



Long Taiou II (detail), 2019–23, oil on canvas, 230 x 230 cm / 90 1/2 x 90 1/2 in. © Zeng Fanzhi. Courtesy the Artist and Hauser & Wirth.

ZENG FANZHI NEAR AND FAR/ NOW AND THEN

17 April–30 September 2024
Scuola Grande della Misericordia

LACMA

NEAR AND FAR/NOW AND THEN

Zeng Fanzhi (b. 1964) is one of the most protean artists working today. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is delighted to curate this installation of his recent works, presented concurrently with the Biennale di Venezia 2024. Tadao Ando's installation design takes full advantage of the magnificent historic spaces of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia, which hosts the debut of two of Zeng's recent bodies of work: new abstract oil paintings and works on handmade paper rendered in ink, graphite, chalk, and gold dust, among other mineral pigments.

Zeng's art is a study in dichotomies, and the works presented here engage two types of materials: one thick and topographical, another thin and translucent. As a consequence, Zeng's work demands two opposing approaches to viewer engagement—one distant, the other intimate. Zeng's practice also draws on both Asian and European traditions, creating a hybrid visual experience that incorporates, interprets, and synthesizes opposing worlds. Rooted in tradition and yet unambiguously contemporary, his art at once challenges and celebrates the notion of ownership over certain cultural artistic methods. Ultimately, Zeng's work declares the benefits to these intercultural exchanges, both creatively and beyond. This work is especially celebrated as a balance of technical mastery and emotion. *Near and Far/Now and Then* sheds new light on Zeng's ambitious painting practice, and Ando's architectural intervention illuminates the interconnections that Zeng's new body of work highlights.

Upon entering the ground floor of the Scuola Grande, one is introduced to the classical proportions of the 16th-century building, bracketed by two large multi-panel oil paintings, one alluding to Buddhist iconography; the other, Christian. Ando's exhibition design initiates a dialogue between the old and the new, integrating a contemporary lighting concept that breathes life into the antiquity of architecture. This illumination casts shadows of the pillars onto the floor and orchestrates a conversation between light and darkness, accentuating the historical context. On the upper floor, the space is divided into five thematic sections, introducing various subjects, including water, trees, *arhats* (original disciples of the Buddha), skulls, and both spontaneous and tightly controlled abstractions of light. Here, Ando's design features a progression of walls with increasingly large apertures, each of which is self-contained yet connected with the others. The audience is encouraged to follow this progression to reach the largest painting in the exhibition, implicitly experiencing the principle of perspective. A selection of Zeng's smaller-format oil paintings and works on paper are featured in and around Ando's temporary walls. Against the backdrop of the Scuola Grande's majestic spaces—steeped in history and richly decorated with frescoes—Zeng's project grounds his audience in the visceral experience of art.

PAINTINGS

In Zeng's oil paintings, the artist simultaneously draws on and challenges impressionist and pointillist painting practice, whereby images materialize only through the careful placement of individual marks of color, as exemplified in the work of Impressionist predecessors. Drawn from Zeng's profound study of color theory, this latest body of abstract paintings loosely depicts traditional Christian and Buddhist imagery. Executed with lively brushwork applied layer over layer, the figurative elements are readily visible and recognizable from afar. When viewed up close, the images dissolve and ultimately disappear into the materiality of oil paint. Tonal variations in one color give way to interwoven schemes of colors, often with more than 30 bright hues in one image.



Water IX, 2019–23, oil on canvas, 230 × 230 cm/90 ½ × 90 ½ in.
© Zeng Fanzhi. Courtesy the Artist and Hauser & Wirth.



Ephemerality, 2019–23, oil on canvas, 480 × 480 cm/189 × 189 in.
© Zeng Fanzhi. Courtesy the Artist and Hauser & Wirth.

