

PRESS RELEASE**“Tianzhuo Chen: Ishvara”****2016.06.09 - 07.10****Long March Space**

After long preparations since Long March Space announced in July 2015 that it would represent artist Tianzhuo Chen, his show “Tianzhuo Chen: Ishvara” is finally ready to surface. This is the artist’s first solo exhibition at Long March Space. His newest “operatic” work, the titular *Ishvara*, is inspired by the famous Sanskrit Hindu epic the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The exhibition will present a video of *Ishvara* alongside nearly 20 entirely new installation works. Chen’s works often feature a variety of images that he has used continuously throughout his exhibitions, performances and events, exploring them in depth and deifying them into “characters”, each with his or her own life and backstory. In “Ishvara”, the complex relationships between all these personas will be revealed.

Looking at Chen’s previous works such as *Picnic* (2014), *PARADISE BITCH* (2014), and *ADAHA* (2014), it’s clear that he excels at creating moments where ordinary people can transcend the physical materiality of their body, where he creates a state of deranged “madness”. In this exhibition, white and darker marble, stainless steel and other classical sculptural materials take the place of the materials Chen has typically used in the past, such as resin, ceramic tile, plastic, foam, and so forth. Materials in the latter category are visible everywhere in industrial society, and are cheap and easy to use; materials in the former imply the monumentality of classicism and of authority. Chen has this time chosen to use more permanent materials and utilize the act of building statues— a direct opposition to the ephemeral material and emotional experience of consumer society.

The exhibition’s on-site works and the *Ishvara* performance itself complement each other in mutually reinforcing ways. *YOGAMAYA* (2016) is an image of a “god” perceived by the male lead from *Picnic* during a holy hallucination. *Ksana* (2016) shows a scene hallucinated by the dwarf twins from *PARADISE BITCH* while in a feverish state. The image from *Guna* (2016) is a colorful marble mosaic of a uterus, symbolizing birth and used as a stage for the “girl” character during the performance. The light installation *OM* writes out what in Indian culture is considered to be the first sound of the universe. The pattern on the gallery floor is similar to that of a mandala, with a Hindu swastika at its center; its tracks were designed to match the choreography of the opening night performance. Thus, the on-site works also participate actively in the show, and thanks to that engagement are full of dynamic possibility, themselves becoming sacred relics in the performance’s wake.

This exhibition will run from June 9 through July 10.

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Introduction to the Performance

“Ishvara” is an alternate name for Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, who is also a high-level, transcendent being in the Buddhist tradition. The performance *Ishvara* lasts about two hours, and includes a total of seven acts: “the kalpa of creation”, “Yogamaya”, “Śrī Bhagavan”, “Ksetrajna”, “Soma” “the kalpa of end” and “Samsāra”.

The characters who appear in this performance are not fully based upon those of the Bhagavad Gītā, but rather are intended to represent abstract concepts. For instance, the “girl” character and the altar images are intended to symbolize the Hindu concept “Karma Yoga”, also known as “prakṛti”, which represents different potencies like “sattva”, “rajas”, “tamas”. Similarly, the loving, reverent and pious elderly symbolically represent the practice of “Bhakti Yoga”.

The performance incorporates a variety of dance elements, such as butoh, traditional Indian dance and modern dance, as well as different musical styles, such as electronic music, hip-hop, trap, classical music and traditional Indian music. The live performance seeks, through the melding of these different types of dance and music and the transformations of bodies and images, to convert each ordinary person into the god envisioned by the artist, with each taking part in a grand scene of carnivalesque revelry. *Ishvara* continues in the same aesthetic vein of colorful, grotesque and kitsch imagery as Chen’s previous performances *ADAHA* (2014) and *ADAHA II* (2015), but here, the artist is thinking in a more comprehensive way about the meaning and form of the works within his performance. Here, he puts greater emphasis on each element in order to further develop the works in a great outburst, drawing upon history and religion to investigate, starting from the artist’s own perspective, how we ought to comprehend the projects of human existence and spiritual exploration while living in the modern world.

In this performance, Chen works in collaboration with performance artists Beio and China Yu, performer Zhou Qi, the Parisian artist collective House of Drama, and the dancers Kiri koo Des and Ndoho Ange. Their performances will take place accompanied by live music of many different styles. The musicians invited to participate include the Nepalese-Swiss electronic musician Aīsha Devi, Vietnamese-French hip-hop musician Nodey, noise/free improvised musician Li Jianhong, lap top improviser/noise player Wei Wei, modernist musician Yue Xuan and the Indian musicians Roumita & Sayak.

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About Tianzhuo Chen

“Flesh is inherently weak, and the border between life and death is, as such, indistinct”

–Tianzhuo Chen

Born in 1985, Tianzhuo Chen is currently living and working in Beijing, China. After graduating from Central St. Martins College of Art and Design in London, he received his Masters in Fine Arts from the Chelsea College of Art and Design, London.

As a younger generation artist, Tianzhuo Chen skillfully works between the artistic disciplines of installation, performance, video, drawing on paper and photography. Many of his artworks require others' participation or that of the audience so to take the form of a “happening”, such as an underground party, staged performance, or more conceptually, a constructed ritual site, and ultimately transforming reality into fantasy. Within his artworks, Chen mixes his well versed knowledge of elements and symbols found in religion (like Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Shamanism, etc.), subculture (like cult cultures, drag and rave, etc.), popular culture (such as cartoons, hip hop and electronic music, etc.), and dance (like Japanese Butoh and Voguing) in order to juxtapose the atmosphere, and cause the audience/participants to transcend both superficial sates of the body and spirit. Ultimately, arriving at, what the artist himself has referred to, as a “state of madness”.

Transcending the self and triggering frenzy are the incentives that seemingly motivate Tianzhuo Chen's artwork. Like a master alchemist, he seeks to bring out elements that already exist within the reality of contemporary society. After their distillation (or purification), he molds and sublimates them into an authentically frenzied atmosphere. The all-seeing eye, Eric Cartman, the racist from “South Park”, and dwarfs that possess elements or symbols of alienation often appear within his works. Whether a wood-carved sculpture, performance prop or video backdrop, his use of bold and gaudy colors in addition to layers of music, both interactively stimulates the senses, and completes the sublimation of his artworks. In the work *19:53* (2015), a decorative ornament of Jesus' Crucifix and the symbol of a “\$” chain necklace are arranged on the same screen. The background of the video is filled with glaring, bulging eyes, and people playing with articles of bondage, such as harnesses, masks, latex tights, SM leashes, Japanese cartoon masks, and the mystical cape of a religious saint, as if representing both newborn mice and skinned dead chicken. All these obscure and mysterious scenes point towards mania, as the Chinese pop singer, Zeng Yike's vocals are played as background music and smoke rises from the stage. In the inflatable sculpture, *I Love the Way You Taste* (2015) now exhibited at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, the continual process of inflating and deflating gives rise to the image of a vulture devouring a woman's intestines.

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Tianzhuo Chen's strong artistic purpose allows him to more freely gather and utilize a diverse range of media. In addition to sculpture, video, installation and drawing, he synthesizes work by including forms of popular culture, such as clothing, music, parties and performance.

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