



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

Zhao Bandi: China Party

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From **5 August to 22 October, 2017**, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) presents the solo exhibition “Zhao Bandi: China Party” in the Great Hall. **The artist’s largest exhibition to date and his first institutional solo show in China**, “Zhao Bandi: China Party” attempts to outline **nearly three decades of the artist’s practice and presents more than a dozen of his works and projects from 1987 to the present**. The included works span fashion design, video, film, performance, and painting. Throughout his career, Zhao Bandi (b. 1966, Beijing) has used art to investigate and reflect on nearly three decades of dynamic transformations, offering a romantic and personal account of China’s evolving reality. For Zhao, social development is a hybrid process, which he has described as “a fantastic party” that conflates the joys and sorrows of life. Sometimes an ardent activist and at other times a calm observer, Zhao steps in and out of this mesmerizing party to chase the rapidly changing zeitgeist with humor and irony. Moving fluidly between ideological critique, value interrogation, and personal expression, Zhao’s work is tinged with a sense of absurdity. And yet for all their playfulness, his interventions earnestly aim to harness the power of media and culture to reshape the contemporary condition.

In the Chinese art world of the 1980s and early 1990s, Zhao Bandi first gained fame as a realist painter, known for complex and virtuosic canvases drawing inspiration from the art-historical canon he revered. Rigid in composition and measured in brushstroke, these paintings often depict quotidian scenes with a narrative undertone, probing the existential and spiritual condition of ordinary people steeped in a specific moment. Works like *Butterfly* (1990), *Letter from Far Away* (1988), and *The Lipstick Girl* (1987) weld personal and historical references in remarkably original and lively ways. In the 1994 exhibition “Captain Moonlight” curated by Hans van Dijk, Zhao Bandi folded several ten renminbi bills into the shape of a flower and placed each of them on top of a rib bone anchored in a vase of blood, conjuring a vision of consumer society that is at once sweet and cruel,

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Exhibition Dates:

5 August 2017–
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Exhibition Venue:

Great Hall

Press material also available
for download from the UCCA
website



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enticing and terrifying (*Nursery Rhyme*, 1994). Beginning in 1996, Zhao moved away from his training and turned to the popular format of advertising photography and the national symbol of the panda to intervene, humorously and trenchantly, in China's inchoate social conditions. Using the symbol of the panda and a visual format that echoed both advertising and propaganda, Zhao realized a series of lightboxes containing public-service announcements, with the aim of generating dialogues between the art world and the public sphere (*Zhao Bandi and Panda*, 1999).

After the year 2000, Zhao's works moved farther in the direction of performance and social intervention. In 2004, Zhao Bandi took two media businesses who published his advertisement photography without acknowledging his copyright to court, where he then unexpectedly subverted the court proceedings by presenting a letter from an ex-girlfriend, leading to his final win (*A Tale of Love Gone Wrong for Pandaman*). More than a parody, the work was a poignant critique of the status quo and a successful attempt at restoring the agency of art in the state's legal system. In 2005, as anticipation of the 2008 Beijing Olympics gripped the country, he held an "opening ceremony" for an imagined personal Olympics in Bern, Switzerland, enlisting a real cast and crowd in his quixotic effort. The 2007/2009 performance project *Panda Fashion Show*—a runway show featuring thirty-one panda-inspired "looks" based on a wide range of social roles, interrogated the sweeping impact of consumer ideology on Chinese society since the onset of economic reform. In it, fashion becomes the stage for a grotesque and gaudy vanity fair. In later intervention projects such as the various *Panda Team Visitation* works, Zhao aims to engage with art as a truly emancipatory and critical force to open a small but deep crevice in a rigid social system. His 2013 feature film *Let Panda Fly* follows the project "Trading Creativity for a Nursing Home," juxtaposed real life events with fabricated episodes to complicate its supposed "authenticity" as the artist and his interlocutors work toward a shared goal.



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In recent years, Zhao has opted to re-examine artistic practice and social activism from a distance, in keeping with yet another historical shift. In 2016, the artist launched “China Party: Chopin,” where relatives and friends gathered upon invitation to witness a young pianist play Chopin while half-submerged in a lake. A video and a new painting depicting this surreal incident will be presented for the first time in this exhibition, serving as the artist’s response to the ambivalent feelings he has experienced in today’s reality.

