

# ZHOU SONG

OSTHAUS MUSEUM HAGEN  
KUNSTRAUM VILLA FRIEDE BONN  
NORDART KUNSTWERK CARLSHÜTTE



OSTHAUS MUSEUM HAGEN, GERMANY

# ZHOU SONG

Zhou Song (b. 1982, Jiangxi, China) graduated from the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 2006. His paintings and sculptures explore intersections between machine aesthetics and biomorphism at the nexus of art, science and philosophy; they imagine futures at once posthuman and deeply humane. Whether questioning the potential outcomes of contemporary sciences, or the impact of the constant expansion of the universe on human desire and destiny, Zhou's paintings thrive in a state of contradiction and openness.

In recent years, he has held solo exhibitions at the Osthaus Museum Hagen in Germany, Kunstraum Villa Friede in Bonn, Guardian Art Center in Beijing, How Art Museum in Shanghai and Today Art Museum in Beijing. His works have also been part of group exhibitions and art projects at multiple institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona, Grand Palais in France, Fortezza da Basso in Florence, Kunstraum Villa Friede in Bonn, University of Vienna, European Cultural Center in Venice, YBL Creative Arts Center in Budapest, Sotheby's in Los Angeles, Toronto Art Center in Canada, Palacio Schacht in Chile, Inca Garcilaso Culture Center in Peru, Museum of Contemporary Art in Panama, Panama Canal Museum, National Gallery of Costa Rica, National Art Museum of Venezuela, National Art Museum of China, Today Art Museum, Guardian Art Center, Times Art Museum, the Yue Art Museum, Guangdong Art Museum, Chongqing Art Museum, Wuhan Art Museum, Chengdu Museum of Modern Art, Duolun Museum of Modern Art in Shanghai, Ningbo Art Museum, Wuxi Phoenix Art City Museum, Xi'an Tianlang Art Museum, Chengdu Wenxuan Art Museum, Shenzhen Guanshanyue Art Museum, the He Xiangning Art Museum, Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts Museum, NordArt2023, the 59th Venice Biennale parallel exhibition "Personal Structures", the 13th Havana Biennial, the 3rd International Biennial Conference on Robo-Philosophy and the 11th Florence Biennale in Italy.

He has received many important awards, graduating with the first place BFA thesis from the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts (2006) and placing bronze at the National Art Academy's Excellent Work exhibition (2006), as well as receiving the "Painting Award" at the 5th May 4th International Youth Art Festival (2012) and the "Lorenzo International Installation Art Award" at the 11th Florence Biennale (2017).

Zhou currently lives and works in Beijing.

P. 6 – 7 Exhibition Exterior View: **Zhou Song**, Osthaus Museum Hagen, Germany, 2023





KARL-ERNST-OSTHAUS  
MUSEUM

**ZHOU SONG**  
22.04. - 11.06.2023

Curators:  
Tayfun Beigin  
Zhang Zikang

Osthaus Museum Hagen  
Museumsplatz 3  
58699 Hagen, Germany

...tten!



**REQUIEM** Oil on Canvas, 150 x 130 cm, 2023

P. 10 – 15 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Osthaus Museum Hagen, Germany, 2023

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# ZHOU SONG'S WORLD VIEW

Tayfun Belgin

Zhou Song is an internationally acclaimed and innovative artist. In his work, the artist pictures varied pictorial worlds, which on the one hand appear realistic but gradually reveal themselves as hyper-realistic reshapings of completely new realities.

What does our reality comprise? How is our current existence defined? Are we inclined to see the future positively or do we side with those who believe that the apocalypse coming? These questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no since they concern complex developments that concern both the individual human individual and relate to surrounding social contexts, the country, the state, and humankind in general. Art does not provide an answer to these questions any more than politics do, nor do wise thinkers who grapple with traditional philosophical queries. But art has the possibility, through content and techniques, to show people things that they have not perceived before—and this also impacts the works of Zhou Song.

I was initially fascinated by the pictures in Zhou Song's "Inflating" series, which are precise in terms of painterly technique and breathtaking in their treatment of the subject. It is useful that an artist like Zhou Song develops theses in his paintings in a direct, and sometimes less direct way, using them to make strong arguments. The strength of his theses is achieved not through blurred imagery or abstraction, but through the mastery of a refined painterly technique. Zhou Song's paintings provoke challenges in the viewer. He challenges our sensibilities when he represents people in the shape of giraffes, depicts them as feet in pointed shoes with high heels, or wraps the body with thorns so that a triangular head peeks out at the end, similar to the above-mentioned animal. What an intelligent depiction of a human caught in a high-speed world! Zhou Song calls the painting *Heaven* (2022), which means sky as well as height, evoked by a slender body moving upward. Is this body a giraffe in a zoo captured by people and marked with the number 1? Is it a person who feels like a giraffe, someone who is trapped in the career that they have pursued? Or is the depiction a joke, a cynical view of the world, or an image for reflection?

When such paintings—which are 2.45 m high or taller—are displayed in a museum, they are forceful. Zhou Song infuses many of his works with inimitable humor, which is, following his work, seemingly necessary to survive in a society that has made great advances yet still sometimes lacks development in interpersonal relations. Wherever people live, certain communal traditions persist, while other social forms of relations emerge.



**CYBERSPACE** Oil on Canvas, 200 x 160 cm, 2022

Us (2021) is one such painting, depicting two people pressed to each other. In the upper section, we see a dark blue suit wearing a white shirt, tie, and sunglasses, seemingly lying on top of a man with a lighter suit stretching diagonally from the upper right to the lower left of the painting. Both are not by any means lightweights. Where did they meet? Perhaps in the metro, which at times does not permit an inch of individual autonomy, as everyone—intentionally or otherwise—touches each other closely due to the lack of space? Wherever—the specific location does not really matter. Us is a symbolic image. It shows us our life in highly civilized societies. The perfectly cut-out fruit of the painting A New World also fits this aim: the melon is sharply painted as a pointed triangle, the cherries as small irregular squares, as well as the apples and other fruit as other geometric shapes. The theme is masterfully varied in Zhou Song's work.

Zhou Song sees an artificiality in everyday life that defines our civilization. Ancient philosophers from ancient China and Greece likely would have been horrified had they encountered fruit wrapped in plastic. They definitely could not have imagined fruit that grows in nature presented in such an artificial way. However, our current existence in nature is very distanced. We have been „making“ nature work for us for a long time, to the extent that it provides us with vitamin-rich products. Step by step, our culture has brought artificiality into our living rooms, into our supermarkets, and thus into our everyday lives. Artificiality takes hold daily—there is no escape from it.

To this end, Zhou Song, who always meticulously follows developments in the natural sciences, has further addressed the issue of how artificial intelligence is helping to shape our everyday lives in his large-format paintings (series: Entropy). We are in the middle of its reach: human robots, automated driving, smart homes, facial recognition, music streaming, medical diagnosis, navigation, digital voice assistants and more—humans are more frequently and urgently transferring their intelligence to computers. Again, progress is radically transforming due to artificiality.

