

## **Art and Mind: New Nature, Works by Zhou Song**

Zhou Song's evocative images of the manifestations of thought and perception have evolved through his distinguished career. In his latest work he demonstrates that, as an artist, he has arrived at a fully matured visual representation where the components of nature including idea and physical phenomena unite to form a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Images of elements of the natural world and inorganic manufactured forms are combined to reveal a new nature where forms are concrete and discrete visual signs conveying the distinctly human activities of walking, thinking, and creating. Zhou does not shy from dealing with the knots of complexity between what we see or imagine we might see and what we think.

The project Zhou has set for himself, framing a two-dimensional world from a fully three-dimensional environment, or four-dimensional environment if you count the domain of the human mind, is not one of simple visual puns and art historical references. The influence of biomorphic art, that is the capacity of abstract form to evoke natural phenomena, practiced by the first and subsequent generations of Surrealists is clear. As with the work of Dali, Magritte, Tanguy, and Leonora Carrington what goes on in the human mind when apprehending form and movement is of paramount importance. In the new nature or new knowledge as pictured by Zhou, essential significance is rendered to what we feel, or, what our cognitive processes involve in walking, pondering the meaning of nothing in a black hole, contemplating the bodily acrobatics involved in an escape to the moon, or the conundrum a creative writer or what a visual artist encounters when faced by philosophical Gordian knots.

Zhou is clearly fascinated by the paradoxes faced by visual artists in their chosen pursuit of describing the world of physical phenomena and thought. The recurring motif of the pencil, broken in frustration, is combined with symbolic foliage suggesting the English saying, "one can't see the forest for the trees," meaning that one can't see

the big picture because one is too focussed on the details. The big picture is physically present in *The Creator III*, Zhou's monumental work of 2023, where the prostrate artist or perhaps critical writer, is depicted as a fallen and broken profile cut from rock.

Zhou in his messaging employs, as did the surrealist and abstract sculptors before him, the inherent qualities of organic and inorganic materials. The inorganic acquire some of the characteristics of the organic as the inflexible twists and turns into knots and the approximation of knots. Likewise, the organic in paintings such as *An Escape to the Moon*, are manipulated to resemble twisted steel, a reverse conceptualization of the legs and arms in *Walking*.

Zhou's paintings, combining passages of intense realism with forms that manifest in the cognitive or non-physical world, are executed in a style that obscures the use of the artist's tools – paint, paintbrush, and pencil. The flat surfaces of the works are in keeping with the overall intent to take the viewer into a new world where ideas are as present as are concrete symbols or signs of nature. In the very act of painting, Zhou challenges the viewer to pass beyond technical expertise in the delineation of objects and focus on what the artist is thinking or dreaming about – a new world with new technologies and novel cosmological perspectives.

In a sense Zhou invites us to contemplate or inflate our ideas of the plenitude and nothingness in the metaphorical black hole of the mind.

Dr Alan McNairn

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