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猿王，2016，畫布油彩，280 x 260 cm

趙剛 21st:

色表／支架 作為歷史人類誌

May 1 - August 23, 2020

關渡美術館

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特別感謝：長征空間、Tilton Gallery、別古藏藝術空間

Each Modern 亞紀畫廊很榮幸宣布「趙剛 21st：色表／支架 作為歷史人類誌」將於關渡美術館展出，由關渡美術館館長黃建宏擔任策展人。本展將展出趙剛近年來的畫作，以自身的主觀視角探討歷史。在關渡美術館的兩層樓空間中，作品從小幅水彩到巨幅畫布油彩，都提出了一種觀看藝術家與畫作的寬廣視角。趙剛挑戰了我們對於歷史的角色，也撼動了我們所認為不可動搖的歷史。這不僅是揭穿了中國歷史文化中的荒謬，也包括了繪畫本體。我們能從過去得到什麼？有什麼是值得被留下的？這些繪畫又剩下些什麼？趙剛的作品也許能解答。答案也許是懷疑的、粗糙的、笨拙的，但這就是答案。

出生在1961年的滿族家庭，趙剛的家族在「文化大革命」期間經歷了嚴重批鬥。然而，作為當時星星畫會最年輕的成員，趙剛透過展覽，對於70至80年代的中國早期現代藝術做出了極大的貢獻。他將非屬藝術機構的藝術家群聚，以自行車代步，在夜晚的北京公寓中舉辦了多次前衛展覽。之後，就在「反精神污染」運動開始之前，趙剛離開了中國。1983年，他先是在荷蘭學習藝術，後來到了美

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國瓦薩學院繼續研讀。在紐約，他的角色不僅是聚集中國前衛藝術家的呼喚者，趙剛也為非裔美國藝術家們創造了對話的空間，甚至買下並經營藝術媒體〈Art Asia Pacific〉。他在紐約生活與工作超過了20年，並在2007年回到北京，尋找所謂的新中國與中國當代藝術。

隨著趙剛的歸國，他發現他與當時的北京格格不入。為了適應，趙剛繼續了他在紐約所發展出來的個人化創作方法。這種方法圍繞著他獨特的身份，也把視角帶回了歷史、情色、革命、詩意、傳統水墨、與中國過去的文化。如此一來，趙剛從私人的角度描畫了對於新中國的想像，以繪畫探討繪畫本身與自己。



China Party 2020, 2019, 畫布油彩, 320 x 970 cm

趙剛所著墨的話題，是中國人與在中國的非華裔人士經常不認知的異質性。展覽中，2019年的巨幅作品《China Party 2020》描繪了一大群的人，綠袍姑娘、蓄鬚道士、中國將領與清朝皇帝都圍繞了一張圓桌，就像反映中國多元文化性的一道彩虹。當我們看得更仔細時，會發現這些人物其實都穿著非漢族或非華人的服裝。在這樣的架構下，趙剛重組內容，再透過粗糙直接的筆觸描繪，剝奪了他們的固有歷史並呈現了內在的形象與色彩。趙剛從當代主觀地看待這些非中國與中國的人物，同時也成為了從內部與外部觀看中國的人。

曾在2018年個展「趙剛回顧展」中展出的39件水彩作品，也能看出趙剛的主觀性。這個系列取材俄國十月革命，再融合了中國歷史及趙剛和中國、共產運動、當代藝術的連結。對趙剛而言，中國長期沒有個人的當代藝術史，藝術家的作品通常關於革命軍閥、知識份子以及中華帝國的遺跡。再次，趙剛透過繪畫與回顧性的觀點照亮了他自己的世界。

2015至2017年作品《知識份子》描繪了中國知識份子在五四運動後，紛紛前往歐洲、美國、日本尋求更高等的教育。當他們回到中國時，也對於家鄉中滿著夢想與憧憬，希望能帶來更好的影響。但是，有很多人在最後落得了悲慘的下場。趙剛和這些知識份子一樣，同時作為局外人與局內人，而他也是一個當代樣板。



知識份子, 2015 - 2017, 畫布油彩, 160 x 130 cm

展覽中很重要的一點是更深層的時間位移，從歷史到社會人類學，再到生物人類學。2016年作品《猿王》探討了人類的史前源起。這隻猿猴背叛了牠應有的慣性，成為了一位具有潛能與智慧的生物。牠將放棄他在動物世界的王位，開始進入人類文明的演化。牠的明亮的眼神在畫布上遠望，也許正是望著人類歷史的演進。假如中國的傳統哲學家要從古代尋找指引，那麼趙剛所見的則更久遠。

