

ASIAN ART MUSEUM
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for Asian Art & Culture

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NEWS



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Zheng Chongbin: I Look for the Sky

Asian Art Museum Debuts West Coast Solo Exhibition of Site-specific Architectural Interventions



San Francisco, Nov. 10, 2020 — What happens when the invisible is made visible? That question animates a new two-part exhibition by Marin County-based artist Zheng Chongbin (American, b. China, 1961) debuting this month at the Asian Art Museum. In dialogue with the museum's comprehensive transformation project, *Zheng Chongbin: I Look for the Sky* explores how the

manipulation of light can profoundly change our perception of architectural space over time, opening new avenues of connection, contemplation, and awareness.

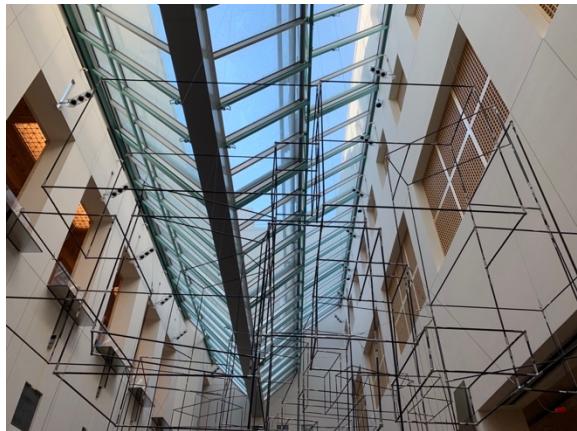
In Bogart Court, a 5,000 square foot glass-enclosed atrium on the north side of the museum, Zheng has suspended dozens of enormous scrim and acrylic panels that vary in transparency and pattern, directing the flow of natural light and manipulating visual sightlines to create a novel spatial experience. For this installation, titled *I Look for the Sky* (also the name of the exhibition), Zheng was interested in engaging with ideas of transparency and the free flow of light that architect Gae Aulenti emphasized in her 2003 renovation of the museum's 1917 building, which originally served as the city's Main Library. Zheng's exploration of transparency and light as mediums is also influenced by the Southern California Light and Space artists of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as his residency in a historic Japanese Zen Buddhist monastery in 2019. The installation will be on view until late 2021.

A second installment, coming January 22, 2021, will be Zheng's *State of Oscillation*: a gallery-filling installation comprising ink paintings, videos, and a chamber made of translucent material. By navigating through this ephemeral compartment suffused with overlapping projected video imagery, visitors will catch glimpses of Zheng's paintings and other works mounted on the perimeter wall. *State of Oscillation* manipulates perceptions of presence and absence, solid and void, immersion and circulation. The gallery will be open and on view until August, 2021.

Zheng Chongbin, portrait of the artist, photo courtesy the artist.

“Sensitivity to subtle temporal and physical shifts, a heightened awareness of our bodies moving through space, flux, self-transformation—these are the critical actions Zheng’s art enables,” says exhibition-organizer Abby Chen, senior associate curator and head of contemporary art at the Asian Art Museum. “The artist likes to say that ‘experiencing is a cognitive journey.’ *I Look for the Sky* invites our audiences to slip into that journeying state of mind, where we linger, allow ourselves to really look and feel, and emerge more fully aware of change.”

In her previous role at the Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco, Chen worked with Zheng in 2011 on his groundbreaking solo exhibition, *White Ink*, which marked a key shift in his artistic practice. Now, *I Look for the Sky* reimagines the Asian Art Museum in spatial and conceptual terms, creating new encounters for visitors through the integration of Zheng’s artistic inquiries and the site-specificity of the museum’s many architectural styles—from the Beaux-Arts, to the Postmodern, to the contemporary.



“This exhibition responds to light. In any given space, there is always a light and a shadow. Light and shadow have influenced every culture from past to present. Light triggers perception and allows us to directly see the world,” says Zheng. “Art should not be afraid to connect the visible with the invisible, building a path to worlds typically beyond tangible experience.”

I Look for the Sky is the first new site-specific installation at the Asian Art

Museum since its 2017-2020 transformation project, which saw the refurbishment of lobbies, public spaces, and galleries, and the addition of a new exhibition pavilion and art terrace. Designed by architect Kulapat Yantrasast, a chief goal of this project was to enhance the museum as a platform for contemporary Asian, Asian American, and Asian diasporic voices.

“Just as the museum’s spaces flow together now in a way that guides audiences to make previously unseen connections between artworks from different cultures and time periods, so *I Look for the Sky* shows us how even slight changes in our point of view can radically transform how we relate to the world,” says Jay Xu, Barbara Bass Bakar director and CEO of the Asian Art Museum. “I’m thrilled to share Zheng’s vision with our visitors, and invite them to explore his ‘floating playground,’ to ask questions of one another, and to challenge received ideas about how space ‘works’—it’s a light-filled antidote to the claustrophobia of these times.”

About Zheng Chongbin

Zheng Chongbin has lived and worked as an artist in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1988. Throughout his practice, Zheng aims to convey and capture the vitality of matter. In his abstract paintings, he works to demonstrate (rather than illustrate) processes found in nature, through the organic interactions of ink, acrylic, paper, and light. In his videos and installations, Zheng

explores the structures that comprise the world—from cellular systems to solar systems—and the way that order emerges from within our inherently chaotic existence. Zheng studied classical ink painting at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, as well as conceptual and performance art at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Exhibition Organization and Publication

Zheng Chongbin: I Look for the Sky is accompanied by an original catalogue published by the Asian Art Museum, featuring new essays by Zheng Chongbin, Abby Chen, and Maya Kóvskaya.

Zheng Chongbin: I Look for the Sky is organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Presentation is made possible with the generous support of East West Bank, Lucy Sun and Warren Felson, and an anonymous donor. This installation is a part of the *Asian American Experience*, which is made possible with the generous support of Glen S. and Sakie T. Fukushima, an anonymous donor in memory of Ambassador and Mrs. Sampson Shen, and Claudine Cheng.

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About the Asian Art Museum

Located in the heart of San Francisco, the museum is home to one of the world's finest collections of Asian art, with more than 18,000 awe-inspiring artworks ranging from ancient jades and ceramics to contemporary video installations. Dynamic special exhibitions, cultural celebrations and public programs for all ages provide rich art experiences that unlock the past and spark questions about the future.

Information: 415.581.3500 or www.asianart.org

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Hours: Thursdays, 1p.m.–8 p.m. Fridays–Mondays: 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays: Closed

Admission: Free for essential workers, SFUSD students, children 12 and under, active duty military. General Admission: \$15; Seniors (65+) and Students (13–17): \$10. *There are no special exhibition surcharges.*

Access: The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access: 415.581.3598; TDD: 415.861.2035.

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