

Press Release

Zhao Gang: Domestic Anxiety

Curator: Lu Mingjun

2021.5.16–7.18

Long Museum (West Bund), Shanghai

The Long Museum will present Zhao Gang's solo exhibition *Domestic Anxiety* in the main staircase gallery from May 16 through July 18, 2021. *Domestic Anxiety* will showcase several massive- and medium-scale still lifes created in the last two years, a series of medium-scale abstract paintings, as well as a large narrative painting created in 2017. Gang's art explores the relationships between fluid individual identities, conflicting cultures, and the ruptured historical era. The recent paintings transcribe an individual's emotional responses to specific historical moments and cultural contexts into a stream-of-consciousness-style visual monologue. Through his creative practice, Gang seeks freedom and truth in an increasingly convoluted social discourse.

We can tentatively interpret the title *Domestic Anxiety* as “a house-husband's anguish,” referring to the culinary expert and chef Zhao Gang's daily, year-long cooking obligations for his family during the pandemic. It further implies his alternative identity as a chef—cooking as a means of alleviating his perennial, perpetual anxiety.

The exhibition is curated by Lu Mingjun, a curator and art historian, who juxtaposes Gang's abstract paintings with his still lifes. “The former concerns *forms*, originating from texts; the latter *imagery*—a corner of kitchen or dining room. If abstract art is his spiritual practice, still lifes demonstrate his mundane, bodily operations. Both are inspired by his personal experiences, but their inherent differences signal his split personality and unconscious anxiety,” Lu said.

The seven massive scale still lifes mark yet another major breakthrough in Zhao Gang's four-decade painting career. By depicting meat, fruits, seafood, wine bottles, and wine glasses—objects embody “eternity” as Gang would claim—the artist renders the sentimentality of an era wherein he is a misfit to his contemporary, and where his stream-of-consciousness constantly surges forth from the depths of his soul without leaving an echo. The largest painting, *Bloody Romance* (2021), measuring 8 by 4m, appears to be comprised of flesh and flower from a distance. But as one approaches to within an arm's length, that is, enveloped in the physicality of the moment the artist painted it, the contours of the objects fade; one is left facing abstract colors and lines wherein the artist's deep emotions are curdling, throbbing, erupting.

This contrast between the distant/concrete and the closeup/abstract demonstrates that Zhao Gang has entered a new stage of artistic experimentation. Born in 1961 and raised in Beijing, Gang was once the youngest member of the Stars Group, engaging with Beijing's underground art scene during the late 1970s. In 1983, he left China to

study in Europe and the United States. After living in New York for 23 years and mingling in local art scene, Gang returned to China in 2006. Since then, he has regularly held exhibitions in Europe and the United States. As one of a few artists navigating the two different painting contexts in China and the West, he has experimented with landscapes, abstraction, history, portraits, figures, still lifes, and other classic painting genres and themes. In 2019, starting from a huge figure painting, Gang created a series of abstract paintings. Now, through his recent massive-scale still lifes and medium-sized abstract paintings, Gang again calls for the abstract, establishing a new visual narrative within the widening void of incongruity between the concrete and the abstract.

As Lu Mingjun said: “This exhibition arose from Zhao Gang’s long-time rumination. Gang has been waiting several years for such an opportunity to reveal himself to the public in a decisive and unreserved manner.”