In the large-scale painting New Genesis (2017), robots acting anthropomorphically conquer the world through wars. Ruins and remnants of human existence linger in the leftmost part of the frame: a lying pregnant woman, an antique nude sculpture, a broken car, remnants of cities and industrial buildings. In the left corner, a dropped atomic bomb releases its mushroom cloud. On the right, a group of robots march with mechanical steps toward an unidentified target. They communicate with each other as they move forward.

This is an outstandingly well-executed horror scene, with our future depicted in greyscale. The robots have taken over our world, which the famous computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: A Space Odyssey ultimately failed to do after fighting with a human crew. The neuroses that HAL progressively developed during the journey to the planet Jupiter demonstrate the vulnerability of all intelligent systems.



**MOON FAIRY** Oil on Canvas, D160 cm, 2022

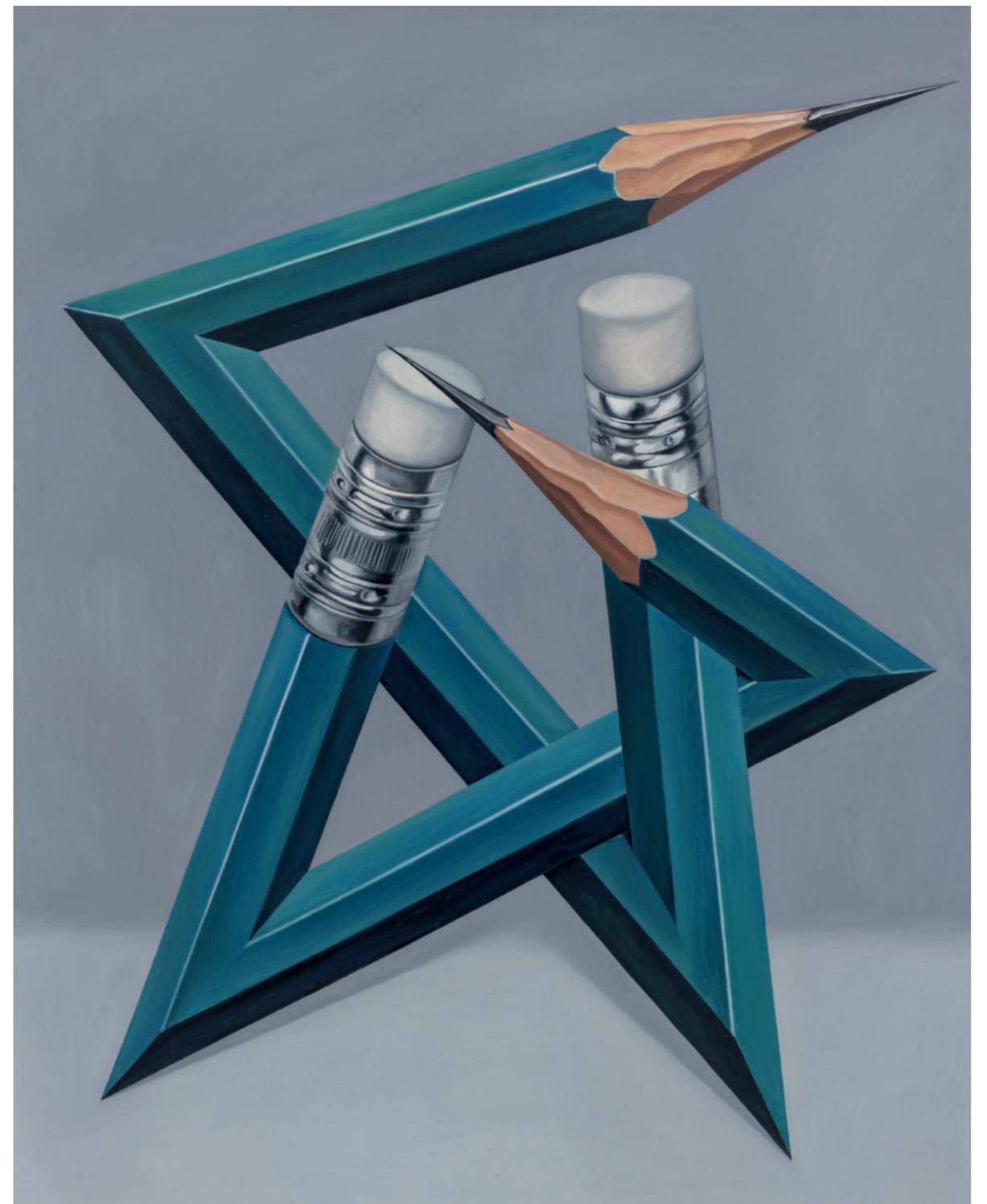
It is only logical that Zhou Song also deals with the topic of human intelligence in his work. His paintings such as *Field of Consciousness* (2016) or *Stream of Consciousness* (2015) concern the brain's operations. In *Matrix*, we then see a fetus that has begun its growth, while in *Zero-Gravity* (2017) an already-delivered human lies in a crouching position on hard ground.

Of course, a large part of painting or sculpting deals with aesthetics. This can refer to concepts of beauty, which is the focus of numerous works from the history of art, beginning with technically brilliant works of the Renaissance until the end of the nineteenth century. Modern art began to change the concept of aesthetics as grounded in notions of beauty, sometimes even reducing it to absurdity. As great as the achievement of the ready-made was to modern art theory, their intellectual impact was actually minimal. Buying a bottle dryer in an iron store in Paris (1914), signing it, and then selling it is a bold act. To align one's entire artistic output with ready-mades is an even bolder one. The above-mentioned practices championed by Marcel Duchamp found many professional imitators who took up his avant-garde ideas, right up to Piero Manzoni, who exhibited a work made of 90 tin cans, each reportedly filled with 30 grams (1.1 ounces) of feces. The label featured the following description in Italian, English, French and German: Artist's shit, Contents 30 gr. net, Freshly preserved, Manufactured and canned in May 1961.

Part of Zhou Song's artistic strategy is to sometimes exaggerate aesthetics, especially in his *Red Field* series. One painting, titled *Soldiers Weeping V*, shows a rifle cut in half, which reveals the inside of human muscles in various shades of red. For me, no depiction of a rifle has ever advanced such a menacing presence. One stands before this painting and many associations suddenly come up: war, devastation, injury, death. This picture touches the viewer! Therefore, this kind of representation is exactly the appropriate aesthetic, because it concerns the depth of human coexistence. This theme also touches on animals such as fish, which Zhou Song sometimes treats with a harsh red color. In one such painting, fish innards are also depicted—an unpleasant sight.

However, the exhibition ends with an oversized strawberry sculpture, reconnecting viewers with more conventional aesthetic concepts. The strawberry is both painted precisely and hyper-realistically or presented as a small metal sculpture.

Zhou Song's spectrum of artistic work is extraordinary. As a painter and sculptor, he can approach the objects in this world in a seemingly pleasant aesthetic and translate them impactfully into an artistic medium. But this seemingly pleasant aesthetic can be deceptive. The realistic touch of his paintings can end up translating as an uncanny hyperrealism. This is why exhibitions of Zhou Song's works always provide adventures in viewing.