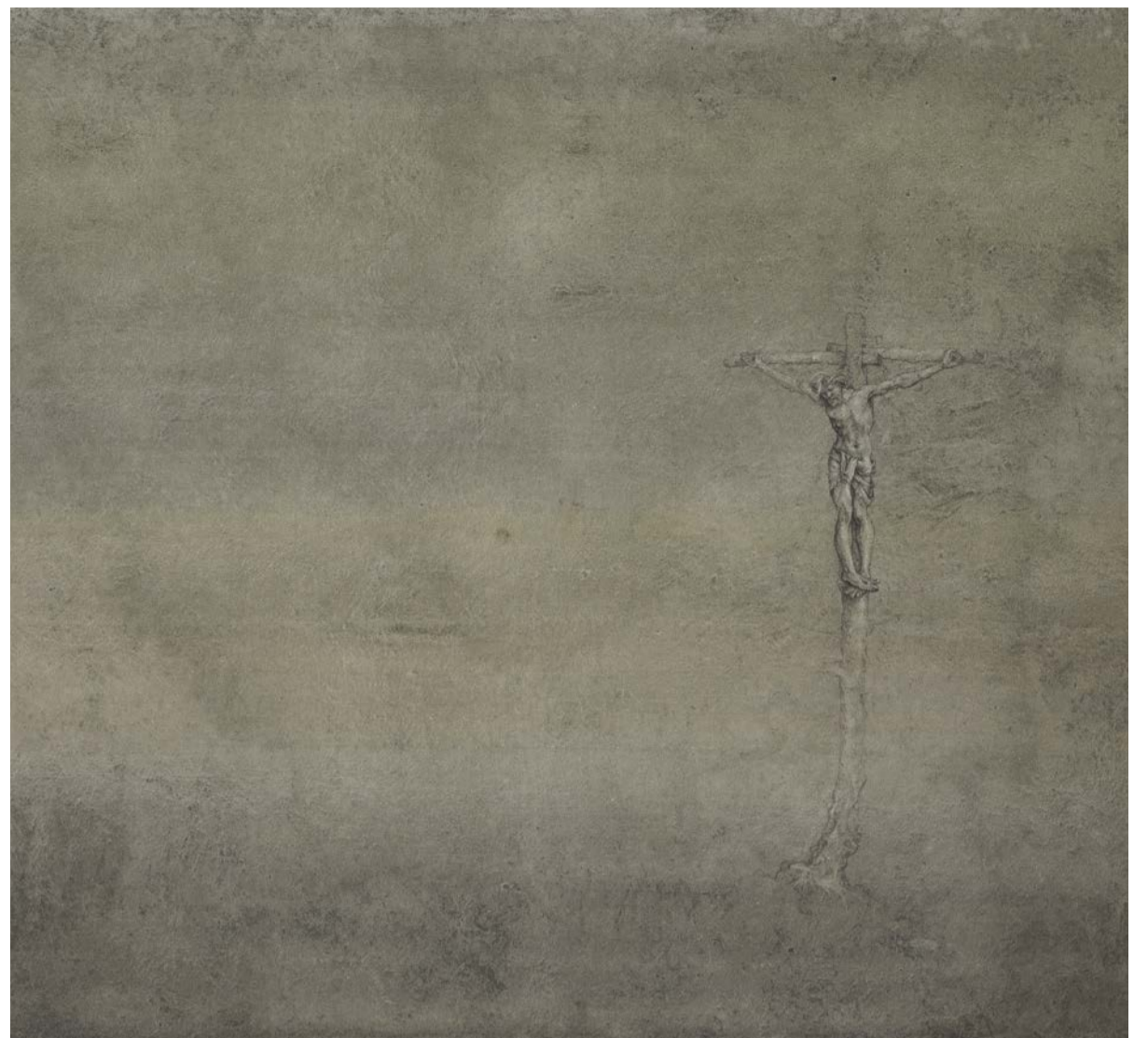
The installation provides an in-depth glimpse into Zeng's command of oil painting, his wet-on-wet technique, and the sheer materiality of paint that defines his work. In a world now inundated with machine-rendered images, Zeng challenges viewers to recognize the superiority of painting as a time-honored art and craft. The artist has said he "refines the abstract through the exercises of the figurative/representation and vice versa," suggesting that this visual give-and-take leads the viewer to a deeper understanding of each practice.

WORKS ON PAPER

The smaller-scale but no less monumental works on handmade paper comprise a parallel direction in Zeng's work since 2009, solidly grounded in ancient Chinese theories and practices of ink painting, as well as in the intimacy suggested in European Old Master drawings. These subtle monochromatic works point to a completely different focus in Zeng's practice, in which he ambitiously combines Christian, Buddhist, and Chinese literati iconography.



Old Trees (detail), 2014, handmade paper, mixed media, 78.3 × 62 cm / 30 ⁷/₈ × 24 ³/₈ in. © Zeng Fanzhi. Courtesy the Artist and Hauser & Wirth.



Crucifixion (detail), 2021, handmade paper, mixed media, 60.2 × 119.7 cm / 23 ³/₄ × 47 ¹/₈ in. © Zeng Fanzhi. Courtesy the Artist and Hauser & Wirth.

