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ZHUANG HONG YI

Following his solo exhibition at HOFA gallery in Los Angeles the artist sits down for an exclusive interview with our Editor KATARINA DJORIC to talk about his creative spark, social connections and his techniques as well as the art scene in China.

The work of acclaimed Chinese Artist Zhuang Hong Yi who's based between The Netherlands and Beijing, transcends the spacial boundaries of a single art form. He is best known for working in two mediums resulting in delicate three dimensional paintings. The flower theme is inspired both by Chinese as well as dutch heritage and actually created from folded origami rice-paper infused by Hong Yi's powerful mix of colours.

When and how did you decide to become an artist? - I don't think there was a specific point in time at which I just decided to become an artist. Becoming what I am today was a process of which the start is ambiguous. I've always done what I felt I desired. I looked around me at the space that surrounded me and the world that I was immersed in. My obsession with the way we as humans exist within nature has led me to where I am now.

How do you keep your creative spark? What keeps you fascinated? - The world! Both the observable physical one and the psychological world of the mind. I combine what I see with what I experience. Inspiration is all around, so we should never stop looking around. In a way, we should all try to maintain a childlike curiosity of sorts. There's so much going on, constantly, during our daily lives. I'll see a beautiful flower on a street corner, it'll remind me of something or nothing in particular, and I'll find that same flower in the painting I create the next day. How beautiful the colours of nature can get, how they can always surprise you that is what keeps me fascinated.

When you start working on a new piece, do you have a final image in your mind? - I never have a final image in my mind when I start on a new piece; it's too restrictive for me. When I am making an artwork, I have every kind of colour available. It may look a little chaotic as I run around grabbing whatever feels right in the

moment but it's in the moment that I find the right rhythm and flow. I simultaneously tune out and heighten whatever's going on in my mind and what you see on my canvases is the result of that.

What kind of impact do you want to make with your art? - What I want to achieve with my art is happiness, enrichment, and re-enchantment. There is a lot of negativity at large these days. I want people to be able to take a break from all that when seeing the bright colours of my work. I want them to feel a joy by bringing them back to the calmness of nature. It's why the flower is so dominant in my art. Everywhere around the world, flowers represent peace, happiness, and prosperity. We might now all speak the same language but we all read flowers.

Your work can be described as 3-dimensional paintings. Can you tell us more about your technique? - The flowerbeds are made of many layers of folded rice paper. Rice paper is very vulnerable and every single kind of flower demands a different treatment. There's different ways in folding them and colouring them until they look exactly like they're supposed to do, like I want them to. I like to think that tending to my work is similar to tending to an actual flower garden sometimes. It takes time, patience, and care.

Tell me more about your exhibition at the HOFA gallery in Los Angeles? - The exhibition showcased my newest works that I created in my studio in Beijing in the span of a few months and included both landscape and flowerbed pieces. I have had a very good relationship with the founders of HOFA gallery since they started their business with their first gallery in London. They are dear friends to me and we have seen each other grow in our respective careers. To have my work represented in Los Angeles by them is something I am very proud of.

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You are based between the Netherlands and China. How would you characterize the art scenes in those countries? - China's landscape has changed a lot throughout the years and marks of the tumultuous events of the 20th century can still be seen and felt. Art in China had been suppressed in many ways, not the least psychologically. The thing with art, though, is that the creation of it is part of what is inherently human, it always returns. The country is slowly recovering and the art scene is starting to bloom again.

Which artist would you say has influenced your art? - I think the essential influences might have been impressionists such as Monet. In their own ways, they were the epitome of this romantic notion that I chase in both life and art. Impressionism left me with the concept of the importance of observation, and the gravity of raw naked beauty and emotion. But there have been many artists, and many people in general, that have mattered throughout the whole process of getting to where I am today. Van Gogh's post-impressionism has left its mark as much as Vermeer's study of light and darkness. There are so many levels of influence. Bits and pieces of thousands of faces and works of art are on every canvas that I make my own. From Western to Oriental art, from historical to contemporary art, there is no one artist that I appreciate the most.

Do you draw inspiration from other art forms such as film, music or literature? - Art in all its forms and manifestations are studies on life. Films, literature, music and all other kinds of art that I have seen or read in my life have played a roll in the development of me as a person and, consequently, me as an artist.

What are you working on right now? - I am currently working on creating new landscape pieces with different techniques, compositions and colours, but I am also trying to find new ideas for my flowerbed pieces. I never only focus on one piece, there are always a lot of ideas going through my head and I always work on multiple pieces and projects at the same time.

How important are social connections and personal relationships in developing a successful career as an artist? - As much as they are anywhere. Of course, one's own merit is the starting point but there are more things at play. Art is personal, thus surrounding yourself with the right people is a matter of importance. Like I said about HOFA, more than being a gallery I collaborate with, they are my friends. The art world is hectic sometimes. There's a lot going on and you have to know how to navigate it. We have each other's best interest at heart.

Discover more of Zhaung Hong Yi's work on www.thehouseoffineart.com