**CIVILIZATION** Oil on Canvas, 150 x 120 cm, 2022

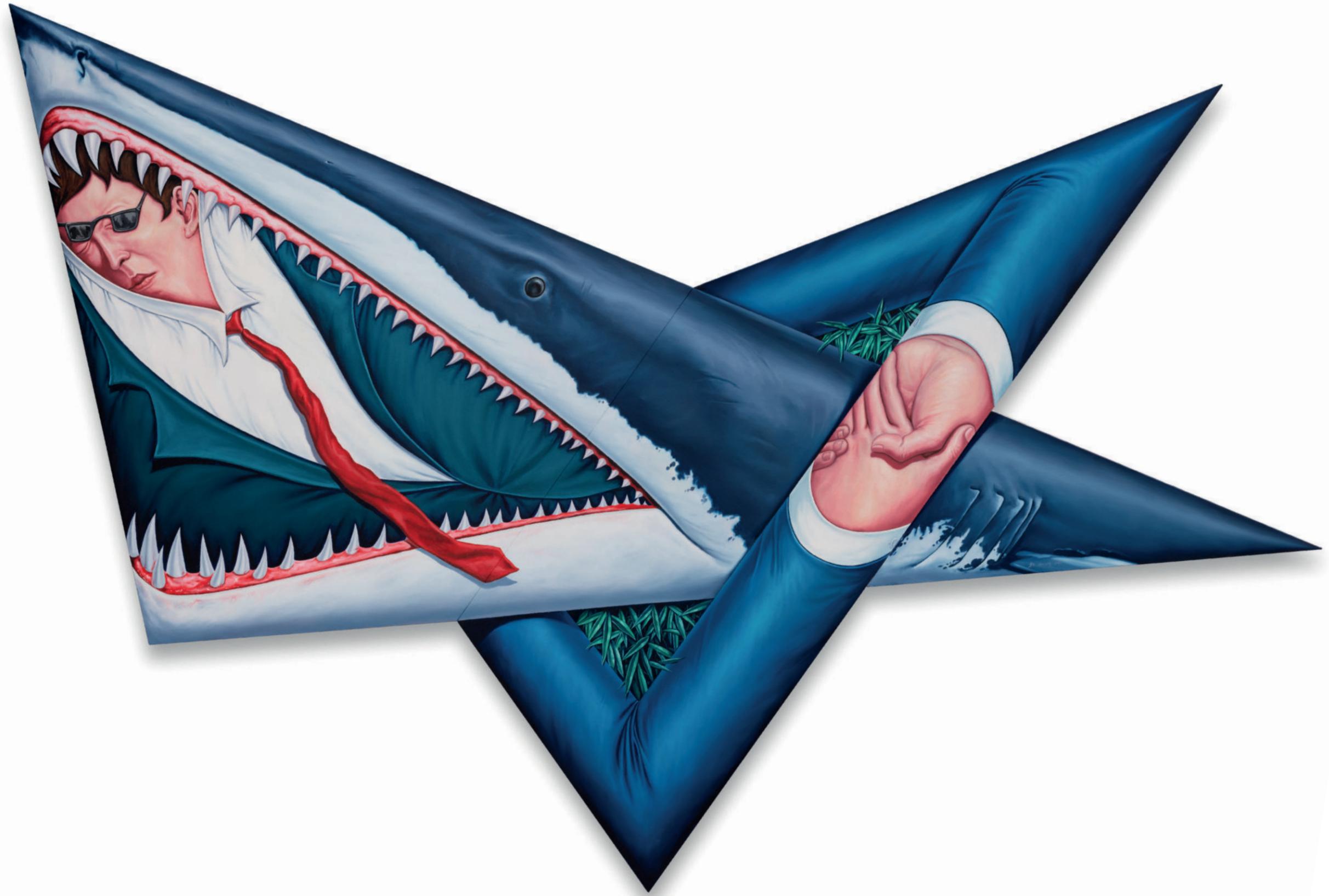


**THE MYTH OF ETERNITY** Oil on Canvas, 232 x 160 cm, 2021



**TIGER**

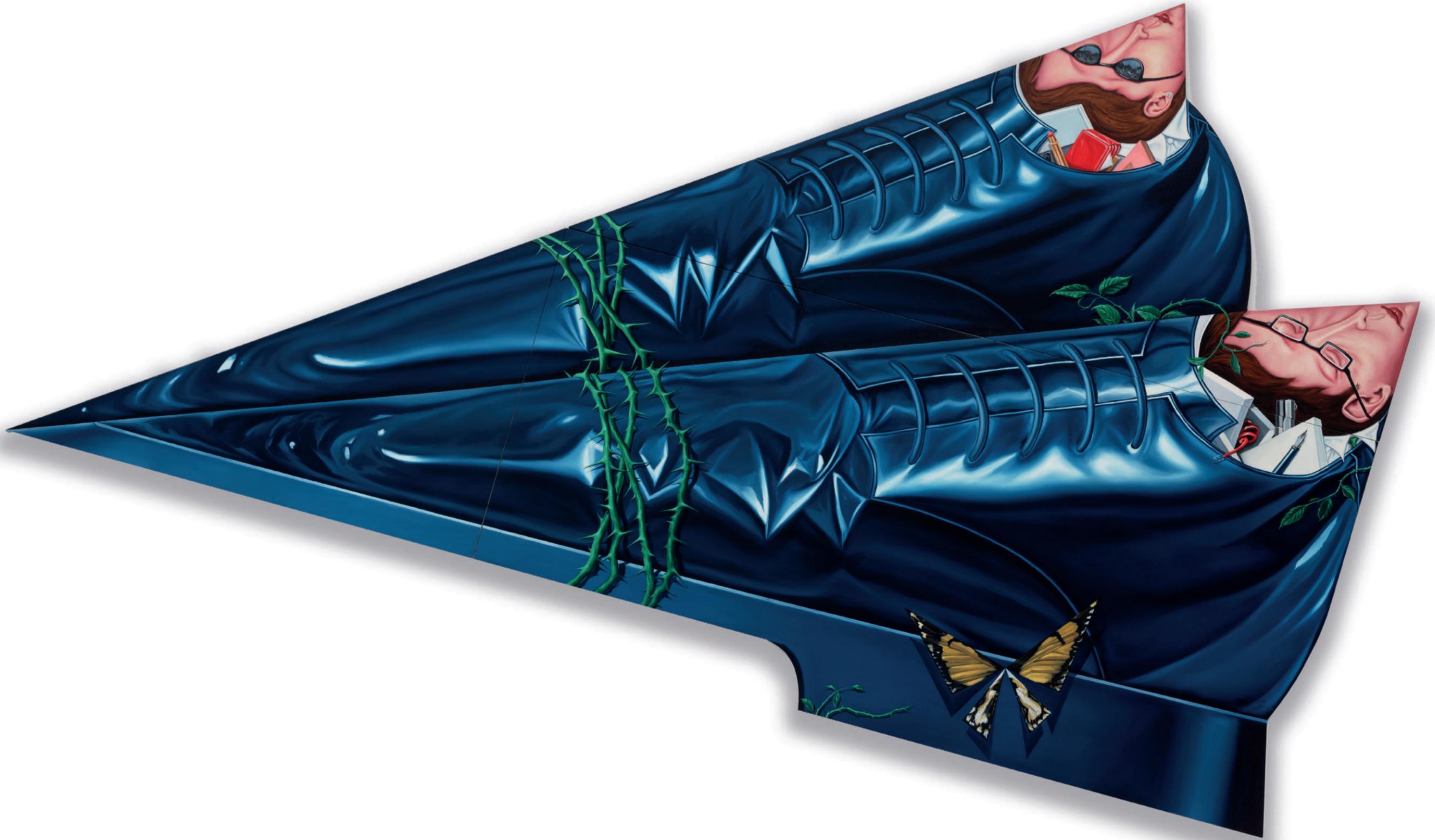
Oil on Canvas  
160 x 200 cm, 2022



**UNIVERSE SPIRIT EQUATION** Oil on Canvas, 340 x 223 cm, 2022

P. 28 – 29 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Osthaus Museum Hagen, Germany, 2023





**THE IMMORTAL BODY** Oil on Canvas, 380 x 230 cm, 2022

P. 32 – 33 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Osthaus Museum Hagen, Germany, 2023



# ZHOU SONG'S ART

Zhang Zikang

Appreciating the works of artist Zhou Song is a process of constant questioning and introspection. What this artist gives is not the answers, but the questions we are waiting for.

Zhou Song has a broad vision and universal humanistic care, he constructs a mutual cultural context with his artwork. His works have skilled artistic techniques and profound philosophical speculations, rather than being limited to any technique, concept, or category, he adheres to the respect for the content itself. For him, skill is a way of thinking and his incisive expressions are sharp and clear.

In Zhou Song's paintings, the fusion of image and color constructs a strong collision in its visual presentation, this highlights the harmony between similarity and opposition, while realizing the balance between complexity and minimalism. The structure and details of his paintings are exhibitions of the artist's thoughts and attitude. The deformation in his paintings are harmonious where plain and solid figures aesthetically coexist, and the space-time crisscross and virtual reality is never a simple beauty of form, but a reflection.

Zhou Song's "inflating" series of works are visual images full of sense and dry humor at first sight, which inevitably makes people wonder whether it was under the influence of pop culture. However, the combination with "good-looking" will not dismiss the connotation of his art with insight. Based on the application of geometric elements and the framework of main composition, the artist emphasizes the richness of painting as a language. He also highlights the emotional relationship in the cold abstract diagram, which constitutes the contradiction of extrusion and resistance, this echoes with the creative theme of his paintings. It is a further exploration and artistic practice of cold abstractionism. Magritte's surrealism is reinterpreted through formal design and the selection of elements. Is it surreal over surreal or actualization of surreal? The inflating body forms two kinds of spiritual guidance in the structure of the picture: looking from the inside to the outside or looking from the outside to the inside. Is it inbound or outbound? The most complex human images are single, indifferent, and diverse natural objects, which has become the amplifier of human moods and emotions. Tao follows nature. Man, and nature achieve spiritual unity and convey the contradiction between each other. People are implicit and resistant due to complexity, while natural things are explicit and carefree, which makes the artist's expression trenchant, humorous, sharp, and direct.

With hyper realistic techniques, Zhou Song's "entropy" series form a profound reflection between real existence, scientific, technological imagination, and virtual future. Zhou Song brought conceptual art into hyperrealism, expanded the historical concept of hyperrealism, led hyperrealism to conceptual art, and built a better communication of emotion and concept. Rooted in historical facts and social times, the artist represents what he sees and hears, his thoughts and feelings, this establishes a strong connection with the viewer. The bloody and flesh body carries the temperature and beat of life