



Zhang Linhai 张林海

Zhang Linhai started by studying wood engravings as an undergraduate, and has developed as a painter since then. Depictions of bald children wandering through, or flying over, an arid wasteland or countryside village are characteristic of his works. This subject matter was chosen in college, stemming from his personal pain and sadness as a child, and reflects his childhood struggles and his dreams of escape and liberation. The repeated arrangements of his motif display nostalgia and alienation. Drawing from an established artistic language developed during his second year of college, Zhang Linhai rarely sketches his ideas beforehand, and almost always uses oils. He works directly onto his canvas, and allows the narrative to fully develop under his brush. The complexity of the narratives and the details and balance of the composition are striking. His paintings are influenced by 'Realism', 'Social Realism', 'Hyperrealism', and even the surreal, resulting in a timeless, unearthly quality that reinforces the feeling of the darkness of his narratives and the poverty of the oppressed. His apocalyptic vision of the world is rendered through the use of geometry, perspective, and surface texture, as well as a unique range of colours and lighting.

In a recent series, *The Fading Sun*, Zhang Linhai employs a palette of sombre blue against earth tones to create a strong shadow effect. The bald young boys flying across mountains have matured into young adolescents with growing hair that are trying to adapt to city life. For him, painting is a means to escape his poor village, and his work communicates the uncertainty of life and fate. It is a means that became a redemption process; indeed according to the artist himself only the illusionary world of art can save him. Zhang Linhai thoroughly explores the transcendental quality of art and especially painting, which survives its creator and conveys spiritual and mysterious qualities. His works express his interrogation about life, his meditation about fate, and his experience of life's sorrow and happiness. Zhang Linhai communicates his ideas through an obscure and self-liberating highly personalized manner. He is a passionate artist, deeply engaged in painting, which is a primary form of self-expression to him.

Born in Shanghai in 1963, Zhang Linhai lives and works in Beijing. An orphan, he was adopted by a farming family from She County, near the Tai Hang Mountains, Hebei province at the age of one. As a child, he suffered from various illnesses, including polio, and at the age of four, he was to sustain deformity due to pyaemia and femoral infection. Despite his challenges, at the age of 17, Zhang developed an interest in painting and completed a Bachelor's degree in engraving from the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 1990. Since his first collaboration with Schoeni Art Gallery in 2000, Zhang Linhai had garnered much international acclaim, with artworks being sold at major auctions and his paintings finding their way into renowned collections. In 2008, his personal retrospective at Beijing's Today Art Museum, spanning 1995 to 2008, *Stunned Speechless*, received much critical acclaim. He has also had a number of solo exhibitions, not only in Hong Kong but also in Shanghai, Beijing, and Hebei.

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