

## Press Release

### Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhao Gang

October 24–December 13, 2020

### Long March Space, Beijing

The "Chinese Eastern Railway" is a rail line that links up the great expanse of China's northeast and crucial moments in modern Chinese history. The actual railway was the product of the *Sino-Russian Secret Treaty* signed by the Qing Empire and Tsarist Russia in 1896. Construction began in August 1897, and the railway went into service in July 1903. The rail line drew a giant "T" on the map, centered on Harbin, stretching west to Manzhouli, south to Lüshun, and east to the Suifen River. The "Chinese Eastern Railway" project was first proposed by artist Zhang Hui in 2018, and launched by Zhang Hui and Zhao Gang in 2019. In this project, the two artists look back on their hometowns—Zhang Hui was born in Qiqihar and raised in Harbin, while Zhao Gang is a global nomad with Manchurian roots who currently lives in Beijing—as well as the shifting landscape of modern Chinese society, politics, ideology and aesthetic expression through painting.

The project comprises two phases. In the first phase, "The Walk", the two artists set off from two different places on July 15, 2019. Zhao Gang rode his motorcycle from Beijing to Manzhouli before turning east. Zhang Hui took the train west from Lüshun station in Dalian. They met in Harbin nine days later, where they engaged in a series of walking discussions with researchers and others interested in northeast China. Participants in the discussions included curator Lu Mingjun, Long March Project initiator Lu Jie, and Harbin Normal University professor Wang Hui, along with the Long March Project team as observer. The second phase unfolded through the creations of the two artists during and after "The Walk", with the results to be presented in autumn 2020 at Long March Space in two chapters: *Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhao Gang* (October to December 2020) and *Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhang Hui* (December 2020 to February 2021), and a symposium on the subject.

Long March Space will present *Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhao Gang* on October 24, featuring 102 paintings the artist created from the beginning of the "The Walk" phase of the project through the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Zhao Gang's Manchurian roots and global wanderings have turned the northeast China into a carrier for his continued exploration of identity, history and cultural hybridity. The first group of artworks from the project, six large life paintings, arose from the artist's impulse to

paint the scenery at Hengdaohezi in Heilongjiang Province, and document his return to the most basic state of artistic training. These artworks begin the exhibition and flow into a river of 96 small artworks the artist created in his Beijing studio since the break out of the pandemic. Time and space intersect, the individual identity undergoes multiple shifts, life experience and the torrents of history weave together, nostalgia and melancholy flow. The 96 paintings are split into four categories, depicting objects in the artist's life, figures famous and not so famous, important images in art history, and various landscapes and plants, weaving critical moments and objects from modern history, art history, and the spread of ideas from West to East into the artist's individual narrative. The entire exhibition is a display of Zhao Gang's sentimentality and romanticism, and stands at once as a direct expression of his individual memories and emotions, and an overturning of existing narrative modes and his continued reflections on the language of painting.

"Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhao Gang" is an expression of the artist's reflections and opinions of the modern history and current state of painting in China, as well as his rebellion against existing modes of creation through which to seek, overturn and reconstruct the essence of painting in his own life, as carried out over several months of self-quarantine.

Zhao Gang says, "This series of works conveys my attitude towards painting."

### **About the artist**

Zhao Gang (b. 1961, Beijing) currently lives and works in New York and Beijing. He made his artistic debut as a member of the Stars Group, one of the first avant-garde artist groups to open the era of contemporary art in China, when he was just 18 years old. Shortly thereafter he pursued formal art education in Europe and then New York. Zhao Gang lived overseas for over two decades, developing a diverse body of work as his perspective became distinctively international. Since returning to Beijing in 2006, Zhao Gang has turned his ever-expanding focus toward the entanglement of his personal past with Chinese history and his unique position, at once a native and a newcomer, in China today.

His selected solo exhibitions include: "Zhao Gang 21st: Supports / ColorLumps as Anthropography of History" (Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts , Taipei, 2020), "History Painting" (Peréz Art Museum Miami, Miami, 2019), "Acquiring Identity" (Long March Space, Beijing, 2018), "The Road to Serfdom II" (Museo de ArteContemporáneo,

Santiago, Chile, 2016), "Paramour's Garden" (Suzhou Museum, Suzhou, China, 2015), "The Road to Serfdom" (Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China, 2015), "Sick Man: Zhao Gang" (Today Art Museum, Beijing, China, 2011).