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我們已經不用去分辨這些肖像是趙剛看待自己身份的角度，或是他的敘事方國。近乎所有的作品都被填塞了他的個人歷史與命運。**2015**年至**2017**年《知識份子》與**2016**年《猿王》便提供了我們如此的觀看稜鏡。前者是文化的混合體，後者則是立足在文化出現之前。前者的人物受到了他人給予的殘酷命運，後者則因不屬於人類而倖免於難。無論是身為滿族、藝術家、移民、返鄉者、局內人或局外人，趙剛表現了明確的立場。歷史為證，良善的初衷與知識也不能保證能人類的野蠻中脫身。



冠狀病毒四，2020，畫布油彩，170 x 130 cm

另一種主題是趙剛對於庭院文化與花園景色的描繪。在**2020**年作品《冠狀病毒三》與《冠狀病毒四》中，物件被畫在了畫布的邊緣，傳統景物的價值被裁切、去語意化。佛的形象成為了中國文化的空殼，已然不是當初創造祂的原意，而人們卻也妥協。趙剛選出了這些面向，不拋棄卻也不接受這樣的表象價值。這樣的技法與趙剛在**2015**年在蘇州美術館的展覽「偶園」與水彩作品中的人物與建築不謀而合，儘管他的油畫展示於室內空間的地面上，卻也還是表現著一種不合時宜的感覺。

與趙剛無異，外人也能看到中國的風景與遠景。**2015**年作品「中國地圖」就是啟發自德國探險家與科學家費迪南·馮·李希霍芬的**1885**年著作。一塊石碑屹立在起伏的山丘與長城之前，引用了外國人對中國的想像，西方式的物質描繪被趙剛所挪用，結合了他的西方主觀意識再次產出，如同一面鏡子對照著另一面。

當代所發生的事離我們不遠，但也終將成為改變歷史的歷史。事實上，《冠狀病毒》系列是趙剛在北京疫情肆虐時在北京所創作的四件作品。在這樣的環境下，趙剛仍堅持他的手法。在第一個系列《冠狀病毒一》中，描繪了一株窗前的暗色植物，窗戶也將景色分割成了兩半。看向窗外幾乎沒有景色的窗外，一片空白凝結了世界。積雪的屋頂對應著遠方的死灰樹木，卻存留下了一片黑葉。這幅靜物畫提供了色彩及溫暖的對比，也令人沈思。趙剛將當代災難所帶來的分離、孤立、忍難、堅韌精神性透過歷史媒材納入了畫作之中。

趙剛是我們所謂中國統一文化的局外人，他在文化中看到了內在圖像，並延續創作至今。透過藝術家，或者說是透過一位畫家與畫家的職責，這些事物都能有新的意義、新的神話、與新的歷史。無論是中國、美國、或其他國家的藝術家，也許沒有人能有相同的認知思想了。

### 關於藝術家

趙剛，**1961**年生於北京，生活與創作於紐約、北京、台北。他的藝術生涯啟蒙於在**18**歲時加入的星星畫會。隨後在歐洲與紐約攻讀藝術，先後畢業於荷蘭馬斯垂克州立藝術學院、美國波啟浦夕瓦薩學院、美國哈得遜河畔安嫩代爾巴德學院藝術創作碩士，趙剛於海外生活超過了**20**年，並發展出了一系列複雜的作品。在**2007**年回到中國北京後，趙剛的創作專注在了私人歷史與中國歷史的關係上。他獨特的本地與外地特質影響了他近年來的創作。重要的美術館展覽有：**2019**美國邁阿密佩雷茲美術館「趙剛：歷史畫」、**2016**年智利聖地牙哥當代美術館「通往奴役之路 II」、**2015**年中國蘇州蘇州美術館「偶園」、**2015**年中國北京尤倫斯當代藝術中心「通往奴役之路」、**2011**年中國北京今日美術館「病夫：趙剛」。重要聯展有：**1990**年美國紐約PS1藝術機構／Blum Helman Gallery「門」、**2017**年美國紐約索羅門古根漢基金會「**1989**後的藝術與中國：世界劇場」、中國北京長征空間「原地前進」、**2018**年中國上海龍美術館「轉捩點—中國當代藝術四十年」。重要雙、三年參展則有：**2008**年「廣州雙年展」、**2007**年紐約「PERFRMA雙年展」、**2005**年「橫濱三年展」。

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*Monkey King, 2016, oil on canvas, 280 x 260 cm*

## ***Zhao Gang 21st : Supports / ColorLumps as Anthropography of History***

May 1 – August 23, 2020  
Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts

