



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

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Exhibition Dates:
3 April – 31 May 2015

Exhibition Venue:
Nave and Long Gallery

Press material also available for
download from the UCCA website

Zhao Gang: The Road to Serfdom

Released on 2 April 2015

The first Beijing-based museum exhibition to review the recurring themes and mature style of painter, photographer, and filmmaker Zhao Gang.

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art presents “Zhao Gang: The Road to Serfdom,” a collection of works produced by the artist in the last year, including fifteen paintings, nineteen photographs, and two short films. The exhibition will open in the Nave and Long Gallery April 3 and run through May 31. The exhibition brings together recurring themes evinced throughout Zhao Gang’s long career—the identity of the wanderer, his critique of reality and history, and his research into the language of painting. Titled after economist Friedrich von Hayek’s treatise on the detriments of a planned economy, Zhao Gang’s tacit confirmation of the book’s message offers viewers a context from which to unpack his show.

In preparation for the exhibition, Zhao Gang visited the home villages of several prominent scientists and intellectuals involved in China’s 1919 May Fourth Movement—Wu Mi, Hu Sidu, Xiao Guangyan, Feng Zikai, Ma Yinchu, Yu Guangyu, and Qian Jin among others—in search of visual subject matter. These early twentieth-century thinkers were educated abroad and returned with heated passion to construct the homeland, suffering countless setbacks but never abandoning their ideals. Juxtaposing his personal journey with the trajectory of this group, Zhao Gang hints at a resonance therein. After participating in the late 1970s exhibitions of the Stars Group, widely considered China’s first modern art movement, Zhao Gang left China to study and live abroad for more than twenty years, assuming several roles along the way—among them investment banker and publisher of *ArtAsiaPacific*—before finally returning to China in the early 2000s. For this exhibition, however, his film *The Road to Serfdom* and the photography series “Pics of the Road” make no reference to the tremendous upheavals of modern China, but rather feature banal scenes that have remained unchanged for several decades.

The paintings featured here navigate a gray area between the subjective and objective. In depicting these select individuals’ classrooms, living quarters, and surrounding landscapes



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from a first-person perspective, Zhao Gang seems to be “performing” as a stand-in, turning their portraits into his own. The exhibition also contains several still lifes, executed in the same frenetic, heavy strokes of intense colors that hint at multivalent meaning. His personal reflections imbue these “neutral” subjects of landscape, portraiture, and still life with a deadpan humor carried throughout the exhibition. Once an ancient innovation, ceramic wares like that depicted in *Hi-tech* became a plaything for emperors, and the “Buddha’s Hand” citrus flower of *Handjob* is religious symbol in several cultures. These visual motifs question the social function of science and religion from a broad spectrum. Meanwhile the monumental group portrait *Cocksucker Blues* brings viewers face to face with the scholars that served as inspiration for the show, their belabored, brown bodies forming a bulbous mountain underneath an uncannily blue sky.

The only previously shown work, *Harlem School of New Social Realism* (2002, 2007) is a recording of Zhao Gang and several other American artists and scholars of color discussing possible forms and features of a future collaboration, produced for *The Long March: A Walking Visual Display* shortly before he returned to China for good. This work makes clear Zhao Gang’s line of inquiry is not rooted to a specific geography or culture, but rather comments on a larger human condition.

Opening to the public April 3 and running through May 31, 2015, the exhibition is curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari with Assistant Curator Guo Xi. Several Public Programs, including lectures and workshops, accompany the show. For more details check the UCCA website. The exhibition is accompanied by the survey catalogue *GANG*, Zhao Gang’s most comprehensive, bilingual publication to date. Taking “The Road to Serfdom” as its thematic structure, the catalogue contains an expansive selection of artwork images and photographs drawn from the artist’s archives, spanning nearly four decades of his life and career. Contributing writers are Simone Levine, Michael Murray, Franklin Sirmans, Sun Dongdong, Philip Tinari, and Christian Viveros-Fauné. The catalogue is published by Post Wave Publishing Consulting. The exhibition catalogue is sponsored by aye gallery, Galerie Christian Nagel, and Post Wave Publishing Consulting. Special thanks to Davidoff Art Initiative and Beijing WeiJi Preservation International Center Company for their additional support.

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About the Artist

Zhao Gang (b. 1961, Beijing) made his artistic debut as a member of the Stars Group, one of the first avant-garde artist groups to open the era of contemporary art in China, when he was just 18 years old. Shortly thereafter he pursued formal art education in Europe then New York, where he lived for over two decades, developing a diverse body of work as his perspective became distinctively international. Over the course of his wanderings, Zhao Gang has been featured alongside prominent Chinese painters Liu Wei and David Diao; participated in PERFORMA, the Guangzhou Triennial, and the Yokohama Triennial; presented his solo exhibition "Sick Man" at the Today Art Museum in Beijing; and exhibited elsewhere in the United States, Germany, China, France, and Japan. Since returning to Beijing in 2004, Zhao Gang has turned his ever-expanding focus toward the entanglement of his personal past with Chinese history and his unique position, at once a native and a newcomer, in China today.

About the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

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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