

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

6-24 BRITANNIA STREET

LONDON WC1X 9JD

GALLERY HOURS:

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Tue–Sat: 10:00am–6:00pm



ZENG FANZHI

Tuesday, 20 November 2012–Saturday, 19 January 2013

Opening reception for the artist: Saturday, November 17th, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm

They are not real landscapes. They are rather about an experience of miao wu [marvellous revelation]. Miao wu constitutes a restless journey of discovery.

—Zeng Fanzhi

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to present new paintings by Zeng Fanzhi, his first exhibition at the London gallery, following the Hong Kong exhibition last year.

Zeng's aesthetic restlessness epitomizes the evolution of Chinese contemporary art in the post-1989 era, grappling with local history and tradition in the face of external influence and accelerated change. Since the beginning of his career, he has presented a succession of powerfully introspective subjects, from the haunting *Hospital* paintings to the visceral *Meat* paintings that juxtapose human subjects with butchered flesh; from the enigmatic *Mask* paintings to candid and startling close-up portraits; from intimate, existential still-lives to depictions of pivotal Western cultural figures such as Francis Bacon, whose psychic portraits altered the status of the human figure in twentieth century art. Charged with an underlying psychological tension, Zeng's oeuvre reveals the place of the unconscious and the aberrant in the construction of human experience.

For the past decade, landscape has been a central focus of Zeng's art. In highly tactile scenes, the details of representation often overlap seamlessly with qualities of abstraction, as in certain traditional Chinese aesthetic objects. All are expressionistically rendered with extraordinary attention to the material nuances of the painted surface. In densely worked paintings, such as *Pure Land* (2012) and *Untitled* (2012), gnarled branches crisscross over dark terrain, accented with swaths of white, teal, violet and rose. Zeng's fictitious place is at once luminous and bleak, where unearthly bursts of vivid color are trapped in snaking brambles that obstruct yet hold the gaze. Filled with brushwork that is both refined and heavily textured, the thick surfaces underscore the physicality of Zeng's painting process. Against these haunting landscapes, the bare yet resilient trees that survive in such harsh conditions hold the promise of renewal and rebirth.

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Several works in the exhibition are inspired by the sketches of Albrecht Dürer. In a reversal of conventional East-West aesthetics, Zeng re-interprets Dürer's intricate imagery and thin, precise brushstrokes—which resonate with traditional Chinese painting—with thick strokes of oil paint layered with a broad brush. In *The Hare* (2012) and *Head of an Old Man* (2012), the rabbit fur of the former and the flowing white beard of the latter are rendered as masses of carefully delineated, yet aggressively and broadly executed brushstrokes. In his interpretation of Dürer's drawing *Praying Hands* (1508)—an iconic image that has been endlessly disseminated and reproduced—Zeng moves beyond the overt symbolism of hands clasped in prayer, intent on rendering the nuances of aging flesh in highly textured impasto.

Zeng Fanzhi was born in Wuhan, China in 1964. Major exhibitions include Singapore Art Museum (2007); Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Etienne de Metropole, Saint-Etienne, France (2007); Fundacion Godia, Barcelona, Spain (2009); National Gallery for Foreign Art, Sofia, Bulgaria (2010); and Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2010). He has participated in numerous international group exhibitions including the first Guangzhou Triennale (2002); the Biennale di Venezia (2009); and "I mondo vi appartiene" at the François Pinault Foundation, Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2011). He will also participate in a major solo exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in October, 2013.

Zeng lives and works in Beijing.

For further information please contact the gallery at london@gagosian.com or at +44.207.841.9960.