



Zhao Fang 赵放

Zhao Fang's art is a fistful of contradictions. He juxtaposes physical and social conflict, which are so realistically rendered they appear to be almost photographic, with an undercurrent of harmony and delicateness. His subjects are often depicted practicing Kung Fu and are captured in a moment of torsion. He distinguishes the passive from the aggressive through the use of light and shadows, painting the skin of the former in a brighter tone and the latter in a darker. In another series, he also explores the tensions between Eastern and Western culture, by centring in on the arms of two figures holding antithetical weaponry, board games and eating utensils. His dramatic stills are presented from a magnified perspective: a pointed finger jabbing into skin, a hand covering another man's face, a clenching fist landing on a chin. Fragments, rather than the entirety, of the action are shown to create a sense of timelessness, detachment and anonymity for the aggressor and victim. The composition and its dynamics trigger the viewer to question whether the aggressor is acting as a result of offensive or defensive purposes. Zhao Fang uses this to challenge the idea of the victor, instead focusing on the complexity and subtlety that is often left hidden behind relationships. This anti-violence stance is undoubtedly influenced by his personal experience in the People's Liberation Army.

Using the painting vocabulary of classical renaissance, the artist achieves incredible depth of form and movement in human anatomy by poising his subjects in a moment of torsion, receding into and reaching out of the canvas through light and shadow. The sense of beauty, stillness and tranquility he creates is in complete contrast to the content of the painting. Through the use of extensive detail, and emphasis on the movement and engagement of the figures, he is able to create a balance in the scene that transcends the aggression that would otherwise threaten to expose itself. He also indicates that there is an intrinsic physicality in his paintings to draw attention to their shared connection and energy, a kind of interdependence where seemingly contrary forces can only exist in relation to each other. Through this action-reaction, yin-yang phenomenon, Zhao Fang beautifully highlights that there exists an interdependency between us, and inspires a conflict of emotions by transferring the contradictions in the paintings into the viewers themselves.

Born in Jilin Province, China in 1972, Zhao Fang lives and works in Beijing. He graduated from the Jilian Academy of Fine Arts in 1997 before joining the People's Liberation Army and being stationed in Shenyang from 1997 to 2000. From 1999 to 2001 he studied at the PLA Military Institute of Arts, Beijing. He debuted his first solo exhibition, *Fist Power*, in 2006, followed by *Blossoming Fists* in 2009, both at the Schoeni Art Gallery in Hong Kong. Since then, his works have received much critical acclaim, notably he was selected as one of thirty top finalists of the Sovereign Asian Art Prize in 2007.