

GAGOSIAN
frieze

Zeng Fanzhi



Q

What should change?

A

Everything: that's just how the world is.

What images keep you company in the space where you work?

Two paintings I made in 2009: a small one, depicting a pair of shoes, and a bigger one, which is a self-portrait with bare feet. I keep them close to me in my studio. Sometimes, I even take the small one with me when I need to work from home. They remind me of who I am, of where and how I started my journey with art, and of my original aspiration.

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?

When I was ten, my mother took me to Hangzhou, one of the most beautiful cities in China. It was an eye-opening experience for me. The natural scenery (including West Lake, a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and architectural features, such as historical pagodas and bridges, were like artworks. They had a huge impact. My latest series, of works on paper, is very much inspired by my memories of this particular trip.

If you could live with only one piece of art, what would it be?

An empty canvas (on which I can 'picture' anything I like).

What is your favourite title of an artwork?

La Liberté guidant le peuple (Liberty Leading the People, 1830) by Eugène Delacroix.

What do you wish you knew?

Who I was and who I will be in my previous and future lives. (Although I strongly believe that I was an artist in my past life and will be an artist again in my future lives.)

What should stay the same?

The world is changing constantly, which is its nature. Conversely, each of us should stay the same, remembering who we are and where we come from.

What could you imagine doing if you didn't do what you do?

To be honest, I can't imagine myself doing anything other than being an artist.

What music are you listening to?

One of my favourite pieces is *Má vlast* (My Homeland, 1874–79) by the Czech composer Bedřich Smetana. It's my regular background music, especially when I am working on large canvases. While finishing the details of a painting, I switch to Chinese Peking opera. Somehow its rhythm coordinates very well with the brushstrokes.

What are you reading?

A book based on interviews and conversations between Professor Joan Stanley-Baker and the collector and connoisseur C.C. Wang, which took place between 1977–78. They reveal long-hidden insights into the essence of Chinese brushwork.

What do you like the look of?

Stones, especially ancient Chinese scholars' rocks. I have collected many of them over the years.

Zeng Fanzhi lives and works in Beijing, China. He has had solo exhibitions at Singapore Art Museum (2007); Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Etienne de Metropole, France (2007); Fundación Godia, Barcelona, Spain (2009); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2010); and he was the subject of a major retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (2013–14). In a specially commissioned exhibition at the Musée du Louvre, Paris, in 2014, Zeng's painting From 1830 till now No. 4 (2014) was shown alongside Eugène Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People (1830). In 2015, he had a solo show at Gagosian Gallery, New York, USA. 'Zeng Fanzhi: Parcours', his largest and most comprehensive exhibition to date, is at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, until 19 November.

Eugène Delacroix
Liberty Leading the People, 1830,
oil on canvas, 2.6 × 3.6 m

Courtesy
Musée du Louvre,
Paris