Curator: Huang ChienHung

Organizer: Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts

Co-organizer: Each Modern

Special thanks to Long March Space, Tilton Gallery, TSO Gallery

Each Modern is pleased to announce “Zhao Gang 21st: Supports / ColorLumps as Anthropography of History” Chinese American Artist Zhao Gang’s first solo exhibition at the Kuandu Museum of Fine Art. Comprised of recent works, the exhibition presents Zhao’s history painting practice as an examination of his own subjectivity and of the premise of History itself. Across two floors of the Kuandu Museum, with works ranging from small watercolor on paper to immersive large-scale oil on canvas, this collection of paintings proposes viewing the artist and his practice in a broad view which challenges our assumptions of history and the shaky ground which it undoubtedly has always stood on. This challenge extends beyond merely serving as a missive debunking the fallacies wrought throughout Chinese cultural history, but also encompasses the ontology of painting itself. What is worth gleaning from this past? What is worth saving? And What does painting have left to offer? Zhao Gang’s paintings offer some sort of answer. Skeptical, coarse, and bawdy answers, though answers nonetheless.

Born in 1961, his family’s Manchu pedigree attracted considerable castigation during the Cultural Revolution. As the youngest member of the Stars Group, Zhao Gang contributed to

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China's earliest modern art exhibitions from the late seventies to the mid-eighties. His activity in a cohort of non-institutionalized artists helped form an underground arts movement, traveling on bicycles between apartment exhibitions across night-time Beijing. He left China, just before the Anti-Spiritual Pollution crackdowns to study in the Netherlands in 1983 and later attended Vassar College in the United States. In New York he played a role in pulling not only a community of Chinese avant-garde artists together, but also created spaces for dialogues with African American artists, and even purchased and ran the art magazine *Art Asia Pacific* for a spell. He lived and worked in New York for over twenty Years before returning to Beijing in 2007, to find a new China, and a new topography of Chinese Contemporary Art.



Scene, 2016, oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm

Zhao Gang the returnee found a Beijing he did not fully recognize. To engage with this new landscape, the artist continued what began in New York in the 90s, a practice towards the more personal, one that revolved around his specific identity, but also stretched back towards history to question the present, drawing from erotica, revolution, poetry, traditional ink painting, Chinese culture's past. In this way, through the personal, Zhao depicts a new Chinese imaginary explored through painting, about painting, and about himself.

One such recurring topic is the often-unrecognized heterogeneity of China, or the non-Chinese within China. In the exhibition's largest work *China Party 2020, 2019*, a panoply of figures makes up this horizontal tableau. A "verdant-robed girl," a bearded Taoist, generals and a Qin emperor gathered around a table, all project a colorful rainbow of a multifaceted Chinese culture. Upon more rigorous inspection, the figures are in fact all wearing the attire of non-Han Chinese, or non-Chinese altogether. Reframed in this context, and rendered with harsh and direct brush strokes, stripping the forms of their historical context and revealing an interior identity through form and color, Zhao gives these non-Chinese, Chinese, a contemporary subjectivity through the inherited and the traditional; one that regards China from within and without.

Comprising another facet of this subjectivity is an untitled body of work from 2018 featuring 39 watercolors. The series frames Russia's October Revolution in a context that includes Chinese history and Zhao himself while addressing identity through links between China, communist revolutions, and also Contemporary Art History. For Zhao, coming of age in China meant there was never one's own Contemporary Art History. Instead what the artist offers is a mix of revolutionary warlords, intellectuals, and the legacy of Imperial China. Once again, through the medium of painting, Zhao Gang is able to shine a light on a precarious aspect of his world through a retrospective turn.

*Intellectual, 2015 - 2017* is a work which is tied to another body of work fixated on a certain group of Chinese intellectuals who took off to Europe, the US, and Japan, after the 1919 May Fourth Movement to receive higher education. Returning to China, with hopes and dreams of building a better homeland, many of these would-be statesmen met unenviable fates. The theme of the simultaneous outsider and insider is no doubt ever present in Zhao's works as he's framed

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them. He is the contemporary analog of these men though in spite of this shares a different destiny.

Importantly this exhibition also draws our attention to deeper displacement with time, shifting from history and sociocultural anthropology, to biological anthropology. *Monkey King*, 2016 touches upon the very origin of homo-sapiens, that is mankind's prehistoric antecedents. Betraying his tendency towards parody, Zhao shows us a sincere creature with potential and intelligence. A figure about to relinquish its throne in the kingdom of animals, and begin the heavy lifting of human civilization. Bright eyes looking out from the canvas, perhaps forward towards the march of human history to come, suggest a range of concern that goes even deeper for Zhao. If traditional Chinese philosophers looked towards the ancients for guidance, Zhao's eyes may be looking even further back.