These drawings recall the apogee of Chinese monochrome ink landscape paintings of the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, while also evoking the spatial ambiguities of ink landscapes of the late Ming- and early Qing-dynasty painters Hongren, Dai Benxiao, and Zou Zhilin. The subject matter moves fluidly from the crucifix to representations of rocks and old trees—symbols in traditional Chinese culture of strength, resilience, and longevity. As with Zeng's paintings, these exquisite drawings defy categorization in their alignment with the great traditions of Asian and European art.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

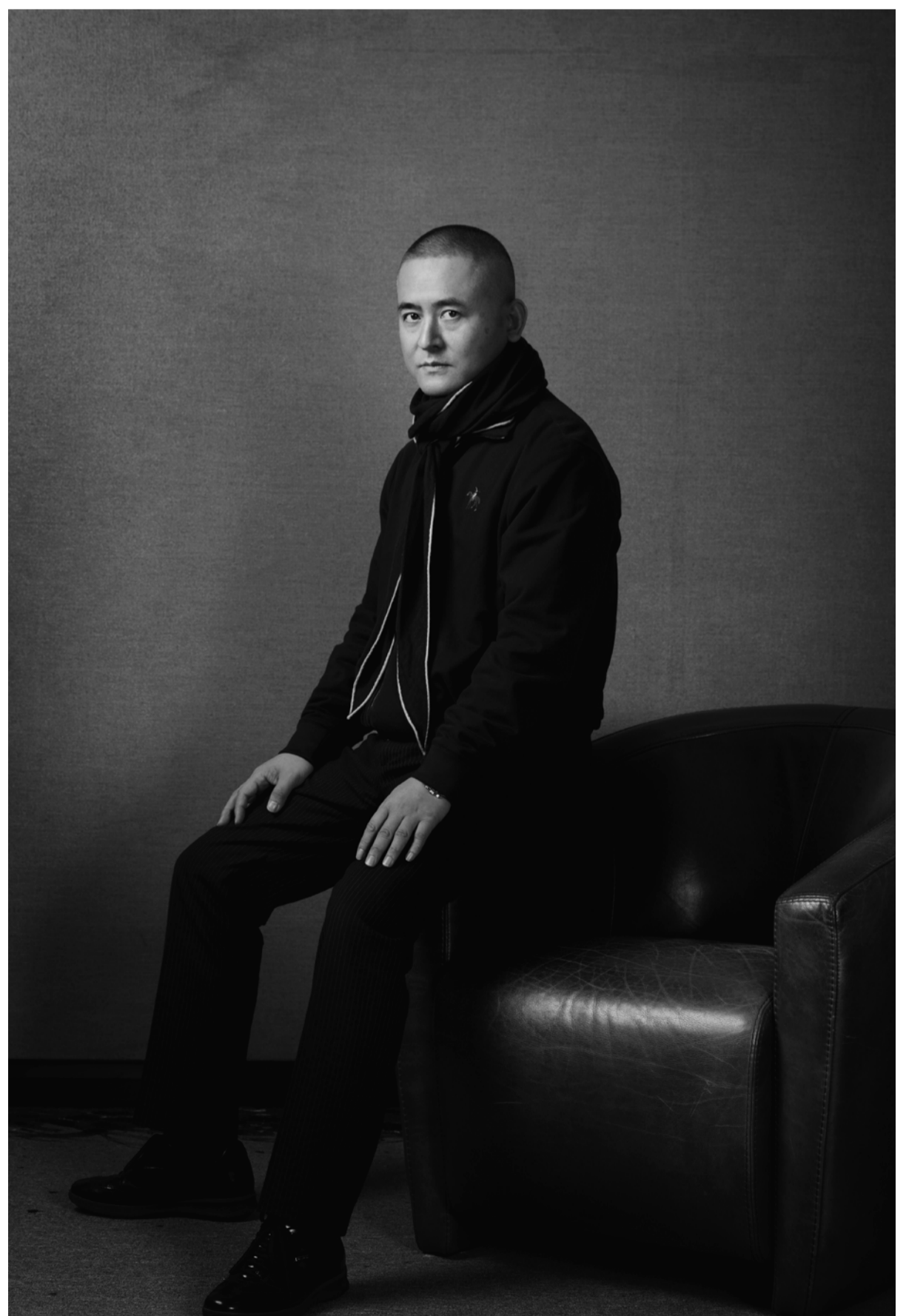
Born in Wuhan, China, in 1964, Zeng Fanzhi graduated from the Hubei Institute of Fine Arts in 1991. During his early education, Zeng immersed himself in Western art and philosophy, as well as the social realist techniques of the 1985 New Wave movement in China. These interests became definitive in shaping his earliest series of paintings, *Hospital* (1991–92) and *Meat* (1992). Both bodies of work are characterized by an approach that is at once objective and tender, while also capturing the agonizing pain of his subjects with an empathetic brush. These works set the stage for an intensely personal and expressive painting practice that documents a prolific period of social and economic development in China.

