

# ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART 尤伦斯当代艺术中心

## Zhan Wang: *My Personal Universe*

November 26, 2011. Beijing.

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Exhibition dates:

**Nov. 26, 2011 – Feb. 25, 2012**

***My Personal Universe: Outer***

Nov. 26, 2011 – Jan. 8, 2012

***My Personal Universe: Inner***

Jan. 14, 2012 – Feb. 25, 2012

In his stunning UCCA solo show *My Personal Universe*, acclaimed Chinese sculptor Zhan Wang combines super-high-definition video, stainless steel sculpture, installation and documentary film to recreate the earliest moments of the cosmos and explore the farthest reaches of the human imagination. This all-new project, created with the support of Louis Vuitton, marks the first time that Zhan Wang – who has achieved international fame for his installations and stainless steel sculptures of Chinese “scholar’s rocks” – has held a solo exhibition at UCCA.

### **A tour-de-force of video, sculpture, installation and documentary film**

According to UCCA Director Jérôme Sans, *My Personal Universe* marks Zhan Wang’s most ambitious project to date. In his exhibition foreword, Sans notes the connection between Zhan Wang’s past work and this significant step forward: “Zhan Wang has always been willing to traverse vast distances in the service of his art: he has scaled Mt. Everest to place one of his sculptures at the summit, [and] set hollow stainless steel rocks adrift on the open sea... In *My Personal Universe*, his first UCCA solo show, Zhan Wang moves into an even vaster macrocosmic realm of possibilities with a tour-de-force of video, sculpture, installation and documentary that explores the contours of the visible and the invisible, the inner and outer facets of the universe.”

For Zhan Wang, the *My Personal Universe* project was a chance to explore the idea of an “initial state of being”. He explains: “In 2010, I started to work on the outline of a plan in which I hoped to inquire into nature of an ‘initial state’ by exploding a large boulder with dynamite. You can imagine this ‘initial state’ as referring to the initial state of the universe and the emergence of concepts such as space and time; you

can also imagine this ‘initial state’ in connection to art, or to the birth of form, or to the way all things take shape. We often say that form is the basis of art, but conceptualization is also the basis of art. What then, is the genesis of form and concept? Where do we look to find their origins?”

For the artist, allowing the audience the freedom to explore their own imaginations and ideas about the nature of the universe was a vital part of this exhibition. “Nobody really knows how the universe was born, because the universe has existed for so long. The best that so-called scientific authorities can offer are hypotheses. Perhaps in the end, there is no such thing as so-called truth, and we exist in a space where the truth is unforeseeable. If so, perhaps we should see this as a perfect opportunity, allowing each of us the right to hypothesize for ourselves the nature of the universe and the nature of truth.”

### **Exploring the limits of the inner and outer universe**

The exhibition is divided into two facets, providing insight into the outer universe – space, time, and the origins of the cosmos – and the inner universe, the limitless realm of human creativity and imagination.

**The first facet of the exhibition deals with the visible, or outer, universe.** Six oversized super-slow-motion video projections show an enormous boulder being blasted to bits with dynamite. The carefully-planned explosion, which took place in China’s Shandong province, was recorded from six different angles with high-definition digital video cameras capable of capturing the blast and its aftermath at 2000 frames per second. The result is that we are able to witness, with astonishing clarity, an event that evokes the earliest moments of our universe. The videos are complemented by an installation of stainless steel “rock fragments” modeled from actual blast debris, and a documentary that reveals the complex universe of social and human relationships – the teamwork, humor, frustration and bureaucratic red tape – behind the making of *My Personal Universe*.

**The second facet of the exhibition deals with the invisible, or inner, universe.** For this, Zhan Wang has created an installation of over 7000 stainless steel rock fragments suspended in midair throughout the exhibition hall, their distribution approximating the path of the debris in the first millisecond after the explosion. Using these visual cues, we are encouraged to delve into the universe of our own imagination and ponder the connection between ourselves, the artist

and the universe as a whole.

In a space adjacent to the installation, visitors will have the opportunity to watch *Legend of the Stone*, a behind-the-scenes documentary about the making of *My Personal Universe*. The documentary, which forms an important part of the exhibition, was filmed on location in Shandong and Beijing, and features both Chinese and English subtitles.

Zhan Wang sees the creative process as something requiring long-term planning, and he decided to record the whole process through documentary. Something unexpected occurred, though, after everything was recorded and photographed by Richard Widmer, an American director, and displayed in the exhibition space—a unique relationship between the works took shape. On one hand, we have cosmic events; on the other, the universe of human relationships. Everything the artist encountered, including the various hurdles and differing political views within society, makes up part of his universe. Zhan Wang says, "The *Legend of the Stone* documentary makes *My Personal Universe* an even more complete work. It is macroscopic and yet microscopic; transcendental and yet down to earth. I wanted to capture those unanticipated events, because it's only through the accidental that artistic creation becomes art."

