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Interviews Artists

Zhang Dali

By **Brainard Carey** August 3, 2023

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Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Zhang Dali

Zhang Dali was born in Harbin, China in 1963. He graduated from the painting department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing with a BA in 1987. An influential figure in socio-political

artistic movements in China, Zhang Dali has, for decades, challenged the conventional with his social documentation in graffiti, sculpture, photography, and painting.

Zhang was exiled from China after graduating from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and spent six years immersing himself in Western art and art history in Italy. Upon his return to Beijing, he developed a keen interest in portraiture (usually of himself), documentary and public urban art, often interrupting spaces with confrontational political statements. The photograph series 'A Second History' consists of propaganda and found images under the rule of Mao, which have been doctored or altered to the Chairman's artistic 'vision' of politics and appropriation. He is critically recognized as one of China's first graffiti and street artists.

In 2011, Zhang Dali's work was featured in *New Photography 2011* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The *New York Times* reviewed the show, mentioning that "the evocation of Orwellian busywork constantly varnishing truth for the benefit of dictatorial dominion is chilling to contemplate." In 2014, Zhang Dali presented a comprehensive solo show at Klein Sun Gallery titled *Square*, which featured his cyanotypes, fiberglass sculptures, and paintings. *Art in America* praised Zhang's work as it "compels his audience to acknowledge those who are damaged and marginalized, in hopes of expanding civic awareness and empathy" and stated that "it is now time for the Western media to accord Zhang

recognition for his powerful, courageous artworks, which speak up for those who cannot freely speak for themselves.”

His work is in public collections including Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; The Saatchi Gallery, London, UK; Smart Museum, Chicago, IL; and Asia Society, New York, NY.

Zhang Dali currently lives and works in Beijing, China.



Zhang Dali Dove (41), 2021. Red cyanotype on cotton, 63 x 90 1/2 inches (160 x 230 cm) Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Zhang Dali



Zhang Dali Dove (57), 2023. Blue cyanotype on cotton, 59 x 74 3/4 inches (150 x 190 cm) Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Zhang Dali



Zhang Dali, *Herbarium Pagoda Tree (S. japonicum) (2)*, 2020. Blue cyanotype on cotton, 53 1/8 x 37 3/4 inches (135 x 96 cm) Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Zhang Dali