Working in the wake of rapid Chinese modernization and urbanization, Zeng turned his attention to figures from the industries around him. Inspired by artists such as Francis Bacon, Willem de Kooning, and Max Beckmann, he produced his *Mask Series* (1994–2004). In these works of portraiture, Zeng straddles realism and imagination, reflecting on his life with meticulous attention to technical detail.

Over the past two decades, Zeng has reacquainted himself with Classical Chinese painting philosophy, and particularly art from the Northern Wei to Song and Yuan dynasties, from the fourth to fifteenth centuries. Informed by these new interests, Zeng has moved further into abstraction. The works in his *Abstract*

Landscape Series (2002–23) are highly gestural scenes that share the dynamic energy of his portraiture and investigate the complex tensions between nature, wildlife, and humanity. These canvases are traversed by meticulous calligraphic lines, which blend with and obscure the legible objects in the background.

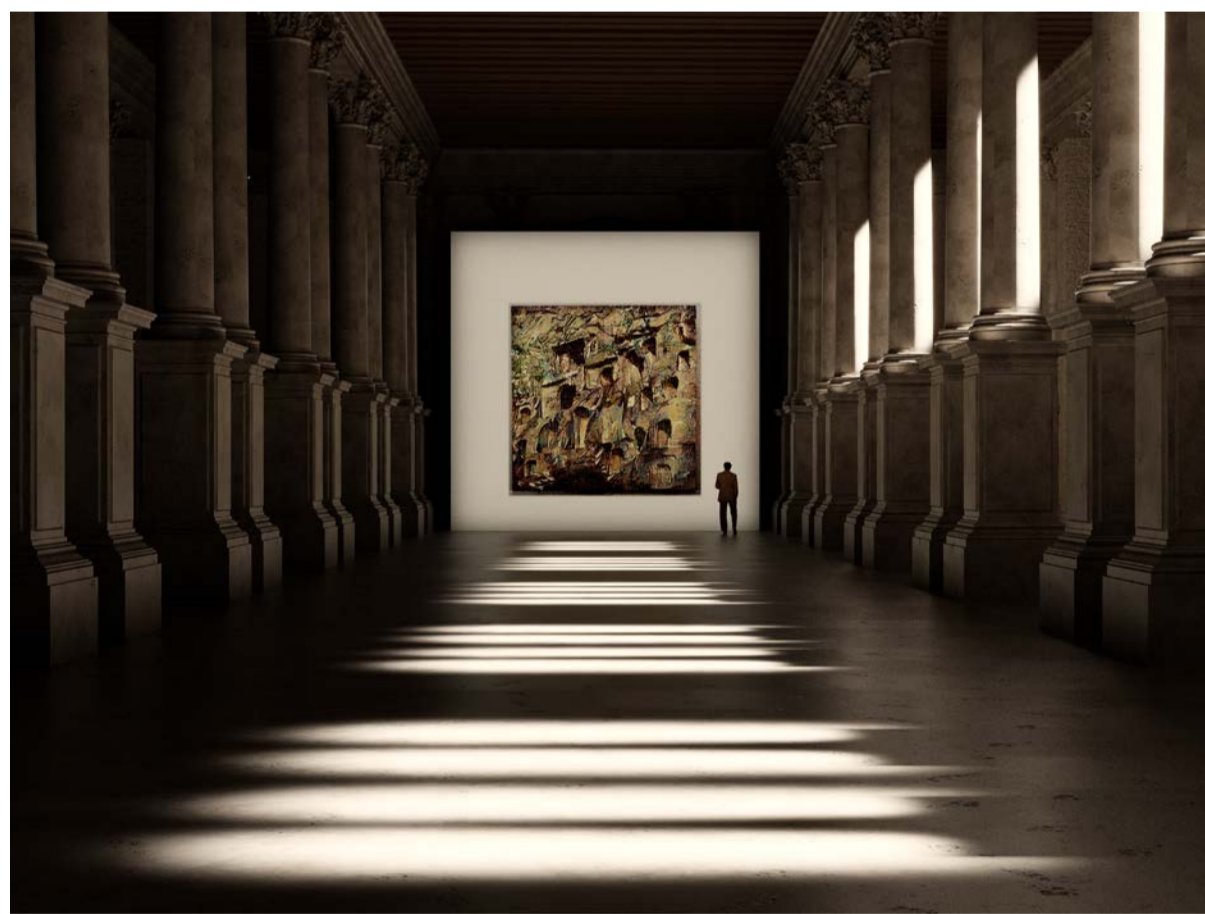
Zeng's practice of consistently challenging and reinventing himself has cumulated in the new body of art featured in this exhibition. The artist's experimentation with approaches, sensibilities, and painting practices have allowed him to respond to the diversity of the human experience.



