

**For Immediate Release**

**“Zhang Wenzhi: Tiger in Mountains, Deer at Ocean” and “Zheng Haozhong: Melodic Variations”**

Curator: Leo Li Chen

28 November 2023 – 13 January 2024

Opening Reception: 25 November 2023; Saturday; 4:00 – 6:30 pm

Artist Talk in Mandarin, Zhang Wenzhi in conversation with Leo Li Chen: Saturday 25 November, 5:00 – 6:00 pm

Venue: Blindspot Gallery (15/F, Po Chai Industrial Building, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong)

Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10:30am to 6:30pm (Sunday and Monday, by appointment only); closed on public holidays.

Blindspot Gallery is pleased to present the duo solo exhibition "**Zhang Wenzhi: Tiger in Mountains, Deer at Ocean**" and "**Zheng Haozhong: Melodic Variations**", showcasing the recent paintings of two Mainland Chinese artists. Zhang Wenzhi (b. 1993, Dalian, China) is deeply influenced by the colonial history of the Japanese and Russian Empire in his hometown in Northeast China. The cultural history of the region dating to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent industrialization and modernization of the area are fundamental to Zhang’s practice. He creates ink paintings that incorporate archival materials, exploring the enduring presence of histories, overshadowed by frequent shifts in power and urbanization, in the region’s collective cultural memory. Zheng Haozhong (b. 1985, Shandong province, China) creates portrait paintings of close friends and acquaintances, finding traces of self-expression in the depiction of other individuals. His studio acts as a working space but also a source of inspiration, often serving as a backdrop in his paintings. The window on the studio wall emphasizes the interiority of the space, analogous to his connection to the exterior world. His work is imbued with an expressive and uninhibited character, reminiscent of musical improvisation. The brushstrokes channel the sentiments of his sitters, and teetering on prescribed norms, they are like discordant notes within order. Through different approaches, the two painters share a commonality in exploring how individuals navigate through complex realities, dealing with the internal and external, the past and present, the private and public. Their works reveal a poignant self-awareness that is explored through the language of painting.

In Zhang Wenzhi’s paintings, the model spotted deer, tiger, big goose, hawk, snake bones and other exotic beasts are derived from museum specimens as well as imageries found in mythological tales and folklores. In ***Bay of the Deer*** and ***The Shark-Deer Chronicle***, the depiction of the spotted deer is derived from a stuffed deer specimen in the Dalian Museum of Natural History, a place frequented by the artist. In Zhang’s presentation, he imagines the deer god beyond the confines of the museum display case, juxtaposed against the historically charged landscape of Northeast China. Summoned from the depths of the ancient forests in Changbai Mountain, the deer god traverses the former Russo-Japanese battlefields along the Lüshun Railway. Following the chant of a shaman, it navigates the expanse of Dalian’s Xinghai Bay Cross-sea Bridge above the roaring waves, before diving into the deep-end of the sea and transforming into an aquatic being. The past and present, nature and industrialization, myth and facts are all closely intertwined in Zhang’s painted scenes. He draws in images from archival documents with mythological iconographies, conjuring an imagery that melds fantasy with facts. The long-standing tradition of Chinese ink painting and its continuity to the present day provide an entry point for audiences to read Zhang’s works. The artist uses nature as a metaphor, portraying it bearing witness to the complex history of the region. By examining the geopolitics of Northeast China from the vantage point of Dalian, viewing contemporary phenomena through the lens of modern history, and examining the connections between tradition and modernity, Zhang delineates the unexplored nexus between the past and the present.



The exhibition also features portrait paintings by Zheng Haozhong from the last three years, including portraits of friends, self-portraits, and still-life paintings of the artist’s saxophone, a close musical companion of the artist during lockdowns. ***Four Portrayals of Her and the Melody Horns*** depicts the same young woman from different angles. A triangle occupies the picture plane hence disrupting the repetition of the female sitter and adding dynamism to the composition. Dashes of blue

brushstrokes and dots of gold, freestyle and imbued with momentum, are scattered across the blank canvas. Few of the strokes have been crossed out by the artist as an afterthought, laying bare his thinking process. In *Patterns, Red, AG*, a woman is seated in a striking red dress. Her dress, let-down hair, body posture, the floor, and the paintings hanging behind her are delineated by thick undulating lines, captivating the viewer from afar. In *Inside the Window, in Major*, we are faced with the artist standing from outside the studio window. The interplay between exterior and interior, the vivid hues of green and yellow foliage, and the bold black lines piercing through the picture plane converge to form a dense yet harmonious composition of colors. The self-portrait unveils the inner psyche of the artist as he peers through the window panes, seemingly in deep contemplation.