itself; technology transmits the relative mechanical sense. Is knowledge, energy, and intelligence simply survival or common prosperous? Beyond the eyes of the artist is the nested eyes of the viewer and the eyes of the times, this structure of multiple examinations form multiple perspectives. The intersection of oriental and western cultural symbols, the relationship between man and nature, society, science and technology, the cultural metaphor of animals and plants, the sociological significance of human's movement, emotion, appearance and dress up, the historical fragments of civilization evolution, scientific and technological development, etc. These are all full of tension formed by Song's humorous and contradictory observations.

Looking back on the creative process of Zhou Song, it is clear that he keeps exploring different sequences of works and he puts forward a serious examination within the social reality of artistic techniques. It can be found that under the transformation of oriental philosophy, western philosophy's exhaustive logic, and deductive pursuit of his works have changed. There is no difference between master or slave, you or me, creators or admirers, trapped ones or onlookers, society or nature, experience or unknown, individual or group, human or science or technology, subversion or inheritance, present or future, real or symbolic, existing or imaginary. Both sides are aesthetic and reflective subjects, dialectical to each other.



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The artist Zhou Song's external image is elegant and easy-going, but the style and subject matter of his works are unconventional and unpredictable. From his series of works such as "New Genesis" to "Inflating", we can not only appreciate his exquisite painting techniques: ultra-realistic detail depiction, large-scale picture control, and the presentation of irregular alien frames, but also observe his creative clues that continue to move forward according to his own independent and keen thinking concept.

Ren Rong  
Founder of the Kunstraum Villa Friede, Bonn, Germany

**THE TURF** Watercolor on Paper, 76 x 57 cm, 2023

P. 38 – 39, Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Kunstraum Villa Friede, Bonn Germany, 2023





P. 42 **IMBALANCE** Watercolor on Paper, 76 x 57 cm, 2023

P. 43 **ALIENATION** Watercolor on Paper, 76 x 57 cm, 2023

**INFLATING SERIES NO. 2** Watercolor on Paper, 56 x 76 cm, 2022





# THE LIGHT OF ENTROPY

Zhou Song

All things have a beginning and all things are like light, the beginning stimulates creating. The Book of Changes said, "The movement of heaven is full of power." The YangQi of heaven is the origin of all things, which is called "yuan". Ancient wise man said: "yuan" is "the existence of birth and transformation". The existence of all things is the manifestation of entropy. Since there is existence, there must be evolution. Existence is an absolute motion, and it stimulates everything, the externalization of all things must give out light.

The existence of all things in the universe is the exchange of "yin and yang", which is called impermanence. However, there must be a law of limitation in this impermanence. Yin and yang are the extremities of heaven and earth. Between the two ends, there is an infinite realm. The existence of all things lies in infinity and evolves, being and not-being grow out of one another and the great form has no shape.

Light comes with color, black and white are the extremities of all colors. The white color demonstrates infinity, and the black generates beginning. Yin and yang coexist and act on each other and everything turns into black and white images, which is shown as magic light. Light is not just light, but the necessity of existence. The existence of things gives out light.

