

MARIANNA KISTLER
BEACH
MUSEUM OF ART



CULTURE
MIXMASTER
ZHANG HONGTU

September 25 - December 22, 2018

Internationally acclaimed artist Zhang Hongtu has called many different places home and experienced life as an outsider at different times. He grew up in China as part of the Muslim minority and, because of his family's religious and political backgrounds, suffered persecution during the regime of Chinese Communist Party founder Mao Zedong. In 1982, he moved to New York City to study art and start a new life. This large exhibition, the first solo show of the artist in the Midwest, brings together early and up-to-the-minute works that highlight the artist's endeavors to express his hybrid cultural roots.

Living in and traveling to different places was part of Zhang's life from the outset. His family relocated many times as his father negotiated turbulent political circumstances during and after the Chinese Civil War (1945-49). At the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the government initiated a free railway travel program for students. Zhang took advantage of it to travel far west to predominantly Muslim territories and then to the south. He and a group

of friends even walked part of the way back to Beijing. For three years, he lived in the countryside and worked in the rice fields.

After college, Zhang was assigned to work in the state-run jewelry import-export company. He persuaded his supervisors to fund a study trip to Dunhuang, a town near a large complex of Buddhist cave temples. He promised to gather ideas for jewelry designs from images of bejeweled figures in the cave murals. In actuality, Zhang wanted to expand his knowledge of painting itself by studying the various styles represented there, which date from the fourth to the fourteenth century. In art school, he had learned the Socialist Realism style approved by the Chinese government. The cave temples, on the other hand, featured painting styles different from what Zhang had learned, and more importantly, showed signs of the mural artists' awareness of European painting. Dunhuang was a major hub on a network of trade routes known as the Silk Road, which linked Europe and Africa to Asia and the Middle East. This

study trip engendered Zhang's lifelong drive to seek out and learn from the new and unfamiliar.

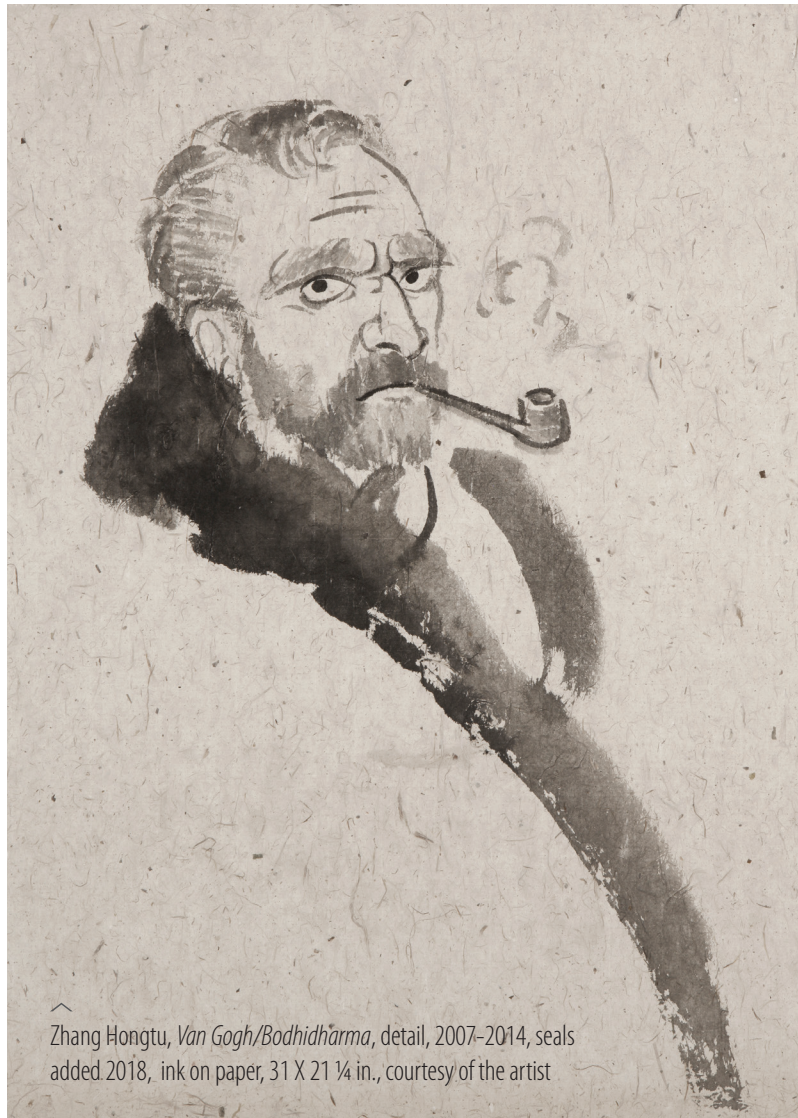
The insights that Zhang shares through his work are delivered with self-awareness, playfulness, and humor, even when they are slyly critical of the status quo. *Quaker Oats Mao*, executed just a few years after Zhang arrived in New York, draws parallels between political propaganda and product advertising. Oil paintings from the series *On-going Shan Shui* (literally "mountain and water") apply the signature styles of famous European artists to landscape scenes imitating iconic Chinese ink paintings. *Ping-Pong Mao* is a table tennis table with cut-outs in the shape of Chairman Mao Zedong's head. The game requires players to avoid losing their balls through the holes.

