
Press Release**Zhang Huan
Berlin Buddha****30 September – 8
December****Private View
29 September, 5-8pm****Performance – 7pm**

For the first large-scale exhibition at its newly opened gallery space, Haunch of Venison Berlin is pleased to announce the unveiling of a major new installation, *Berlin Buddha*, from Chinese artist Zhang Huan.

Berlin Buddha, a four-metre-high sculpture made from compacted incense ash, sits opposite the aluminium mould from which it has been cast. On the eve of the exhibition opening, Zhang Huan will remove the final aluminium plates from the ash Buddha's face, causing the figure's head to crash to the floor, leaving the rest of the ash figure to crumble slowly over the course of the exhibition.

This monumental sculpture represents the culmination of Zhang Huan's 'ash works'; a series of paintings and sculptures made from incense ash. Collected weekly from temples around Shanghai, the ash is sifted into different tones and grades from fine dust to large flakes. It is then applied to large canvases with an impasto technique, or else piled and bound into sculptural works, including a series of ash busts modelled on the artist's own face.

While incense ash has long been revered by eastern cultures for its spiritual and medicinal properties, Zhang Huan views this unique and poetic medium as the direct embodiment of a nation's collective memory: the literal debris of the dreams, hopes and remembrances of the millions of people for whom incense-burning is an almost daily ritual.

A large-format ash painting, *Young Mother*, provides a striking backdrop to the *Berlin Buddha*. Zhang Huan explains the appeal of the image, sourced from an old photograph of a young woman in 1930s Shanghai: "One afternoon in the studio, I saw two streaks of light shining onto the lower section of this unfinished painting. This brief moment felt magical to me. I followed these streaks of sunlight and quickly fixed ash residue from burnt white paper to the painting surface. This is how I came to finish the painting; the inspiration came from a moment of illusion."

A series of Zhang Huan's celebrated *Earth Life* insect paintings will occupy the mezzanine level of the gallery. Large, pale, luminous canvases featuring life-size painstakingly hand-painted dragonflies, mosquitoes, ants and cicadas.

A key figure of Beijing's 'East Village' community in the early 1990s, Zhang Huan came to international prominence through his radical performances, in which social

and political concerns were articulated through acts of physical endurance. 12 *Square Metres* (1994) famously saw him squat for an hour in a public latrine while flies swarmed around his naked body.

Following a period of seven years in New York, Zhang Huan returned to China where his practice diversified to encompass traditional media such as painting, sculpture and printmaking, as well as ambitious large-scale installations and mixed media works. Today he runs a studio complex in Shanghai's southern Min Hang district where he is supported by over one hundred studio assistants.

This exhibition has been organized in co-operation with Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin.

For further information and images please contact: Claire Walsh
Call +44 (0) 20 7495 5050 or email claire.walsh@haunchofvenison.com

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Editors' Notes

Zhang Huan

Zhang Huan (b. 1965, He Nan Province) studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and now lives and works in Shanghai. His work is held in a number of important public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, The Saatchi Collection, London, the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

In September 2007, the Asia Society in New York will mount the first ever museum retrospective of Zhang Huan's work. Curated by Director Melissa Chiu, the exhibition includes more than fifty works spanning performance, photography, sculpture and painting from all periods of the artist's career.

