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Tiananmen Square Under the Lens, In the Work of Zhang Dali

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AN HOUR AGO

Zhang Dali has a history of creating art packed with political inflections. In early graffiti works the artist frequently used the tag “AK-47” to accompany spray-painted drawings of migrant workers and line drawings depicting the silhouette of his bald head, which he proliferated across Beijing. His most recent show, “*Square*,” on view now at [Klein Sun Gallery](#) in New York, furthers these themes and motifs and hones in on the historical landmark Tiananmen Square as a divergent site of both hope and despair.

Walking through Zhang’s current show, one encounters life-size, fiberglass casts of Chinese migrant workers that stand, sit, and dangle from the ceiling. Amid the freestanding human forms, white dove sculptures linger, suspended midair, or perched on shoulders and heads of nearby figures. In *Square No. 4* (2014), a male worker is presented holding his hands on his cap, his face pointing downward, his eyes closed, caught deep in thought or in a moment of distress. Doves flutter nearby, though he doesn’t seem to notice their presence. Although it is lifelike, the sculpture is not true to reality; doves do not populate Tiananmen Square but are meant as a visual symbol of healing and aspiration. Zhang describes this site as “holy” and “brimming with white light,” yet it is inextricable from the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, where hundreds of Chinese civilians were murdered by military force. He continues to explore these threads in a series of acrylic paintings; in *Square Sketch No. 2* (2014), a small child and an adult are seen with decapitated heads against a blue background. Both seem unaffected by this violent action, instead actively engaging with the doves.

To mirror the migrant worker sculptures and paintings, “*Square*” also features a series of cyanotype prints that capture white impressions of the doves on traditional Chinese rice paper. Though they appear serene, the stark birds on this surface are tangled in ink and the crinkles of the paper—a metaphor for the artist’s hopes for the square and his memories of the troubled history surrounding that space.

“Zhang Dali: Square” is on view at Klein Sun Gallery, New York, June 26th–Aug. 30th, 2014.

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Zhang Dali 張大力
Deep Blue Sky No. 2, 2013
Klein Sun Gallery

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Zhang Dali 張大力
Square No. 4, 2014
Klein Sun Gallery

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Zhang Dali 張大力
Square Sketch No. 2, 2014
Klein Sun Gallery

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Zhang Dali 張大力
Square No. 9, 2014
Klein Sun Gallery

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Zhang Dali 張大力
Square Sketch No. 1, 2014
Klein Sun Gallery

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Zhang Dali 張大力
Dove, 2014
Klein Sun Gallery

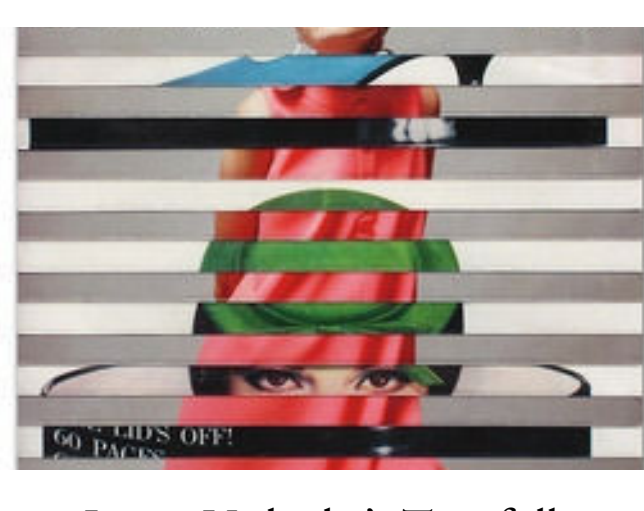
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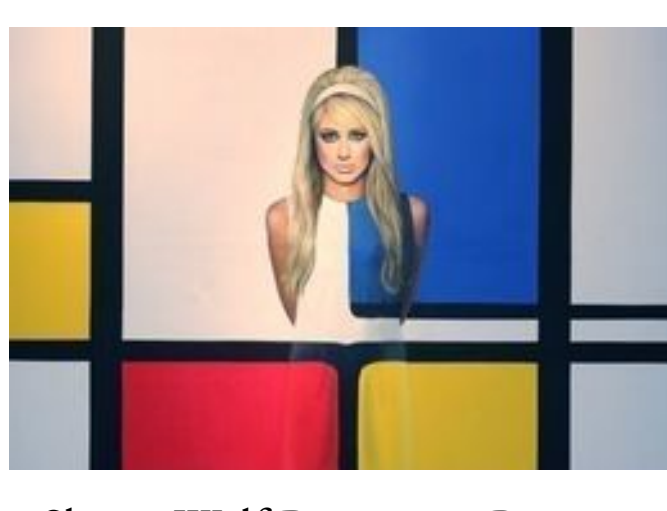
ZHANG DALI 張大力

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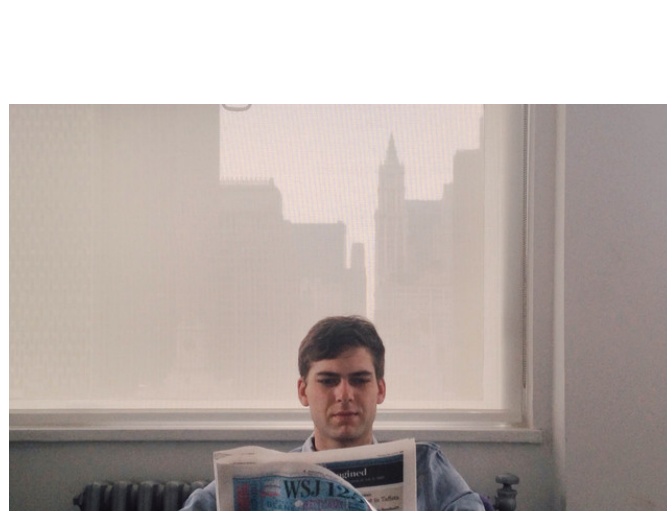
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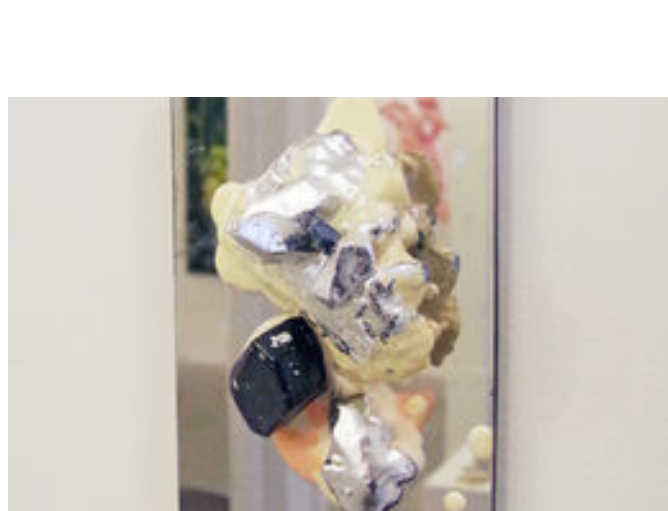
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