Van Gogh/Bodhidharma, Zhang's most recent work, features thirty-nine imagined "portraits" combining the features of Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh and those of Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Chan Buddhism in

China, as depicted in traditional Chinese and Japanese art. Van Gogh had been an enthusiastic collector of nineteenth-century Japanese woodblock prints, which became available in Paris in the late 1850s. He studied and adapted ideas in these prints to develop his signature painting style. Bodhidharma, on the other hand, was a Buddhist monk active in the fifth or sixth century. He traveled from his place of origin—either Central Asia or India—to China with Chan teachings. From there, the religion spread to Japan, where it became known as Zen. For Zhang, Japanese Buddhist scholar Daisetz Teitarō (D.T.) Suzuki was also significant to the transmission story of Zen. Several prominent American artists and writers learned of Zen through Suzuki's lectures in English, which later became available in print as well.

This exhibition highlights Zhang's efforts to visualize what it means to be an artist equally Chinese and American. Each work encapsulates his interest in the consequences of travel, migration, and cultural cross-pollination.

Aileen June Wang
Curator



Zhang Hongtu, *Van Gogh/Bodhidharma*, detail, 2007–2014, seals added 2018, ink on paper, 31 X 21 ¼ in., courtesy of the artist

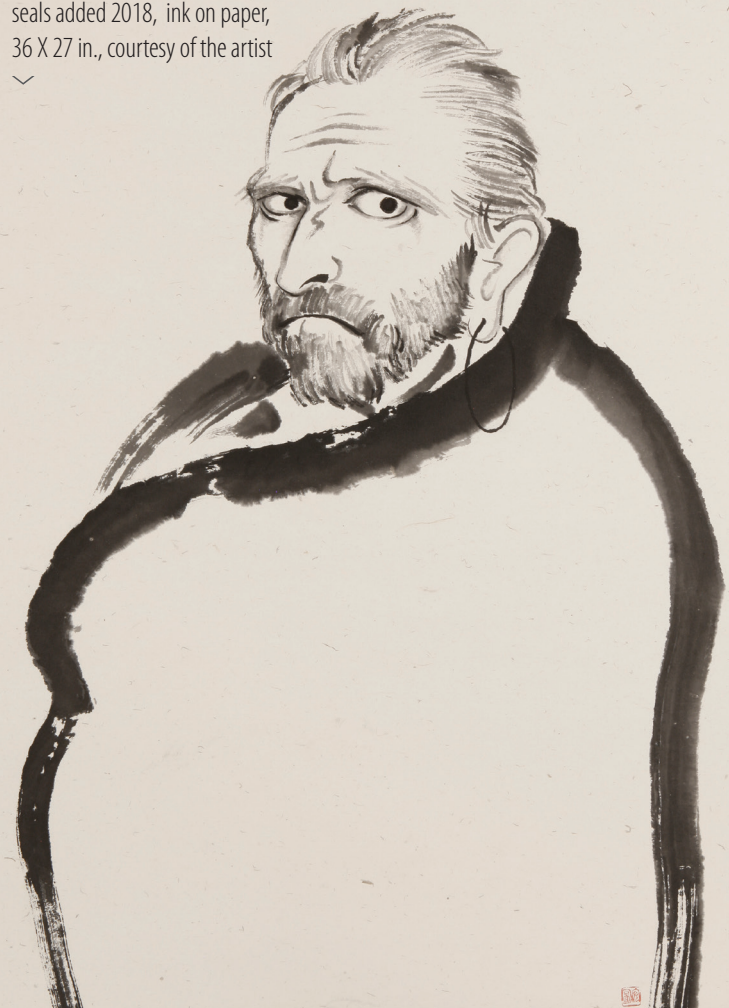


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Zhang Hongtu, *Kekou-Kele (Coca-Cola)*, 2002, porcelain,
10 in. (H), courtesy of the artist

Zhang Hongtu, *Quaker Oats Mao*, from the series *Long Live Chairman Mao*, >
1987, acrylic on Quaker Oats box, 9 1/4 (H) x 5 (D) in., courtesy of the artist



Zhang Hongtu, *Van Gogh/*
Bodhidharma, detail, 2007–2014,
seals added 2018, ink on paper,
36 X 27 in., courtesy of the artist





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Zhang Hongtu, *Ping-Pong Mao*, 1995, mixed media installation, 30 x 60 x 108 in., courtesy of the artist and Baahng Gallery

Major support for this exhibition is provided by a grant from the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation's Lincoln & Dorothy I. Deihl Community Grant Program, with additional sponsorship by Anderson Bed & Breakfast and Terry and Tara Cupps.

Related events at the Beach Museum of Art

Ping-Pong Mao Tournament, Art in Motion festival

Saturday, October 6, 2018, 11 am-4 pm

Registration deadline: October 3, 12 noon. First come first served.

To register, call 785-532-7718 or email beachart@ksu.edu with name, phone number, email address, and level of experience in table tennis.

Gallery Conversation with Zhang Hongtu

Saturday, October 6, 2018, 2:15-3 pm

(during Art in Motion festival)

Related event at the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas

Artist Talk by Zhang Hongtu

Tuesday, October 9, 5 pm

The artist will share his experience of traveling to Dunhuang in western China, a town on the Silk Road trade network, and discuss how it influenced his thinking about art. Dunhuang was an early center of international art and culture exchange, connecting Europe and Asia. It was a hub for the spread of Buddhism from India to China. Many Buddhist cave temples were built near Dunhuang between the fourth and fourteenth centuries.