



Ullens Center for
Contemporary Art
尤伦斯当代艺术中心

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Exhibition Dates:

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Curators:

Philip Tinari and Paula Tsai

Exhibition Venue:

Great Hall

Press material also available for
download from the UCCA website

Xu Zhen: A MadIn Company Production

Released on January 18, 2014

A major mid-career retrospective explores the protean Shanghai artist's interest in geopolitical subjectivity and the conditions of (Chinese) contemporary art

UCCA is proud to announce a major mid-career survey of mercurial Chinese artist Xu Zhen (b. 1977, Shanghai), one of the most interesting and promising artists working in China today. An irreverent artist with a voracious appetite for global information and a unique ability to produce work across multiple platforms and media, Xu Zhen is a key figure in the Shanghai art scene and a foundational figure for the generations of Chinese artists born since 1980. The exhibition is curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari and UCCA Chief Curator Paula Tsai.

Xu Zhen's practice incorporates a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture, mechanical installation, video, photography, and performance, often within a single piece. "Xu Zhen: A MadIn Company Production" comprises a similarly diverse set of works, with over 50 installation pieces, 10 videos, 40 painting and collage works, and several performances, filling UCCA's signature Great Hall. The exhibition spans Xu Zhen's early works made in his own name beginning in 1997, works made under the moniker MadIn Company between 2009 and 2013, as well as significant new pieces produced specially for this exhibition under MadIn Company's "Xu Zhen" brand.

The title "Xu Zhen: A MadIn Company Production" acknowledges the longstanding relationship between the artist's individual practice and his sprawling involvement with the Shanghai contemporary art scene. In 2009, Xu Zhen dissolved his art practice into the "contemporary art creation company" MadIn Company. Acting as the group's CEO, Xu Zhen continues to undertake creative projects, artworks, and exhibitions under this revised mantle. MadIn encapsulates Xu Zhen's unique conflation of art practice, curatorial work, and art promotion that has defined his multifarious career in the Shanghai art scene. The artist's withdrawal from his own name marks a rejection of the persona-driven contemporary art world while acknowledging that, since he first began working with art in 1997, Xu Zhen's artwork has always been a collaborative effort.

Says Tinari, "Since the early 2000s, Xu Zhen, with his unique combination of skepticism and



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action, contemplation and involvement, has produced some of the most compelling and self-knowing art contemporary China has ever seen. We look forward to presenting his considerable output to audiences who might not yet be familiar with the arc of his career.”

A prankster provocateur in the vein of Yves Klein, Xu Zhen engages a variety of issues with his characteristic wryness, from the politics of intercultural and international viewing in *Seeing One's Own Eyes: Middle East Contemporary Art* (a “group show” of works by fictional Middle Eastern artists), to voyeurism and ethical anxiety in depictions of race and suffering in *The Starving of Sudan* (an in-gallery tableau recreating Kevin Carter's iconic 1994 photograph of a starving infant), to satire of de rigueur contemporary art practices in *8848-1.86* (wherein the artist “removes” a chunk of Mount Everest equivalent to his own height from the summit and brings it back for display in the museum). Presented together, Xu Zhen's oeuvre reflects the lingering concerns of an artist participating in the international art world while remaining deeply skeptical of it and its conventions, most immediately the label “Chinese contemporary art.” Xu Zhen's artworks probe the various mediations that corrupt the viewer's experience of an artwork, particularly in observing a culture that is not one's own.

“Xu Zhen: A MadIn Company Production” includes a number of Xu Zhen's landmark works. His 1998 video *Shouting*, in which the artist lets out pained shouts on crowded city streets, only to capture the sequential shock and dismissal of hundreds of passers-by, made him the youngest Chinese artist to date to be included in the Venice Biennale. His 2007 installation *Shanghart Supermarket*, which takes the shape of a Shanghai convenience store fully stocked with packaging that has been emptied of content, sold for the price of the putative objects, was widely debated when it debuted at Art Basel Miami Beach at the height of the last art-market bubble. In *Physique of Consciousness Museum*, Xu Zhen uses various social, religious, and political criteria to array archaeological and ethnographic artifacts—actually just mounted photographs of the same—without respect to place or time of origin.

In a major new commission for the lobby, Xu Zhen literally and winkingly juxtaposes East and West—that operative cliché of so much art in China—by mounting headless replicas of key Hellenistic and Buddhist sculptures neck to neck.



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The UCCA exhibition is realized in collaboration with MadelIn Company. It is accompanied by an eponymous catalogue which will mark the first comprehensive monograph on the artist's work, with essays by Philip Tinari and Lu Mingjun. The exhibition will coincide with The Armory Show 2014 (March 5-9), for which Xu Zhen has been appointed the Commissioned Artist as part of the "Armory Focus: China" section which Tinari has curated.

"Xu Zhen: A MadelIn Company Production" is generously sponsored by the following individuals and institutions: Ms. Lin Moru, Mr. Qiao Zhibing, Mr. Shen Qibin, Mr. Zhang Wei, White Rabbit Collection, CP Denmark, ShanghART Gallery, and Long March Space. The exhibition publication is supported by Beijing New Century Contemporary Art Foundation founder Mr. Wang Bing.

About the Artist

Xu Zhen is a graduate of the Shanghai Art and Design Academy, a technical college. After graduating in 1996, Xu declined to continue his education, forsaking the standard art education system and instead moving to Beijing to participate in the flourishing contemporary art scene there. After a year living in Beijing, Xu returned to Shanghai and began making art.

Apart from his artworks, Xu Zhen is a leading figure in the Shanghai art scene, working as a curator, critic, entrepreneur, and broker. In 1998, Xu co-founded the independent, not-for-profit BizArt Art Centre, the first organization of its kind in Shanghai. The creative lab funded experimental exhibitions of young Shanghai artists through its graphic design, art advertising, and other commercial services. In 2006, Xu helped initiate the online contemporary art forum Art-Ba-Ba (www.art-ba-ba.com), which remains one of China's leading web platforms for discussion and criticism of contemporary art. In 2009, Xu dissolved his art practice into the "contemporary art creation company" MadelIn Company. In 2013, MadelIn Company launched the brand "Xu Zhen."

Xu Zhen won the Best Artist prize at the 2004 China Contemporary Art Awards. He is the youngest Chinese artist to participate in the Venice Biennale (2001). Solo exhibitions as himself and as MadelIn Company include "Seeing One's Own Eyes: Middle East Contemporary Art" (ShanghArt Gallery, Shanghai, 2009; S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2009; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 2009); "Physique of Consciousness" (Kunsthalle Bern, 2011); "Xu Zhen: Forbidden Castle" (Muzeum



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Montanelli, Prague, 2012); and “MadeIn Company” (Shanghai, Minsheng Art Museum, 2012). Major group exhibitions include the Venice Biennale (curated section, 2001 and China Pavilion, 2005); “Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection” (Kunstmuseum Bern, 2004); “The Thirteen: Chinese Video Now” (PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, 2006); “Art of Change” (Hayward Gallery, London, 2012); the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (Gallery of Modern Art and Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2012); the 4th Guangzhou Triennial (Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, 2012); “Surplus Authors” (Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2012); and Arsenale (Mystetskyi Arsenal, Kiev, 2012).

About UCCA

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is an independent, not-for-profit art center serving a global Beijing public. Located at the heart of Beijing's 798 Art District, it was founded by the Belgian collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens and opened in November 2007. Through a diverse array of exhibitions with artists Chinese and international, established and emerging, as well as a wide range of public programs, UCCA aims to promote the continued development of the Chinese art scene, foster international exchange, and showcase the latest in art and culture to hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

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