

Press Release

Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhang Hui
December 19, 2020–February 28, 2021
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 learned to paint 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.

"Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhang Hui," part of the second phase of the Chinese Eastern Railway project, will open at Long March Space on December 19. Zhang Hui was born to a family of railroad workers in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province, and studied painting in Harbin. He sees the Chinese Eastern Railway as a typical case study in humanity's material and civilizational construction. Zhang Hui believes that this production in northeastern China, a place once devoid of any traces of modernity, is part of a "blueprint" that covers this land. As the northeast has been built up in modern times, layers of this "blueprint" have stacked up with the various constructs and traces of human existence over the past century, shaping the reality of the northeast we see today. The occasions on which a piece or corner of this blueprint are revealed provide a conceptual basis for the latest developments in Zhang Hui's painting language. The seventeen paintings featured in this exhibition are a visual presentation of this concept of the northeast rendered through the artist's painting logic.

The Chinese Eastern Railway is not just a real, specific railway, but also a front line for

Address: 798 Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Rd, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Mailing: Long March Space. Mailbox 8530, Beijing. P.R. China 100015

地址：北京市朝阳区酒仙桥路4号798艺术区 | 邮址：北京市8503信箱长征空间 邮编 100015

encounters and circulation between different cultures and forces. It has influenced the way people see the outside world, and has grown into a monumental visual structure in the aesthetic experience and collective unconscious of generations. The repeating imagery in this exhibition, including Li Hsiang-lan (Yoshiko Yamaguchi, a Japanese actress and singer born in the northeast), and groups of modern northerners (such as the crowds in front of the Mudanjiang Train Station), explore the complexity of history and the relationships between the individual and the environment, transforming the Chinese Eastern Railway into an amalgam of the people who live on this land. The three flight attendants, the singing chef, and the people pitching a tent are all products of Zhang Hui's image methodology. Like the other frequent, ever-changing images in Zhang Hui's painting, they are an outgrowth of Zhang Hui's graphic universe, active participants in the world built from his past, present and future painting.

The "Chinese Eastern Railway" project is an opportunity for Zhang Hui to look back on his life and his art, and a time for reflection and new beginnings in his artistic approach, painting language, and experiments in image logic. In Chinese Eastern Railway, however, we see more than just one special case; we see the inner momentum behind Zhang Hui's accumulation, progression and regression spanning a multitude of special cases. From this perspective, the Chinese Eastern Railway exists not only as a part of Zhang Hui's lived experience, but as something internal to his entire painting practice.

About the artist

Zhang Hui was born in Heilongjiang Province in 1967, and graduated from the Central Academy of Drama in 1991. He currently lives and works in Beijing, and teaches at the Central Academy of Drama Stage Art Department. In his early career, Zhang Hui's artistic practice focused on action and installation art. He later shifted his explorations to multimedia theatrical performance. He was an important participant in the *Post-Sense Sensibility* exhibitions held in the late 1990s, and co-founded the *Odd Phenomena Group* in 2004.

Beginning with his 2006 solo exhibition *Partial Zones*, Zhang Hui shifted to explorations in painting language and graphic logic, examining the murky realm between reality and the subconscious, normal and abnormal, and reflecting on the truth and singularity of people's understanding of reality as he strove to expand the structures beneath real events and their images. The objects of research in his artworks range from habits rooted in everyday life to the probing of other dimensions, which form the two main components of the artist's dramatically resonant works. The constantly-shifting, recurring images in Zhang Hui's painting expand like a series of hyperlinks stringing together time and space. For Zhang Hui, visual experience is more than just artistic experience, but is a form of experience that has been "trained" by vision, and often drops hints in our thinking that change the way people see the world.

Recent solo exhibitions include "Chinese Eastern Railway: Zhang Hui" (Long March Space, Beijing, 2020); "Zhang Hui 2018" (Long March Space, Beijing, 2018); "Zhang Hui" (Long March Space, Beijing, 2016); "Square" (Long March Space, Beijing, 2014). Important group exhibitions include "Duration Chinese Art in Transformation" (Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, 2020); "Meditation in an Emergency" (UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2020); "Assembling" (chi K11, Shenyang, 2018); "Post-sense Sensibility: Trepidation and Will" (Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, 2016); "Stereognosis" (Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art, Guangzhou, 2015); "The 11th Sharjah Biennale: Re:emerge-Towards a New Cultural Cartography" (Sharjah, 2013); "The 8th Shanghai Biennale-Rehearsal" (Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, 2010); "The 3rd Guangzhou Triennial: Farewell to Post Colonialism" (Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, 2008).

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地址：北京市朝阳区酒仙桥路4号798艺术区 | 邮址：北京市8503信箱长征空间 邮编 100015