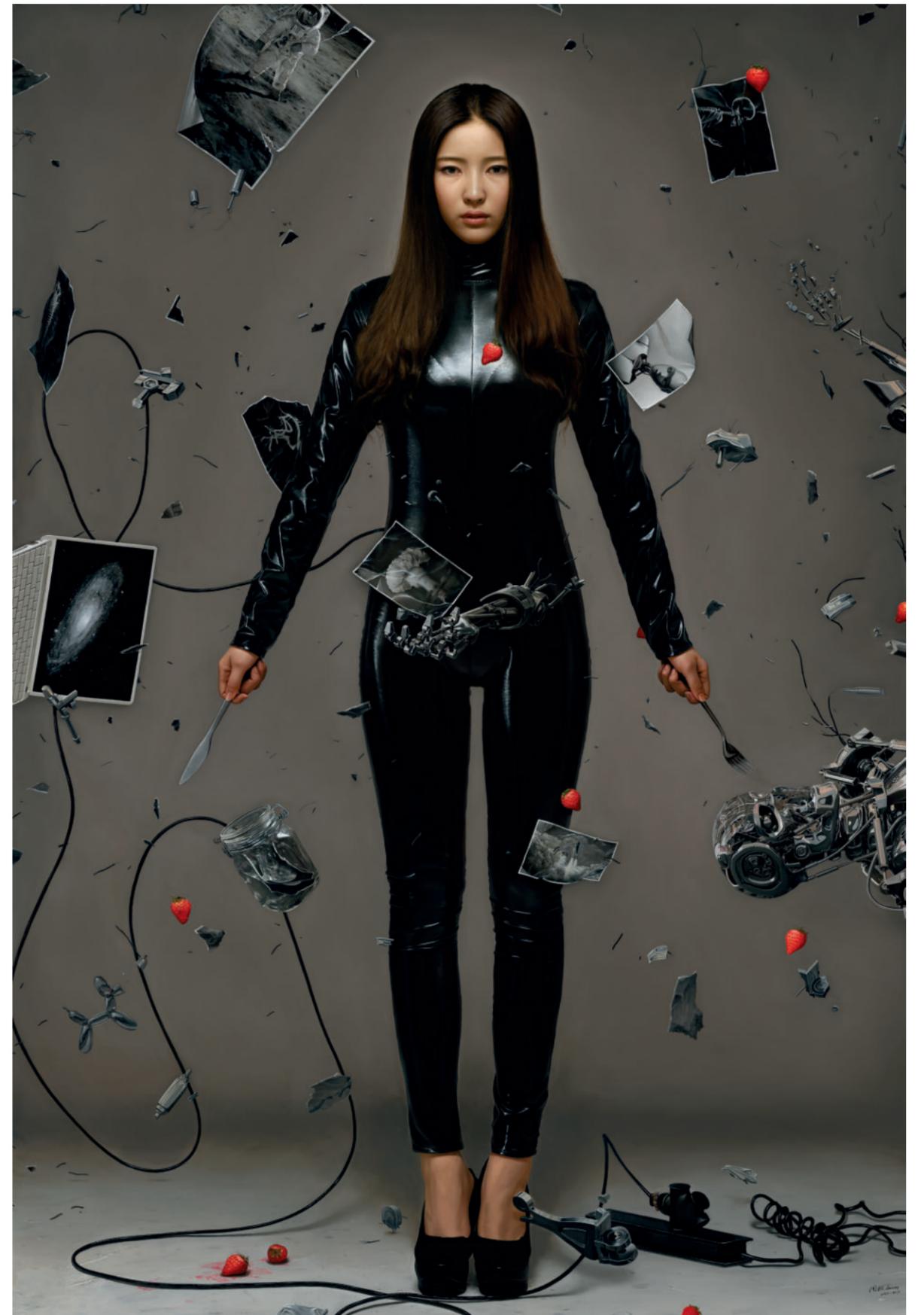
Entropy is the virtual state of evolution, evolution will generate entropy. The quality of entropy equals to the quality of evolution. Although entropy is virtual, the quality of all things is obvious and the law of the evolution of all things is existence. All existence is the light of entropy.



**THE KNOT** Oil on Canvas, 120 x 150 cm, 2023

**COUNTER TIME TRAVELS** Oil on Canvas, 200 x 130 cm, 2015

P. 52 – 53 Detail, **COUNTER TIME TRAVELS** Oil on Canvas, 200 x 130 cm, 2015





*Zhou Song is proficient in various media, including video. The black-and-white series of paintings by him demonstrates the technical details of technological innovation, and the precise image display enables people to suspect that an engine is running. Photorealism shows the surrealist world view. The geometric lines drawn of the big triangle show the fragmentation, which is completed on the second image. It continuously repeats the amplification of the details and assigns it to a large triangle and two small triangles, which are hung irregularly from each other. The deviation and increase of this precision bring us an experience. Surrealism becomes a tool for a perfect presentation of the image contents. It also shows that the urgent pursuit of emerging imagery continuing art in themes instead of being addicted to repeated content.*