UCCA Director Philip Tinari observes: “UCCA is proud to present this immersive overview of over three decades of Zhao Bandi’s output. Zhao’s long career provides, at each historical moment, potent ideas about how art can engage with social realities, inspire new thinking, and leave distinctive traces. We look forward to sharing his work, and the poignant, whimsical ideas on which it is based, with our public.”

About the Exhibition

“Zhao Bandi: China Party” is curated by Philip Tinari, Guo Xi, and Yang Zi. The exhibition is supported by Beijing DSH Auto Co.,Ltd., Zhengzhou Jinshui Xiyu Art Center, and Mr. Liu Gang. Additional support comes from LinQi (Beijing) Asset Management Co., Ltd. Lighting support comes from Hongri Lighting. Exclusive audio support is provided by GENELEC. Exhibition production support comes from Green View Club. The exhibition opening events are supported by Wine J. J., Steinway Piano Asia Pacific Co.,Ltd., Ryan Carter Urban Garden Design, and Jing-A Brewing Co.

The exhibition is accompanied by a suite of public programs, including a conversation series that features a talk by French curator Henry Périer on Zhao Bandi’s work in relation to the exhibition, a discussion about the state of realist painting in contemporary art among a dozen artists in front of Zhao’s works on canvas in the exhibition space, a panel discussion on art and copyright which takes



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its inspiration from a legal dispute set off by one of Zhao's works, and a talk about the relationship between art and advertisement. UCCA will also present "Painting Party," a series of workshops for UCCA members and visitors; an experimental theater play starring the artist and the curators; and a live performance incorporating classical piano and modern dance improvisation.

In conjunction with "Zhao Bandi: China Party," UCCA Studio presents a series of children's workshops under the theme "I am an Animal Messenger," with sessions including "Mascot Design," "Fashion Design," and "Conceptual Design." UCCA Studio also launches an open call for children's design of the UCCA Studio mascot, which will culminate in an exhibition for the submitted designs as well as an exhibition of artworks created in workshops during the October holidays.

"Zhao Bandi: China Party" is accompanied by a series of limited-edition products including brooches, phone cases, eco-friendly tote bags, and clothes. Jointly released by UCCASTORE, AIO Lab and Zhao Bandi Studio, these items are available at UCCASTORE and online.

About the Artist

Zhao Bandi (b.1966, Beijing) is a renowned artist and pioneering figure of the Chinese avant-garde movement. Trained as a painter, his practice has evolved to include performance, photography, video, fashion, film, and social intervention. Zhao has been included in exhibitions and presented projects including "Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World" (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2017); "Chopin Underwater" Culture Party (Sichuan, 2016); Zhao Bandi Panda Fashion Show (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2009; China International Fashion Week, Beijing, 2007); "One Man's Olympics" Solo Performance (Bern, 2005); "Zhao Bandi: Uh-oh! Pandaman" (Manchester Art Gallery; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Plymouth City Museum & Gallery, 2004); 48th Venice Biennale (1999); 11th Sydney Biennale (1998); "Moonflight" (Hanmo Art Center, Beijing, 1994); "China Avantgarde" (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Modern Art Oxford; Kunsthal Rotterdam, and further



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venues, 1993-1994); and “A New Painting by Zhao Bandi” (CAFA Gallery, Beijing, 1992). From 1999 to 2004, Zhao Bandi’s public art projects featuring pandas appeared in metro stations, airports and streets of cities throughout China and abroad, including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Milan, London, Manchester, Birmingham, Oslo, and Tokyo. From 2010 to 2013, his art and charity project “Trading Creativity for a Nursing Home” attracted over two million Chinese youth to submit their artworks, the revenue from which was used to establish a nursing home in Kaifeng county, Henan province, which currently houses 46 elderly adults. From 2013 to 2014, *Let Panda Fly*, a film Zhao directed based on his previous projects, was selected by the 29th Warsaw International Film Festival and many children’s film festivals, and enjoyed a wide theatrical release in China.

About the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is the international institution at the heart of Beijing’s 798 Art District. Each year it presents a wide range of exhibitions and educational programs, highlighting artists from China and beyond, and encouraging the public to engage with contemporary art and culture. Opened in 2007, UCCA is a non-profit, non-collecting, non-governmental museum sustained by the generosity of numerous patrons, sponsors, members, and visitors, beginning with founders Guy and Myriam Ullens. In everything it does, UCCA aims to elaborate an inclusive, cosmopolitan vision of China in the world.

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