Portrait of Zeng Fanzhi. Photo: Li Zhenhua

ABOUT THE ARCHITECT

Born in Osaka, Japan, in 1941, Tadao Ando is a world-renowned self-taught architect. He established Tadao Ando Architect & Associates in 1969. His representative works include the Church of the Light, Osaka; Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, MO; and Chichu Art Museum, Naoshima, Japan. He has received numerous awards, including the Architectural Institute of Japan Prize (1979), Japan Art Academy Prize (1993), Pritzker Architecture Prize (1995), Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects (2002), Person of Cultural Merit (2003), Gold Medal of the International Union of Architects (2005), John F. Kennedy Center Gold Medal in the Arts (2010), Order of Cultural Merit (2010), French Order of Arts and Letters (Commandeur; 2013), Grande Ufficiale dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia (2015), Isamu Noguchi Award (2016), and French Legion of Honor (Commandeur; 2021).



Light and Shadow, rendering in conceptual stage, in support of Tadao Ando's space design for *Zeng Fanzhi: Near and Far/ Now and Then* © Tadao Ando Architect and Associates

His work has been the subject of major solo exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1991), Centre Pompidou, Paris (1993, 2018), and Armani/Silos, Milan (2019). He has been a visiting professor at Yale, Columbia, and Harvard Universities. Since 1997 he has been a professor at the University of Tokyo and is currently a professor emeritus.



Portrait of Tadao Ando. Photo: Kinji Kanno

ABOUT LACMA

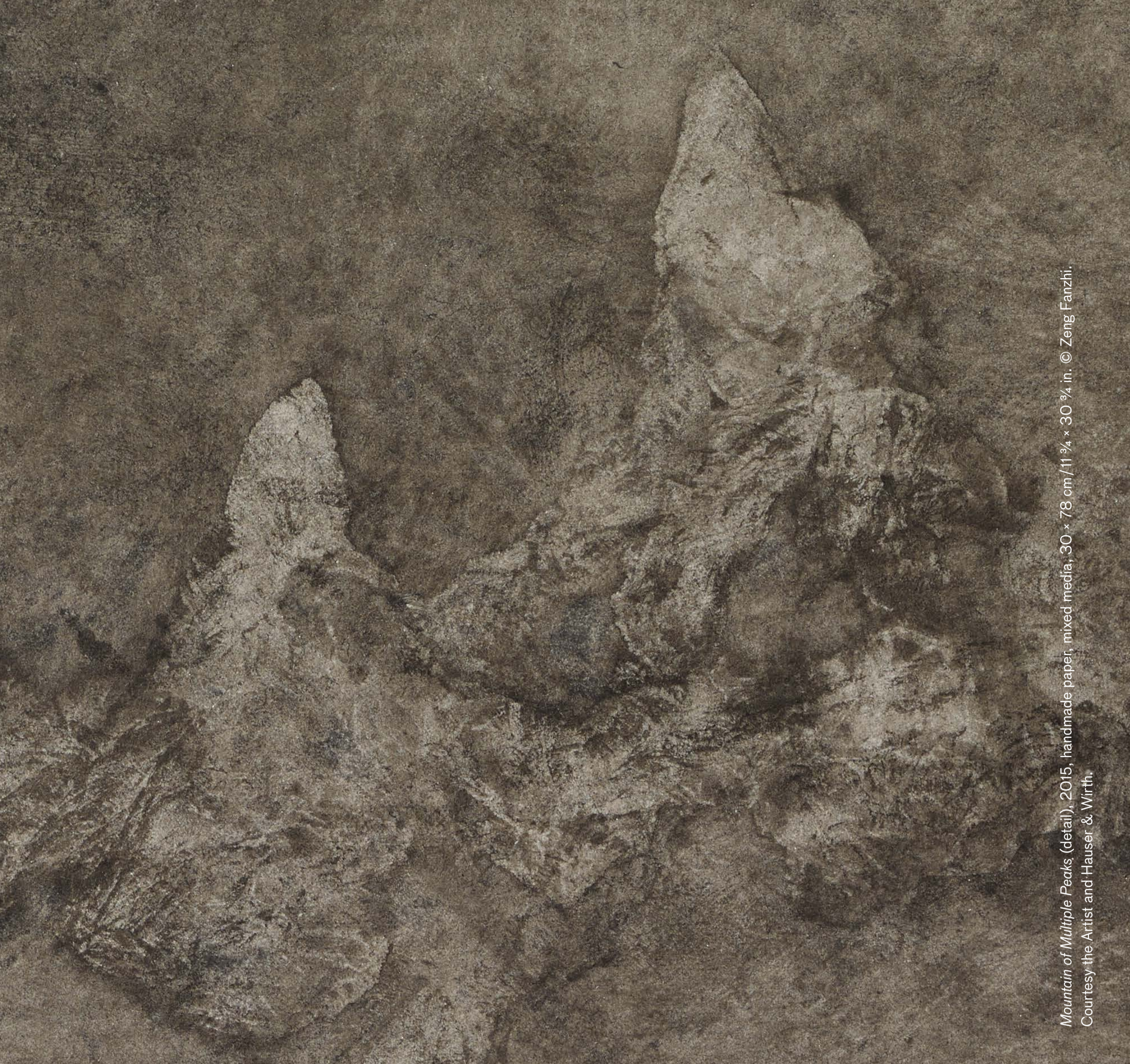
Located on the Pacific Rim, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 152,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. LACMA is committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories and strives to ensure that the museum can be a place of reflection, expression, and empathy for everyone.