Dieter Ronte  
Former Director of the National Museum of Bonn, Germany

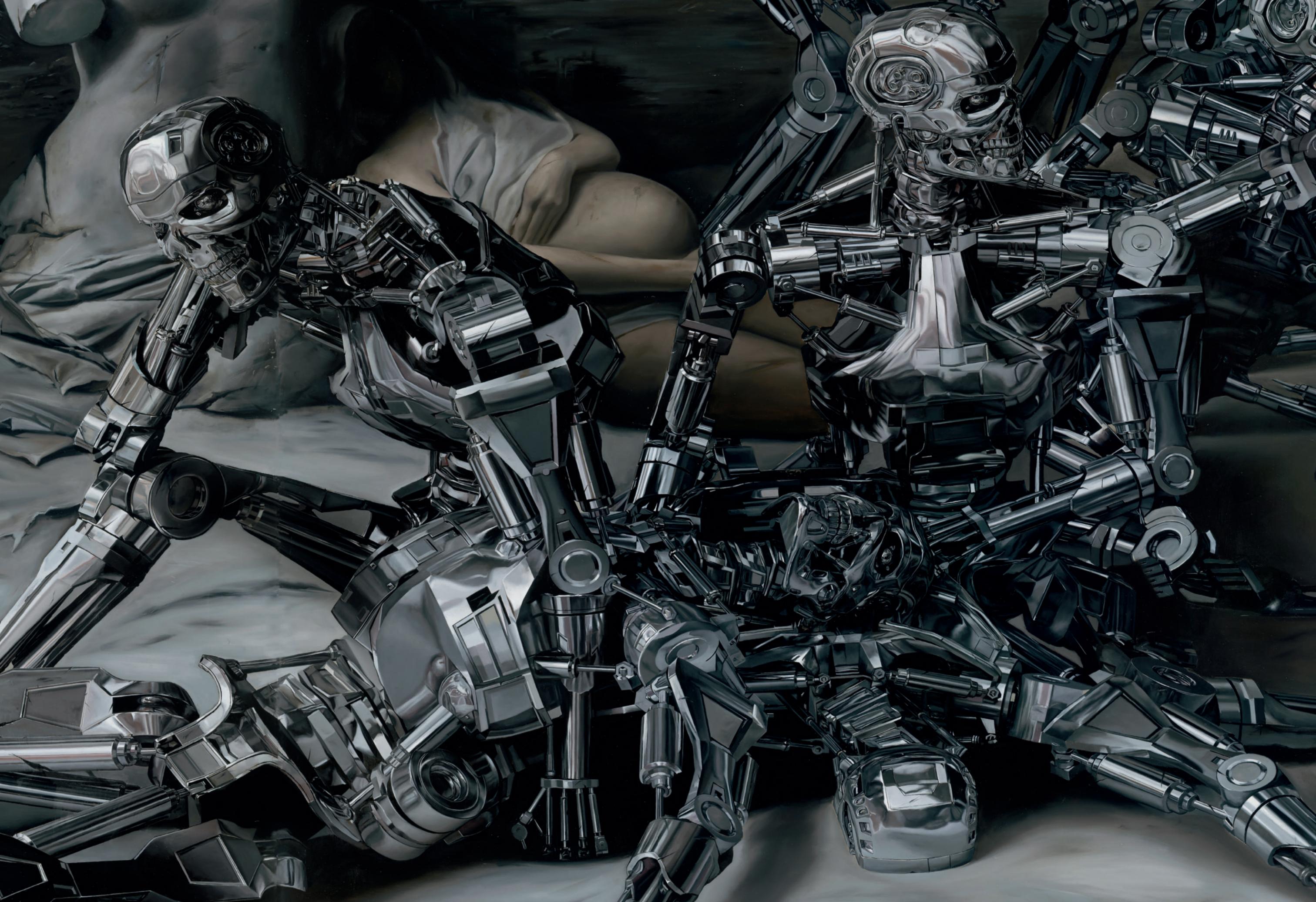


**DARK CONSCIOUSNESS** Oil on Canvas, 60 x 80 cm, 2013



**BLACK HOLE** Oil on Canvas, 40 x 21 cm, 2011





# ZHOU SONG'S TECHNO-ANXIETY

Alan McNairn

For centuries, the fields of philosophy and science have proven to be fertile ground for exploration by visual artists. The relationship between aesthetics, that branch of philosophy concerning art, beauty and taste, and the visual artist is mutually advantageous. The same cannot be said for the relationship between art and science. In this case the rapport is more often classically parasitical with the visual artist plundering the catalogue of advances in science and innovations in technology while returning little of substance to scientific disciplines. There are however, occasional instances where artists have worked as handmaidens of science such as serving as vehicles for the dissemination of scientific data, for example botanical and anatomical information. From time to time artists have pushed technology in directions unanticipated by innovative applied scientists but for the most part kinetic, computer, robotic, experimental film and video and electronic artists use technology without contributing to its development. Unlike artistic aficionados of technology Zhou Song has embarked on a pointed critique of the potential outcomes of contemporary applied science.

Zhou Song's works emanate from that region where science, philosophy and art converge. He takes on challenges in this venture that have become paramount in some branches of modernism, however his work is situated in this curious nexus without an obvious position in the phylogeny of art history. Such a stance lies at the very heart of post-modernism. Zhou has embarked on a project in the visual arts that finds its closest parallel in the work of post-modernist literature and its ally post-modernist film, where the conjunction extreme realism and magical elements transforms the mundane to create new and unexpected meaning. It is useful to consider that the beginnings of magical realism in 20th century literature occurred on the periphery of European culture namely in Latin America. Zhou, free from the oppression of the history of European art, has steered a unique course avoiding the influence of the realist movements of 20th century European and American art such as British Neo-realism beginning around 1914, Surrealism, the New Objectivity (*magischer Realismus* and *neue Sachlichkeit*) of post-expressionist German art, French *Nouveau réalisme* of the 1960's, and American Photorealism of the 1970's.

Zhou's series of paintings *Soldiers Weeping* of 2006-2012 in which the cut away images of machine guns show interiors where mechanical mechanisms have been replaced by brilliantly coloured combinations of the internal organs of humans. The extreme realism of the organs and tissues references that branch of medical illustration utilizing photography. The disjunction between what one expects the interior of a machine gun to be and what Zhou has proposed in his pictures is a clear statement on the function of the weapons, recognizable as the American M16 — an extraordinarily efficient personal killing machine. Virtually independent of the skill of its user, the M16 is capable of mincing human organs causing death or serious injury. The message of Zhou's visual critique of contemporary killing technology is extraordinarily powerful because the artist has opted to utilize the techniques of extreme realist painting. This is evident when his work is compared with that of the American artist, Noah Scalin, who focused on the same idea in 2015 creating works in which polymer reliefs of human organs are enclosed within the contours of firearms. Among his sculptures are AK-47s, the global favourite in killing machines developed by Mikhail Kalashnikov to defend and expand the influence of the Soviet state. The choice of specific makes of machine guns as subjects for visual critiques of mechanized killing in Scalin's and Zhou's art seems significant.

Zhou took his critique of modern technology a step further in *Dark Consciousness*, a work that represents his thinking on the human impact of the proliferation of IT, and, in particular, the looming upheaval of human consciousness implicit in the era of proliferation of artificial intelligence. *Dark Consciousness*, elucidates the interconnection between human and artificial intelligence, an affinity that will become increasingly more intimate in the future. The anxiety expressed in Zhou's questioning image is symbolic of current disquiet on the meanings and effects of AI. The future facing humanity in a world of artificial intelligence is unsettling. The looming brave new world where technology is predicted to create inanimate machines that mimic conscious thought, still considered the very essence of humanity, has placed a new urgency on scientific research on the human mind. Problems that were once considered the domain of philosophy, such as the how do we, as humans, come to understand ourselves and our world and the distinction between the mind and the brain, the mechanisms of reason, are implicit in the Zhou's image of *Dark Consciousness*.

Metaphysical speculation as opposed to pure science fiction is the motive behind Zhou's painting *New Genesis*. This deeper delving into the prospects of a future in which technological science or neo-physics have trumped classical metaphysics presents a prospect where the creators of a desolate dystopia are not humans but rather machines artificially endowed with what technologists conceive as intelligence. In Zhou's imagination, the brave new world is one that has consumed and replaced human thought and creativity. The inner experiences of humanity, those of desires, will and emotion that allow an inner understanding of reality beyond sensory perception, mediated by the representation of the detritus of human creativity, have been abolished by applied science. Metaphysical speculation as opposed to pure science fiction is the motive behind Zhou's painting *New Genesis*. This deeper delving into the prospects of a future in which technological science or neo-physics have trumped classical metaphysics presents a prospect where the creators of a desolate dystopia are not humans but rather machines artificially endowed with what technologists conceive as intelligence. In Zhou's imagination, the brave new world is one that has consumed and replaced human thought and creativity. The inner experiences of humanity, those of desires, will and emotion that allow an inner understanding of reality beyond sensory perception, mediated by the representation of the detritus of human creativity, have been abolished by applied science.

