

## Ravenel Art Presents Four Important Works by Zeng Fanzhi at its Hong Kong and Taipei Autumn Auctions

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Four important works from Zeng Fanzhi's most recent periods will be offered in Ravenel Art's Hong Kong and Taipei auctions this autumn. 'Red Clouds', estimate HK\$6 – 8 million and 'Man and Bamboo', estimate HK\$4.8 – HK\$ 6.8 million will come under the hammer at the Four Seasons Hotel in Hong Kong on Monday December 1. 'Blue Sky', estimate NT\$18 – 26 million and 'Untitled No. 7' from his landscape 'Sky' series will be auctioned at the Fubon National Conference Centre in Taipei on Sunday December 7.

Zeng Fanzhi is perhaps the most mature contemporary Chinese artist both in terms of expression and technique. Concerned primarily with the inner world, reflecting his personal feelings and emotions and those of his friends as they have interacted with society, Zeng has created an unique body of works which stand as major achievements in the expression of the inner mind in its relationship to the fast changing realities of modern Chinese life. Unlike most Chinese contemporary artists, Zeng has not focused on social and political commentaries instead focusing on the alienation and detachment of the individual in a bewildering new world. These universal themes and his masterful painting processes have won him wide recognition worldwide and have ensured that his works are some of the most sought after both locally and internationally.

Zeng studied German expressionism, which was to have a major influence on his work at the Hubei Academy of Fine Arts. Wild strokes, fleshy colors, and brooding expression were to become part of his hallmarks. However, as an artist, Zeng has remained anything but static in both his techniques and expression. Whereas many artists are happy to stay with a winning formula, Zeng's art has progressed in very significant steps over the last two decades showing a constant growth in maturity.

His first two major series, 'Hospital' and 'Meat' were directly influenced by early experiences in his life both of them horrifying for the young introvert. As a young boy he had to use the bathroom of his local hospital and on a daily basis saw the chaotic scenes there. His 'Hospital' series typically portrays uncaring doctors and scared patients. Passing his local butcher's everyday, he would see the workers lying on frozen carcasses in an attempt to cool down in the hot summers. As the young Zeng witnessed the workers covered in blood, he was deeply disturbed. Finding little reception for his early works in Wuhan his hometown he moved to Beijing in 1994. Looking for acceptance of his ideas, he soon only felt isolation and detachment. This is when he created his most famous series 'Mask', where people are wearing masks which hide their true self from society. Well dressed but with vacant or puzzled eyes, these outwardly professional urbanites are masking their true inner selves. In 2000, he began to paint figures without masks, and in 2004, Zeng turned to landscapes and figures in landscapes continuing to explore his concepts of failed community and human loneliness.

'Red Clouds' is a figurative painting of a young man, smoking a cigarette, head lowered, hand in pocket, standing isolated against a broad sky, and surrounded by wild grass. The young man is viewed from a low perspective typical of the 'socialist realist' posters of Zeng's youth. This gives the figure a seemingly monumental presence, towering above the viewer. However, the demeanor and posture of the young man are anything but monumental, he is a figure lost in deep thought, alone with his feelings and troubles. The wild red and black grasses encroach on his lower body and partly obscure his face. The effect of the grass is like a net or a wild plant in our nightmares entangling and ensnaring us. Zeng's dark colors add further to the sense of uneasiness, the wild grass perhaps reflecting our deepest conflicting emotions and thoughts. The red clouds of sunset and the colorless sky speak of isolation and aloneness.

Zeng's technical mastery is also evident in the painting. Deep linear marks are stroked into the paint calling attention to the surface yet they also have deep representational meaning. Zeng uses two brushes at one time and sometimes four. One brush is following his logical mind, the others his unconscious or intuitive one, thus creating a new language combining the destined and the accidental. His chaotic strokes are reminiscent of the calligraphic abstract representational techniques of ancient Chinese art.

'Man and Bamboo' reflects the influence of Expressionism on Zeng. A single solitary figure floats suspended in an empty background gazing at a minimalist rock with sprouting bamboo shoots and whispers of grass. Painted in 2005, the figure is unmasked, revealing a haunted gaze as he stares at the Zen like arrangement of rock and bamboo. Detachment is emphasized as the legs and hair meld into the empty background. The deep fleshy colors of the face and large hands add to the abstract expressionism. The introspection of the character reflects Zeng's own personal life and emotions.

'Blue Sky' is part of Zeng's 'Landscape' Series. Created in 2006, Zeng has moved more away from European Expressionism and more towards the spiritualism of traditional Chinese ink and brush paintings. 'Blue Sky' is a powerful expression of things deep within the artist's soul. In the foreground we are confronted by a dark and mysterious hill covered in wild vigorous grass. In the background is the sky at dusk. Dark and deep blues are offset by a blazing white centre. Darkness and night are approaching yet the wild grasses are strong, vigorous and vibrant perhaps like our deepest thoughts and emotions. Zeng's masterful brush strokes are indicative of his free flowing and subconscious painting style, allowing his moods and emotions to flow onto the canvas.

Ravenel Art's Hong Kong Auction of Modern and Contemporary Asian Art: Monday December 1, 2008: 11:30am-1:00pm, Four Seasons Hotel - Four Seasons Grand Ballroom, 8 Finance Street, Central, Hong Kong. Preview: Friday, November 28 - Sunday, November 30, 10:00am-7:30pm Grand Hyatt Hong Kong – Salon, 1 Harbour Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong.

Ravenel Art's Taipei Auction of Modern and Contemporary Chinese, Japanese Korean Art: Sunday December 7, 2008, 2:30pm-7:30pm, Fubon National Conference Center, B2, No 108, Section1, Tun-Hwa South Road, Taipei, Taiwan. Preview: Friday December 5 - Saturday December 6, 10:00am-7:00pm, Fubon National Conference Center, B2, No. 108, Section 1, Tun-Hwa South Road, Taipei, Taiwan.

Ravenel Art was founded in 1999 and holds two annual spring and autumn auctions in Taipei and will hold spring and autumn auctions in Hong Kong. It specializes in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art, Korean, Japanese, S. E. Asian and Indian Contemporary Art. Ravenel Art also arranges private sales of Western contemporary art. The company has offices in Taipei, Hong Kong and Beijing.

Ravenel Art  
15F-2, No 76, Section 2, Tun-Hwa South Road, Taipei 106, Taiwan  
[en.ravenelart.com](http://en.ravenelart.com)  
David Kearney  
[david\\_kearney@ravenelart.com](mailto:david_kearney@ravenelart.com)  
+886 2 2708 9868 ext 183

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