### **A bold step forward for an artist famed for his stainless steel "scholar's rocks"**

In 1995, Zhan Wang began creating the sculptures that would become his lifelong trademark: intricately-wrought stainless steel replicas of traditional Chinese "scholar's rocks". Over the past decade and a half, Zhan Wang's stainless steel rock sculptures have graced galleries, museums and landscapes all over the world. He has even placed one of his sculptures at the summit of Mt. Everest, and set others adrift on the open sea, accompanied by a multilingual message of friendship in case they should be found out at sea or on shore.

"My choice of rocks represented what I believe is the fundamental question: what is it that the world lacks?" explains the artist. "What it lacks is a true understanding of Nature; it lacks an attitude of dealing with Nature with the same profundity with which it treats humanity. In doing this, I went against my original belief that a work was only art if it had human figures. I chose to use stainless steel because in China that represents modernity and eternity, a materialist ideal of something that never rusts."

With *My Personal Universe*, Zhan Wang has taken yet another bold step forward in his artistic practice, while showcasing the strengths that have made him one of China's most internationally-acclaimed artists. By juxtaposing the cold science of what is real with the joyous alchemy of what is possible, Zhan Wang illuminates the cosmos that surrounds us all, as well as the universe that lies within.

Exhibition supported by Louis Vuitton.

### **About the documentary film *Legend of the Stone***

A CNEX Production  
Executive Producer: Zhang Jilan  
Producer: Xu Xiaoming  
Director: Richard Widmer

### **Related Events at UCCA**

#### **Artist Talk: Artist vs. Scientist: Debating the Birth of the Universe**

December 3, 2011 / 14:00-15:30

UCCA Auditorium

Guests: Zhan Wang (artist); Li Miao (research fellow, Institute of Theoretical Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences)

Moderator: Shu Kewen (Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Sanlian *Lifeweek* magazine)

Language: Chinese with English translation

### **Zhan Wang Catalogue at UCCASTORE**

The exhibition catalogue for Zhan Wang's *My Personal Universe* will soon be available at UCCASTORE. In the meantime, UCCASTORE has an excellent selection of catalogues from Zhan Wang's many previous exhibitions.

### **About the Artist**

Zhan Wang (b. 1962, Beijing) is widely recognized as one of China's leading contemporary artists. His sculpturally-informed practice includes installation, photography and video, and challenges conventional notions of landscape and environment, urban and rural, artificial and industrial.

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Zhan Wang's most celebrated work to date is his series of "artificial rocks" –stainless steel replicas of the much-revered "scholar's rocks" traditionally found in Chinese gardens. The mirrored surfaces of these often monumental objects absorb the viewer and the surrounding environment into the artwork, creating an abstraction and distortion of reality, a visual interplay of tradition and modernity. In the artwork *One Hour Equals 100 Million Years – Suyuan Stone Generator*, Zhan Wang recreates the natural phenomenon of rock erosion, designing a machine that compresses the traces of years into a period of hours. In his *Urban Landscape* series, the artist takes his fascination with material and reflection one step further, recreating whole cityscapes – three-dimensional miniatures of London, Beijing, Chicago, and other urban centers – out of gleaming kitchenware and metal cutlery.

Zhan Wang has exhibited extensively at biennales, museums and galleries around the world, including the 50th and 53th Venice Biennale, the National Museum of China in Beijing, National Art Museum of China, Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Hayward Gallery in London, Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, and Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. He has also executed a number of art projects at significant landmarks such as Mount Everest and the Great Wall of China. Zhan Wang is the first contemporary Chinese artist to be included in the collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Zhan Wang currently lives and works in Beijing, where he is an associate professor of sculpture at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

## About UCCA

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is a non-profit, comprehensive art center founded by collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens in November 2007. UCCA presents exhibitions of established and emerging artists and develops a trusted platform to share knowledge through education and research.

## Louis Vuitton and Art

Louis Vuitton's association with art has a long history, For over 157 years, the House synonymous with French elegance and style has been working with the best engineers, decorators and artists. Under the impetus of Marc Jacobs, Artistic Director since 1997, Louis Vuitton has been revitalized and new collaborations with artists such as Stephen Sprouse, Takashi Murakami and Richard Prince have proven the brand's commitment to pushing the dialogue between luxury and

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modern art even further. Louis Vuitton has also established several Young Arts Projects to motivate the growth of young artists.

## About Louis Vuitton

Founded in Paris in 1854, Louis Vuitton is synonymous with the art of travel. Its iconic trunks, luggage, and bags have accompanied journeys throughout time. With the arrival of Artistic Director Marc Jacobs in 1997, Louis Vuitton extended its expertise to Ready-To-Wear, shoes, accessories, watches and jewellery, available in its exclusive network of stores located all over the world.