Over the years, LACMA has developed a robust program of Chinese art through groundbreaking exhibitions, international partnerships, and key acquisitions. Recently, the museum has strengthened its holdings in Chinese contemporary art. In 2019, LACMA acquired Zeng Fanzhi's monumental painting *Untitled 2018*, thanks to the generosity of Dominic and Ellen Ng. Other key acquisitions include the promised gift of over 400 contemporary Chinese ink paintings from the Fondation INK in Geneva in 2018, and the acquisition of Ai Weiwei's *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* (2010), a gift of the late Budi Tek in 2022. In Los Angeles, LACMA has presented numerous exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art, with highlights including *The Allure of Matter: The Material Art of China* (2019), *Ink Dreams: Selections from the Fondation INK Collection* (2021), *Legacies of Exchange: Chinese Contemporary Art from the Yuz Foundation* (2022), and *Ai Weiwei: Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* (ongoing).



Visitors at Chris Burden's *Urban Light* (2008), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Urban Light* is made possible by Willow Bay and Bob Iger, and is open 24 hours a day thanks to their generosity. Special thanks to the Brandon-Gordon family for their founding support of the 2008 installation. © Chris Burden/licensed by The Chris Burden Estate and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

LACMA is a vibrant cultural space for more than one million annual visitors, thanks to the ongoing expansion and upgrade of the museum's 20-acre campus. The museum's transformation will culminate with the addition of the David Geffen Galleries, a new state-of-the-art building for the permanent collection designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Peter Zumthor. The David Geffen Galleries embody LACMA's vision of a museum for the 21st century—an inclusive, non-hierarchical space that makes art more accessible. The David Geffen Galleries also opens up 3.5 acres of new outdoor public space while further integrating LACMA into the surrounding park. With construction scheduled for completion in late 2024, the museum is in the final stages of realizing its next chapter. LACMA's revitalized campus will embody the future of a big art museum—one that is rooted in openness, accessibility, and equity. We hope to welcome you to Los Angeles soon so you can experience it yourself.



Mountain of Multiple Peaks (detail), 2015, handmade paper, mixed media, 30 x 78 cm / 11 3/4 x 30 3/4 in. © Zeng Fanzhi.
Courtesy the Artist and Hauser & Wirth.

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The exhibition is co-curated by Michael Govan, CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, and Stephen Little, Florence and Harry Sloan Curator of Chinese Art and Department Head, Chinese, Korean, and South and Southeast Asian Art.

Major support is provided by East West Bank, Mr. and Mrs. Cheung Chung Kiu, Simian Foundation, Clara Wu Tsai, and Hauser & Wirth. Support for this exhibition is also generously provided by LACMA's Global Ambassadors.



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