

# DIEHL + GALLERY ONE

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PRESS RELEASE

## ZHANG HUAN *PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES*

Opening Thursday, December 11th, 7 P.M.  
Exhibition December 12th - January 17th, 2008

*I hear and I forget.  
I see and I remember.  
I do and I understand.*  
Kong Qiu (Confucius)

As either performance artist, film and video-maker, photographer, sculptor and / or draftsman, the art of Zhang Huan is polymorphic in its form and content(s). In essence Chinese his art develops through affective analogy and identification, which is to say the artist's life is somehow embedded in the works he produces in quite a unique and special way. That specifically unique way is to operate in a bi-focalised manner that is either directly personal as physical, or, perversely satirical, in its chosen forms of artistic expression. The drawings of Zhang Huan make this quite clear. Apart from their unique iconography, derived in large measure from para-traditional Chinese sources such as proverbs or possible sayings and the like, they are also layered with numerous different and intended multicultural animal-cum-anthropomorphic associations. Thus the bestiary-like drawings of Zhang Huan are generally executed in ink and/or charcoal on paper, or woodblocks and ink, and incorporate extraneous materials such as ashes and soy sauce, while many are thereafter subsequently mediated and executed by means of the silkscreen technique. The traditional use or convention of ink and charcoal, of ash and soy, is also ironic since soy sauce as a condiment is long associated with Chinese cuisine, but whose origins (at least 2500 years ago) mirror those of the history of ink and charcoal drawing production in China. Soy sauce is the result of roasted grain and

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soybeans passed through a fermentation process. Indeed, a feeling for fermentation and its creative analogy of art as recipe, is something redolent throughout much of Zhang Huan's art – the idea of art and cooking have long been intimately connected within Chinese culture.

Drawings while almost invariably untitled serve several functions for Zhang Huan. There are the drawings that appear as if particular narratives or proverb-like series (most often silkscreen), those which operate as studies or after-drawings of prospective sculpture (usually charcoal), and ink on paper drawings (sometimes with acrylic) which tend to be singular and more densely finished. The crucial point to be made, however, is that drawing-related elements and procedures most often forms the hub of integration for understanding all the other elements of Zhang Huan's work. For example the artist also uses ashes in his ash paintings on canvas or linen, or more formally materialised in his ash heads. And, the role of china ink was crucially important to his early interactive performance works where his face was continually written upon only to be eventually obliterated by the ink text applied to it. In his earlier performances with a donkey (the series called *Window*, 2004) we can find the same donkey or ass that appears among the drawings recently, which is in turn the basis or drawn record of the large sculpture work currently exhibited, and entitled *Feather Donkey*, 2006. The sheer density of interlaced allusions between Zhang Huan's different media, all find their focus as fulcrum in related ways throughout his diverse and expressive drawings.

Imagination as flux and metamorphosis seems clearly to be the second imperative of Zhang Huan, at which point the artist's drawings might be said to link to the artist origins in performance art and photography as a source of record. In this respect the first pencil or brush of the artist was his body itself, as he was a practitioner denied and censored when he finished his studies in the early 1990s in his Chinese homeland. In consequence Zhang Huan's body has always been vital and essential to his work as it has developed over the years. The body as physiology, the body as the site of expression, the body as an interactive entity with the animal and material world, the body-mind convention to often weighed down by factual knowledge that needs to learn again how to liberate the imagination. The photographic art works that document Zhang Huan's performances thus extend the presence of his original thoughts, feelings, and actions.

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The naked body in all its fragility is the living token and expression as to much that Zhang Huan has subsequently achieved. The rich and diverse contents of the current exhibition thereby gives access not only to the immediacy of his work, but by extension simultaneously opens up the parameters of a life both lived and experienced.

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Friday, November 7th, 2008

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