



Future Greats: Zhao Yang

Jilly Ding Kit Features 26 July 2017 ArtReview Asia



Zhao Yang, *Across Sea*, 2016. ARA Summer 2017 Future Greats

Zhao Yang was trained in Chinese figurative ink painting, but today his artistic output juggles inspiration from the Chinese masters with Western painting traditions. The tension evident in his oil and acrylic paintings – most often depicting one or two obscured figures in a washy-coloured landscape – is not just the result of the coupling of a traditional aesthetic with a conceptual approach, but also stems from the subject matter itself. The 2016 painting *Across the Sea*, exhibited at the artist's recent exhibition at the Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts in Taipei, is typically enigmatic, for example. Two silhouetted figures are shown standing in a canoe rowing across dark blue waters to a mountain in the far distance (the canoe is a frequent motif in the artist's work). *Man Holding Stone* (2015), exhibited in the same show, is stranger still: a burly male figure is shown in an abstracted landscape, yet the man has a pair of thick horn emanating from the top of his head.

Having worked as an illustrator for a children's-book publishing house in mainland China for over a decade, Zhao's artistic vocabulary evolves around the apparent interpretation of symbols and metaphors – indeed these mesmerising fictional spaces and characters have seemingly fallen from the artist's extensive reading of mythology, classics and poetry – yet the viewer is left free to provide their own interpretation as to what is going on, who these people are or why they've been brought to the canvas. Throughout his work, Zhao constantly foregrounds his fascination with the complexities of human emotion, experience and history, all embedded in and expressed through the simplest of painterly fashions.

Zhao is based in Beijing. He recently exhibited at Shanghart Gallery, Shanghai; Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, TNUA, Taipei; and Good Chance Space for Contemporary Art, Shenzhen.

From the Summer 2017 issue of ArtReview Asia, in association with [K11 Art Foundation](#)

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