Zheng's paintings convey the distinctive expressions and gestures of each sitter, these portrayals of friends and companions hint at the subtle and unspoken distance within relationships. They embody an expressiveness that treads the line between figurative depiction and abstract representations, each brushstroke an extension of the artist's performance. Paralleling long and short tones, chords and modulations, his paintings straddle the boundaries of prescribed norms, performing dissonant notes within a dynamic framework.

#### About the Artists

Zhang Wenzhi (b. 1993, Dalian, China) creates collagesque ink paintings which interweave Chinese modern history, folklore, popular science, and archival materials. Using his hometown as an entry point, Zhang spotlights the convoluted history of Northeast China, particularly the period dating in the late Qing Dynasty, delineating the repercussions of the past in the present. The region was once exploited by various colonial powers before undergoing rapid urbanization, leaving it in a collective state of amnesia. Zhang depicts spirit animals and mythological creatures, including the Deer god, pointing to the prominence of shamanism in Northeast China. They become metaphoric of life and prosperity in a place once subjected to trauma and constant shifts in power. In Zhang's paintings, these auspicious creatures are juxtaposed against a vast landscape where historical and mythological motifs are nestled within industrial infrastructures; they bear witness to the region's ever-unfolding changes and complex historical tapestry. Zhang currently lives and works in Beijing.

Zheng Haozhong's (b. 1985, Shandong province, China) figurative paintings, depicting friends, acquaintances and himself in his studio, capture the gestures, expressions, and psyches of his sitters. His paintings carry a rhythmic quality with expressive brushstrokes that are freestyle and not confined within a rigid parameter, mirroring the music he plays. In recent works, the prominence of window frames accentuates the domesticity of his paintings, capturing the isolation experienced by individuals during lockdown and covid restrictions. Zheng delves into an introspective reflection on interpersonal connections, subtly hinting towards the notion of solitary. His work is collected by DSL Collection, The Moegling Foundation, and White Rabbit Gallery. Zheng currently lives and works in Shanghai.

#### About the Curator

Leo Li Chen is an independent curator and writer based in Beijing, China. He was the Director of Research in Magician Space, Beijing, and is an independent curator in Hong Kong and Mainland China. His main research focuses on geopolitics, performativity and moving images, to explore the complexity of identity and subjectivity that transcends geographical barriers. He has curated the exhibitions, "How Far, How Close" (Aranya Art Center, Beidaihe, 2023); "Facets" (Gallery Weekend Beijing Public Sector, 2023); "The Racing Will Continue, The Dancing Will Stay" (Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou, 2019); "Today Could Have Been a Happy Day" (Taikang Space, Beijing, 2018); "That Has Been and Maybe Again" (Para Site, Hong Kong, 2016) and "Adrift" (OCAT, Shenzhen, 2016), among others. He was a resident researcher at Asia Art Archive in 2016, and at MMCA Korea in 2019. He was awarded the New York curator residency fellowship by Asian Cultural Council in 2019.

#### About Blindspot Gallery

Set up in 2010, Blindspot Gallery is a Hong Kong-based contemporary art gallery. The gallery began with a primary focus on contemporary photography and image-based art, and has evolved to include diverse media in contemporary art. The gallery represents both emerging and established artists, mainly from Hong Kong and the region but also beyond.

For media enquiries, please contact Ms. Helena Halim at +852 2517 6238 or by email [helena@blindspotgallery.com](mailto:helena@blindspotgallery.com).

Zhang Wenzhi, *Bay of the Deer*, 2023, Ink and color pigments on paper, 199 x 119 cm (work size), 202.2 x 122 x 4.1 cm (framed size)

Zheng Haozhong, *Patterns, Red, AG*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 200 x 150 x 5 cm  
(Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)