Whether these portraits represent aspects of Zhao's identity or narrative are no longer in question. Almost all of the works are imbued with some piece of his own historical fate. What *Intellectual*, 2015 - 2017 and *Monkey King*, 2016 offer us is representation of this spectrum. The former is the amalgam of cultures, the latter predates culture. One figure suffers a cruel fate at the hands of his own people despite his learning, the other is removed from this strife because it sits outside the troubles of mankind. Zhao makes clear his position on his circumstance, as Manchu, artist, emigrant, returnee, insider and outsider. History has shown, good intentions and intellect do not exclude you from man's barbarism.



*Coronavirus 1, Coronavirus 2 and Coronavirus 3* (left to right), 2020, oil on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

Another cycle repositions Zhao through court culture and landscapes from literati gardens. In *Coronavirus 3*, 2020 and *Coronavirus 4*, 2020, objects appear from edges of the canvas, cutting off, and de-contextualizing these traditional objects of value. A statue of a buddha becomes an emptied vessel of Chinese culture, both removed from the world that created it, and the people that comprise this culture. Zhao picks and chooses these aspects, not discarding, though not accepting at face value either. This technique draws parallels with his Suzhou Museum solo exhibition "Paramour's Garden" from 2015 and its watercolors of floating figures and architecture, though these oil on canvas works are grounded, and enclosed in interiors, there still a sense of the unhinged.

Landscapes and vistas of China can also be seen through eyes of outsiders, not unlike Zhao. *Map of China*, 2015 takes its inspiration from the cover of German traveler and scientist Ferdinand von Richthofen's 1885 book. A stone stele stands before rolling hills and the Great Wall. Here the foreigner's imaginary is invoked; a western depiction of an essentialist view of

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China is re-appropriated by Zhao, and reworked, but with his assimilated western subjectivity. A mirror is held up to a mirror.

The contemporary is never too far away, and as such neither is history or the historical events that will dot future annals. In fact, the *Coronavirus* series is comprised of 4 works done in Beijing during the height of the COVID-19 viral epidemic across China. In this context, Zhao's practice persisted. In the first of the series, *Coronavirus 1*, 2020, a small dark plant in front of a sill, with a window pane divided into sections, reframes the scene into two pieces. Looking out through these panes, a near-void of white freezes the world in place. Cascading sheets of snow blanket roof tops towards a horizon of grey and dead trees. The red flowers of the houseplant pull us back indoors and out of the cold. Taken with its historical context, Zhao puts the very real aspect of separation, isolation, endurance and tenacity of the spirit born in the face of a contemporary crisis into this historical medium and subject.



*Dialogue*, 2016, oil on canvas, 100x 70 cm

He is an outsider of the fiction that we call a unified Chinese culture. Zhao sees this within these inherited images, trickling down to our present. Filtered through the artist, and through the baggage of painting and painter, these things can take on new meanings, enforce new myths, and posit new histories. No other artist, Chinese, American, or otherwise, has had the singular frame of mind to share such a vision.

## About the Artist

Zhao Gang (b. 1961, Beijing) currently lives and works in New York, Beijing, and Taipei. His artistic career began as a member of the Stars Group in Beijing when he was 18 years old. Shortly thereafter he pursued an art education in Europe and New York; graduating from State Academy of Fine Art, Maastricht, the Netherlands; Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, USA; MFA, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, USA. Zhao Gang lived for over two decades overseas, developing a complex body of work. After returning to Beijing in 2007, Zhao Gang has focused his practice on his personal past with Chinese history. His unique position as a native and a foreigner has influenced much of his recent artworks. His selected museum solo exhibitions include: 2019 *History Painting*, Perez Art Museum Miami, Miami, Florida, USA; *The Road to Serfdom II*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago, Chile; 2016 *Paramour's Garden*, Suzhou Museum, Suzhou, China, 2015; *The Road to Serfdom*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China, 2015; *Sick Man: Zhao Gang*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China, 2011. His selected group exhibitions include: *The Door*, P.S.1 Institute of the Arts/Blum Helman Gallery, New York, USA, Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, USA, 2017; *Marching in Circles*, Long March Space, Beijing, China, 2017; *Turning Point - 40 Years of Chinese Contemporary Art*, Long Museum West Bund, Shanghai China, 2018. He participated in important biennial/triennial exhibitions such as Guangzhou Triennial, 2008; PERFORMA 07, New York; and Yokohama Triennial, 2005.