2552-3720
ADMISSION: NT\$50
ON THE NET: www.mocataipei.org.tw



▲ Zhang Huan, *Opera*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOCA, TAIPEI

EXHIBITIONS



Li Shing-lung, *Mountain and Peak*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FU GUEI TAN YUAN ARTS AND CULTURE

Fu Guei Tan Yuan Arts and Culture (富貴陶園) is currently holding exhibitions for Li Shing-lung (李幸龍) and Sun Wen-ben (孫文斌), two of Taiwan's top ceramicists. Li's show, titled *Color in Wood Firing* (柴燒觀色), presents a rich display of mountainscape sculptures that emphasize the multiple layers of engraved patterns to contrast texture and color. Sun's *Forms of Tea* (茶型) meditates on Taiwan's tea culture with elaborately crafted pots, cups and trays.

■ Li Shing-lung will be exhibited at Fu Guei Tan Yuan Arts and Culture (富貴陶園), 96-98 Chongqing St, Yingde Township, Taipei County (台北縣鶯歌鎮重慶街96-98號). Tel: (02) 2670-3999. Sun Wen-ben's work is on display at Fu Guei's second showroom at 11-13 Taocih St, Yingde Township, Taipei County (台北縣鶯歌鎮陶瓷街11-13號). Tel: (02) 2679-6903. Both locations are open daily from 10:30am to 8pm ■ Exhibitions end on March 21

Before heading off to Fu Guei Tan Yuan Arts and Culture, be sure to give yourself a firm grounding in the history and development of Chinese ceramics with *The Magic of Kneaded Clay: A History of Chinese Ceramics* (埴泥幻化—中國歷代陶瓷展), currently on view at the National Palace Museum. The exhibit examines Chinese ceramics from the perspective of various glaze colors and how glazes evolved at different kilns, as well as how official models of decoration formed over time. The exhibition is divided into five sections: Pottery and Porcelain, Neolithic Age to the Five Dynasties, Song to Yuan Dynasties, Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty. ■ National Palace Museum (國立故宮博物院), 221 Zhishan Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市至善路二段221號). Open daily from 9am to 5pm. Tel: (02) 2881-2021. Admission is NT\$160 ■ Ongoing

Beyond Vision: Highlights of Abstract Paintings From the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts Collection (興象—典藏抽象繪畫展) offers viewers a solid overview of Taiwan's abstract art scene through the work of 65 artists. From the calligraphic experiments of the 1950s and 1960s up to the self-reflective examinations of the post Martial Law period, the 142 works on display reveal the vibrancy and depth of this art movement in Taiwan. Meanwhile, in the museum's basement, China-born Taiwanese artist Lo Fong (羅芳) demonstrates her deep respect for nature in *Embracing the Heart* (擁抱心宇), a retrospective show. The landscape painter combines the free expression and mood of Western expressionism with the rigid strictures of literati painting to create works of wild serenity. ■ National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (國立台灣美術館), 2, Wuchuan W Rd Sec 1, Taichung City (台中市五權西路一段2號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 9am to 5pm. Tel: (04) 2372-3552. Admission: Free ■ Beyond Vision ends Friday. Lo Fong exhibit ends March 7

Taiwanese ink painter and founding member of the Fifth Moon Group, Liu Kuo-song (劉國松) continues his avant-garde approach to this traditional Chinese art form with *Nature as Mental Transformation* (寸心運大化). Liu's landscape paintings combine traditional forms with a palette bordering on pastel and are informed by an abstract sensibility. ■ Sincewell Gallery (新思惟人文空間), 2F, 37, Ming-je Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市民明路37號2樓). Open daily from noon to 10pm. Tel: (07) 345-2699 ■ Until March 21

Chinese contemporary sculptor Zhan Wang (展望) reinterprets the work of Dutch architecture firm MVRDV in the sculptural installation *Urban Arcadia*. Zhan reconstructs 24 of MVRDV's works and combines them to create a Chinese landscape of stainless steel. ■ MOT Arts, 3F, 22 Fuxing S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市復興南路一段22號3樓). Open daily from 11am to 9pm. Tel: (02) 2751-8088 ■ Until May 30