Zhou's visual prognostication of a dystopian world created and populated by "thinking" machines independent of human control suggests that in one sense the order of physics is inimitable to life as we know it. However, it is the very order of the universe — its periodic movement — that creates the conditions where life is possible. The laws of physics, propounded to explain everything from planetary movement to human self-awareness and which create the conditions necessary for the development of artificial intelligence are part and parcel of a distinctly human predilection to conquer through severance of all connective tissues posited by metaphysicians. Zhou's series of rotating saw-blades bearing images of a planetary bodies is a metaphorical statement on astrophysical movement and its intimate connection to the human mind stretching from antiquity to the present. It is by means of cosmic consciousness that the human mind understands itself and indeed is what makes us human. Zhou's visual art agenda is extraordinarily ambitious. It involves on the one hand perception with its cohort representation and, on the other hand, the inner meaning of things in themselves. In dealing with the latter he has turned to science and metaphysics for answers. At the same time, the very science or physics of reality that is the substrate of his concepts is itself subject to critical appraisal. The phenomena of humanity are set against the applied technology that destroys them.

P. 58 – 59 **NEW GENESIS** Kunstraum Villa Friede, Bonn Germany, 2023  
P. 60 – 61 Detail, **NEW GENESIS** Oil on Canvas, 510 x 250 cm, 2017  
Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Kunstraum Villa Friede, Bonn Germany, 2023



P. 68 – 69 **CONCEALMENT** Stainless steel sculpture, Size Varies, 2017  
**HEAVEN** Stainless steel sculpture, 26,5 x 26,5 x 60 cm, 2022





P. 72 – 73 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Kunstraum Villa Friede, Bonn Germany, 2023  
**THE SHARK** Stainless steel sculpture, 88 x 105 x 102 cm, 2022





# ZHOU SONG'S BIOMORPHIC ART OF CYBERG

Eugene Wang

The art of 21st century paintings opens up a new horizon. It is ready to move on from the captivity of the previous century's master narratives—the teleology of flat surfaces, the self-delusion of spontaneity of self expression, medium specificity, conceptual art, and intermediality, and so on. All these have receded in the rear window mirror, having either been internalized or simply made irrelevant, as we are close to the first quarter mark of the 21st century. New horizons loom large and new possibilities beckon. Just as Bauhaus had served as a catalytic agent in jump-starting modern art in the 20th century, so a new impulse—what might be called New Bauhaus—is gaining traction. Design, or the integration of design into the painterly medium, is having its second coming, with a vengeance. Unlike the old Bauhaus that was driven by the mechanist and functionalist impulse, 21st century artists like Zhou Song marry machinist aesthetics with biomorphism. In its origin, art had aspired toward the condition of biomorphic design. Over time, art has undergone stages internalizing biological forms through various means: extrapolating forms from nature or generating nature-inspired abstract or fractal patterns. Zhou Song's art takes up a more complex set of conditions. Rather than operating within the parameters of lush organicism vs. austere machine aesthetics, he explores the nexus and entanglement of the two. Mechanic schema provides the framework for biomorphic substance; artificiality colludes with bodily texture. These works aptly capture the posthuman dynamic of cyberg, at once a body of mechanism and a mechanics of the body.

Meanwhile, an emotional line runs through the seemingly cold mechanism of cyborg. Body parts and biological texture come into a creative tension with schematic designs, thereby breaking out of the formal shackles that hold them in captivity. Palpable animation impulse powers the stillness of the painting medium. What would have been the machine "cool" is turned on its head. It is the very ground to stage animus. The visual facts thus created give rise to further play: optics (light and shadows) readily morph into the gestalt of sculpted silhouettes. This is how the medium of painting performs animation. It derives its vitalism from the visual medium of animation and freezes it on the canvas.

Zhou Song's painting is a culmination of some previous stages contemporary Chinese art had gone through. Since the 1980s, the medium of experimental Chinese painting had experimented with incorporation of abstract design, the remediation of print and sculptural mediums, and so on. Having internalized these early phases of formal experiments, Zhou Song has taken it to a new level. A deep impulse drives his art. It comes down to the artful navigation between the distancing effect of geometric schema and the immediacy of the presence of vitalism, the palpable materiality of things and disembodied body parts. While formal attributes—such as the notable sharp angularity repeatedly staged in his paintings—contribute to the artificiality of these pictorially built or assembled forms, they also perform their vital parts. They thrust, pierce, and gesticulate, at once destructive and constructive. In the trail of some hinted narrative events or stormy actions, intimation of some tenderness rearing its head: a butterfly clinging to the side of a pair of shoes bound by prickly thorny thistles, or some roses interposed among octopus tendrils, covering the roped and clothed bodies. The visual and conceptual drama is palpable; its moral has a lasting staying power. Narrativity, at one time banished by the medium-specific purists, now comes back to the medium of painting with a vengeance. Only this round, we are learning from the morals of the last century. We—painters and critics—are better off putting medium specificity to the rest once and all. In this day and age of increased integration and domain-crossing, familiar terms such as "total art," intermediality, or what have you, appear to fade into irrelevance. They cannot even begin to capture the new dynamics on display here. With our growing ecological consciousness, we are here witnessing the birth of biomorphic art of cyberg, at once posthuman and deeply humane.



NORDART 2023 BÜDELSDORF, GERMANY



**CYBERSPACE II** Oil on Canvas, 130 x 80 cm, 2022

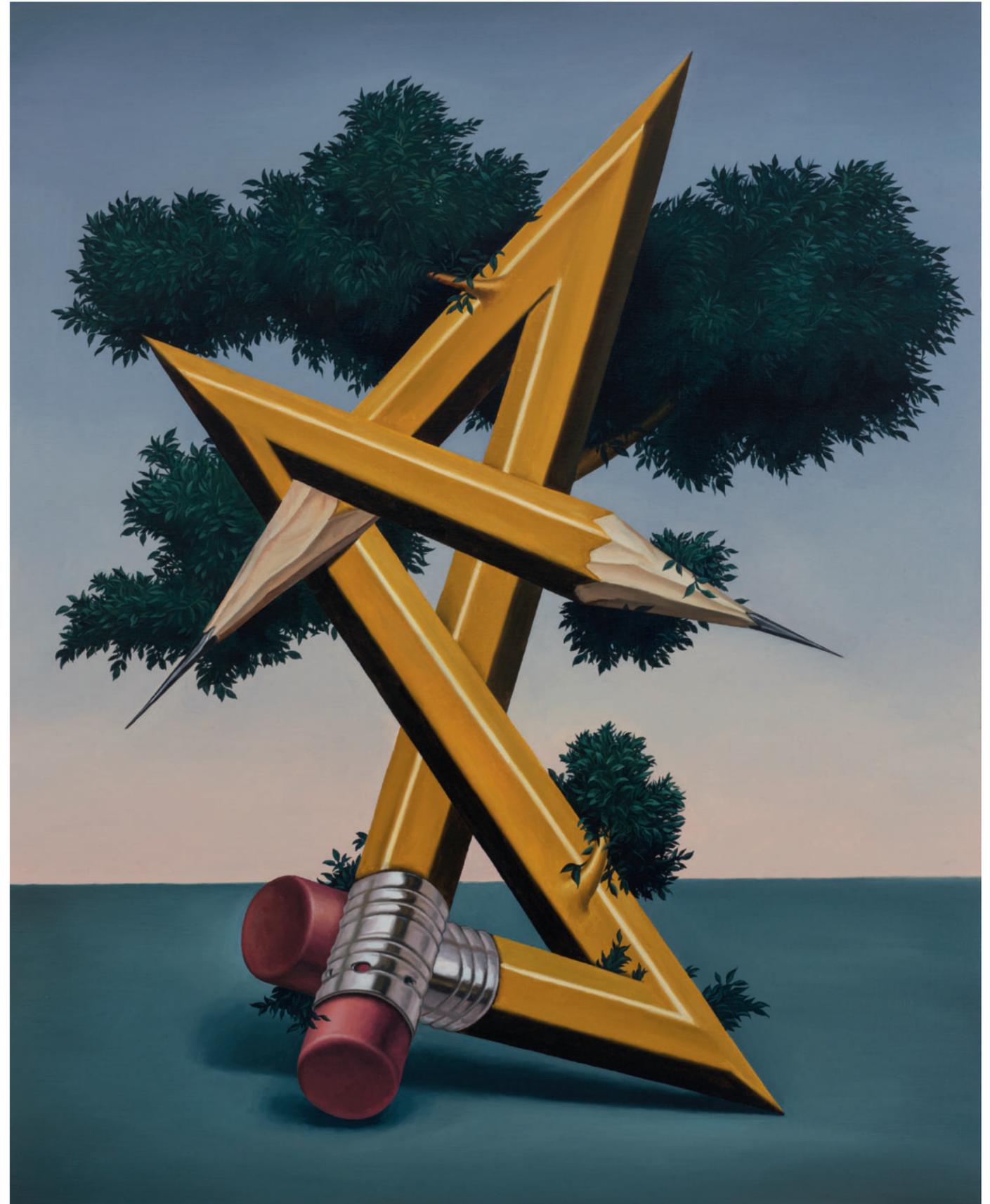
P. 76 – 79 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Nordart Kunstwerk Carlshütte, Germany, 2023





