
Asian American Art Oral History Project


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DaHuang Zhou Interview

Julia Lin
DePaul University

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Interviewer: Julia Lin

Artist: DaHuang Zhou

In-person Interview: Zhou B. Art Center, Chicago, IL

Date: 02/19/2010 6:30 PM CST

*Note: The following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in AAS 201: Asian American Arts & Culture during Winter Quarter 2010 as part of the **Asian American Art Oral History** research project conducted by Laura Kina, Associate Professor Art, Media, & Design/Director Asian American Studies.*



Artist Biography:

“The Zhou Brothers are one of the most accomplished contemporary artists in the world today renowned for their unique collaborative work process. They always work together on their paintings, performances, sculptures, and prints, often communicating without words in a so-called dream dialogue. Their thinking, aesthetic, and creativity are a symbiosis of Eastern and Western philosophy, art, and literature that informed their development since early childhood. Their indomitable spirit allowed them to leave behind their brilliant success in China, where they were hailed as national heroes for their early work, to step onto the world stage. They have since achieved international acclaim while continuing to work in the West.”

Zhou Brothers. Web. 22 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.zhoub.com/bio.html>>.

For more information visit the artist's website: <http://www.zhoub.com/>

Julia Lin: Let's get started. Could you tell me a little about yourself and your personal and family history?

DaHuang Zhou: I don't know if you heard anything about the Zhou Brothers?

Lin: Mmhmm.

Zhou: You do? The Zhou Brothers, my brother and myself, came to Chicago from China in 1986. Since then Chicago became one of our base's in America. And in the last 25 years we have spent most of our time here and in Europe. So Europe is our second home and Chicago is our first home. In the eighties, before we left China, we were the leaders of The Contemporary Art movement and that was one of the highest points in our career in China. Before we came here in 1985, we were the only Contemporary artists to have our own solo museum traveling show throughout China. It included, The National Art Museum in Beijing and the Art Museum in Shanghai and Nanjing as well as the five most important institutions in China. So, that was considered one of the very big movements for the Chinese Contemporary Art and after that, in 1986 we went to America. In the last twenty some years, we were very active in the United States and in Europe. The reason we stay here is because we like to have a broader International stage for Contemporary Art.

Lin: How has your early life in China and dealing with the Cultural Revolution influenced your art?

Zhou: You know, for artists, their inspiration mostly comes from the history of their life. So my brother and I, we came from that period of the Cultural Revolution in China. This is one of the very special periods in human history and in Chinese modern history. This time period greatly impacted our creativity and our inspiration. So, but, our work, is mainly, reflective of mankind and not so much a political movement.

Lin: I read that your grandmother left you with a mantra, "*To become an artist, one must possess the highest spirit.*" Could you please explain more in detail how it has carried into your artwork and life?

Zhou: Because my grand-mom she is one of the most influential women, I know. And she founded the women's college, the first women's college in southern china. And that's why for my grandmother she was one of the very first women to bring the Western Culture to China. Education and all that. So that's why we have a strong influence from my grandma, and she believed that the spirit is more important than any other thing, so that's why when we decided to be artist's, she very strongly encouraged us, so, the spirit is very important.

Lin: How do you identity yourself culturally and do you ever identity yourself as an Asian-American?

Zhou: Umm...I am Chinese. In the last twenty some years, our activity and our stage has been in America and Europe, when people talk about the Zhou Brothers, they do not say they are Chinese or they are American. The Zhou Brothers have become a symbol today. So for people, it's just like Picasso, they don't talk about, Oh, Picasso is Spanish or French. Picasso is Picasso. Yeah.

Lin: Have you ever been included in an exhibition that was contextualized as Asian-American or have you ever been labeled as an "Asian-American artist"?

Zhou: No. I have never had any exhibition that labeled myself as an Asian-American Artist. And also, for me in the last twenty some years, I have had a lot of international exhibitions, but ninety percent of the exhibitions have been our solo exhibition. Very few of the exhibitions were for the group exhibition, but even group exhibitions, they were all very important artists in our time today.

Lin: In my class, there has been debate on whether or not there is an "Asian-American Aesthetic". Some say putting such a label on art with-Asian American artists limits the art and the artist. How do you feel about this?

Zhou: I think this is not a very important issue for, you know, for art, for culture, for sport, anything. If you're really good, you represent whatever you represent. The label doesn't matter. You know, if you are good people will remember that. If you're American, they will very proud of you. All the Americans will be very proud of you. But if you're, if you're, even three generations from China, then China will also be proud of you too. Yeah.

Lin: How has your art and yourself changed over the course of thirty years?

Zhou: In the last thirty some years, there has been a lot of changing. Because art always has to develop ...cannot stay the same. If art is not changing, and here is no development, there is no life. In the last thirty years, we basically have three different periods. The first period is China period. Start from the early seventies until the mid eighties, this period of work is more related to Chinese culture and history. Then from the late mid-eighties until nineties, this is American period. In this time, this group of work is mainly reflected to what's happening in our life, And then from the late nineties, until today, is Europe period. This period of work, is sensitive, colorful, and is related to what would be happen in the future.

Lin: What types of exhibition opportunities have changed or stayed the same for you over the years?

Zhou: You know in the eighties, in the mid-eighties until the beginning of nineties, we were very active in America. We had twenty, thirty galleries, in all different cities, and having ten, twenty exhibition's every years. Since 1993 until today, we were very active in Europe mostly in Germany, in Switzerland, Austria. We taught in Austria and Germany, and also in London. In this time, we were having many exhibitions. Mainly in the museum's, traveling, and also many of them in the galleries. In the nineties, also, one of very strong period for our sculpture development, we have created a lot of sculpture in Europe. After the year 2000, we start to spend

more time in America, to focus on our Art foundation. The foundation is supporting artists from Europe and China and to provide them working space, studio, and residency. We develop the Zhou Brothers Sculpture Park in Michigan State in the 2005. In the last six years, we put a lot of time and effort to develop the Zhou B. Art Center. Today the Art Center has become a very important stage for contemporary Art. We believe this stage will be beneficial for a lot of international artists and become one of the important play ground for the them.

Lin: Could you tell me about the exhibition you are currently working on?

Zhou: Two years ago, we had one of our most important exhibitions in our life. That was the “Zhou Brothers 35 year Retrospective “ opening in the National Art Museum in Beijing in China. And that includes in the last 35 years about 200 pieces of works from different period, and different Media, that is one of the most complete exhibitions of our work. In the last two years, we have few new exhibitions in the museum in Switzerland, and Germany, and also in America.

Lin: Do you have any specific goals or aspirations for the future?

Zhou: Very important thing for my brother and I is continue to create. The art, artistic creation is always one of our dreams, in the same time. We will continue to develop the Art Center to beneficial contemporary art world and our society. In the last 12 years, my brother and I taught in Salzburg, the most important academy for fine arts in Europe. Now we have a passion to develop the Zhou B Art Academy in America. So we hope it will happen.

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