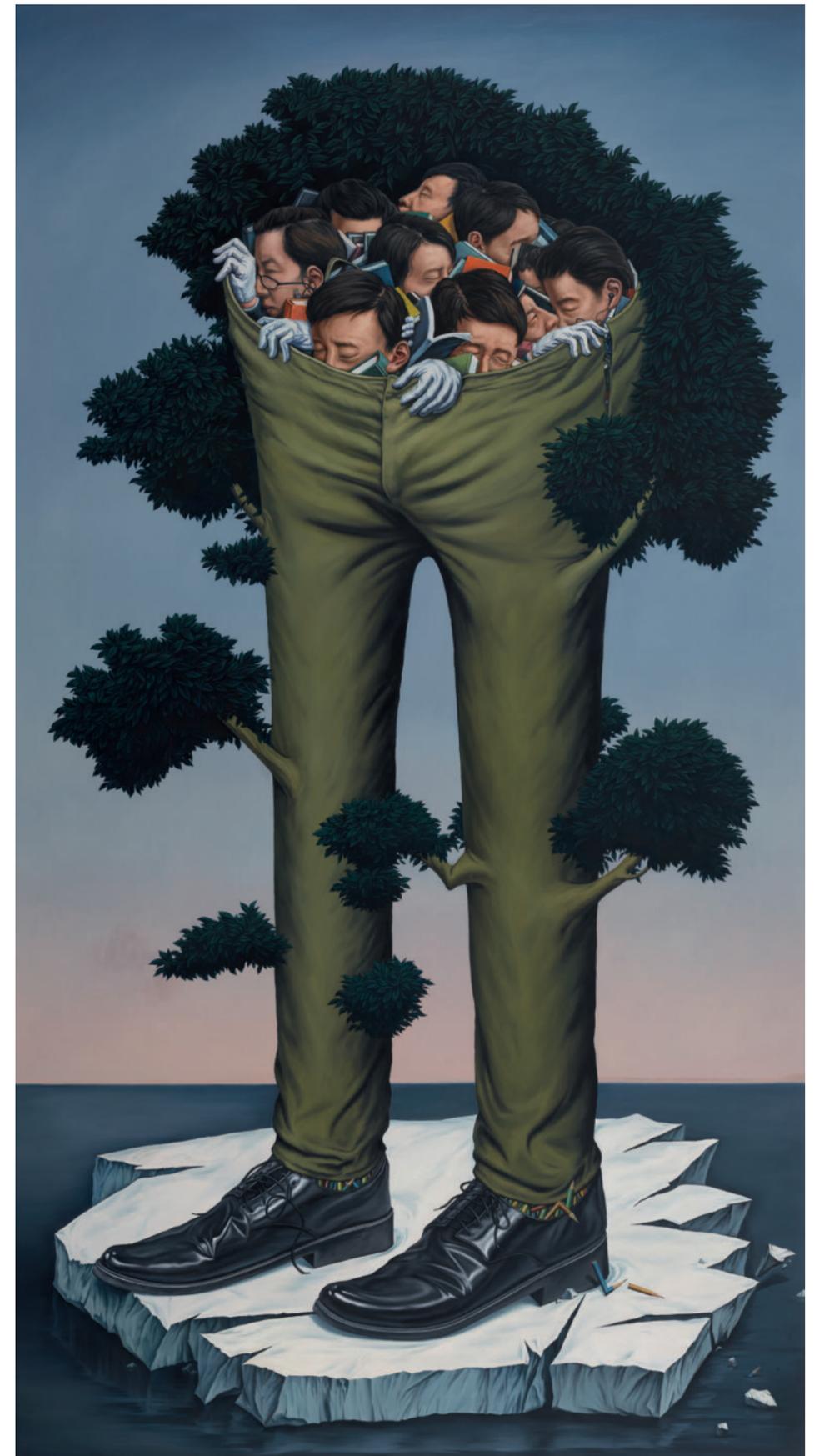
**THE CREATOR** Oil on Canvas, 100 x 80 cm, 2021

P. 82 – 83 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Nordart Kunstwerk Carlshütte, Germany, 2023





P. 90 – 91 **SYMBIOSIS** Oil on Canvas, 476 x 120 cm, 2022  
**WALKING ON THIN ICE** Oil on Canvas, 400 x 200 cm, 2023





**THE PEACH GARDEN** Oil on Canvas, 200 x 150 cm, 2021

P. 94 – 95 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Nordart Kunstwerk Carlshütte, Germany, 2023





**THE CREATOR II** Oil on Canvas, 100 x 80 cm, 2021

P. 98 – 99 Exhibition View: **Zhou Song**, Nordart Kunstwerk Carlshütte, Germany, 2023





# Imprint

This catalogue is published on the occasion of the exhibition

## ZHOU SONG

at the Osthaus Museum Hagen from April 22nd - June 11th, 2023

at the Kunstraum Villa Friede, Bonn from August 19th - September 30th, 2023

at NordArt, Büdelsdorf from June 3rd - October 8th, 2023

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**This exhibition is a collaboration**



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**Verlag Kunstraum Villa Friede**

**[www.kunstraum-villafriede.de](http://www.kunstraum-villafriede.de)**