



MEETING OF THE MINDS From left: *Container* (2002); Chinese artist Zhang Enli and art entrepreneur and exhibition curator Adrian Cheng pose in front of Zhang's painting, *Untitled* (2002)

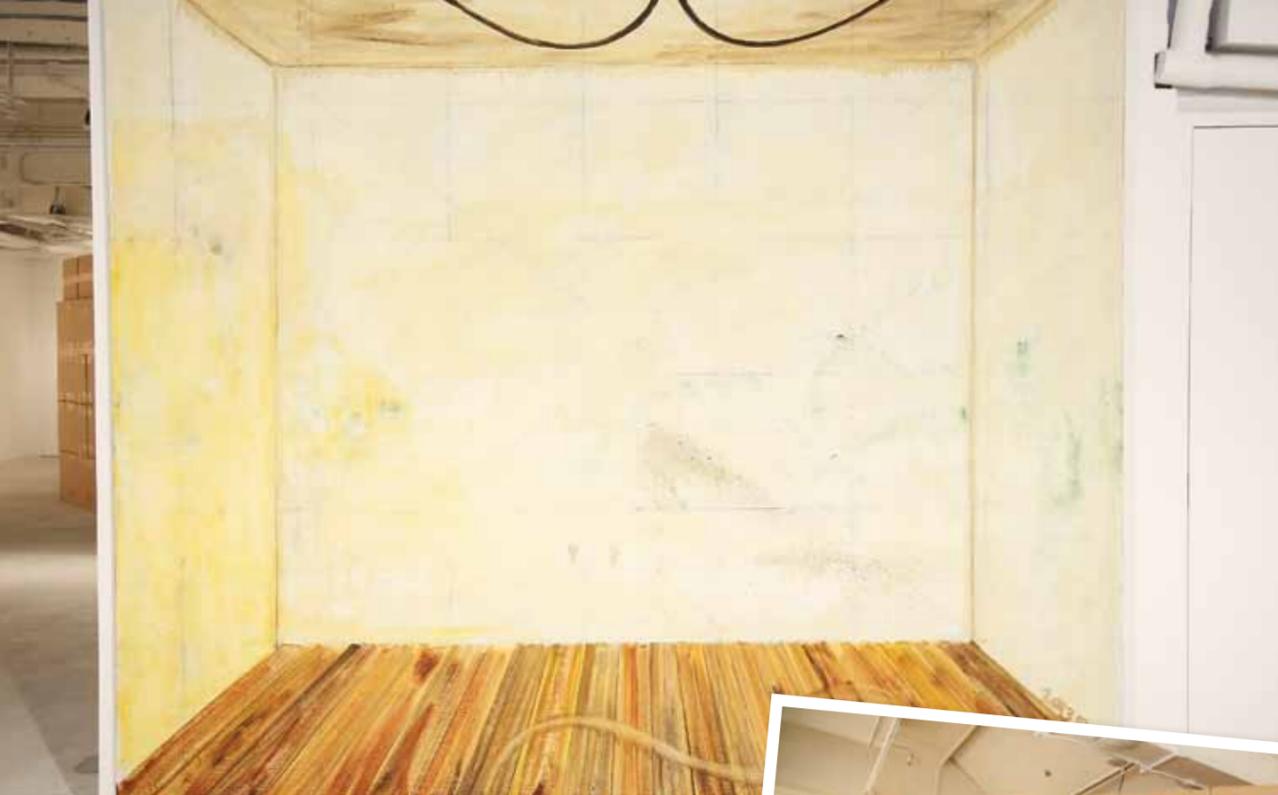
A Space Odyssey

The K11 Art Foundation Pop-up Space played host to two famous firsts during Art Week, with Shanghai-based artist ZHANG ENLI making his Hong Kong solo debut, in an exhibition presented by ADRIAN CHENG in his first show as curator, writes PAUL KAY

AS ART WEEK 2014 dawned in Hong Kong, art-world luminaries and torrential rain descended upon the city in equal measure, while every gallery and exhibition space geared up for what was likely to be their most important show of the year. But early on a Monday evening dense with possibility both meteorological and artistic, the show attracting most attention among Hong Kong's cultural cognoscenti was not at Art Basel or any of the usual blue-chip venues in and around Central's gallery district, but at an intriguing pop-up space on the border of Central and Sheung Wan.

Located on the former locker-room floor of the now-defunct Fitness First gym at Millennium Plaza, the K11 Art Foundation Pop-up Space opened its doors to give guests their first glimpse of *Space Painting* by Zhang Enli, an eagerly awaited exhibition that represented the artist's inaugural solo show in the city. On a night of notable firsts, the show also marked the debut as curator of Adrian Cheng, the founder of the K11 Art Foundation and heir to the Chow Tai Fook and New World Development empires.

Born in Jilin Province in 1965, Zhang has spent much of the last 20 years based in Shanghai, creating works that focus on ordinary, everyday objects, from



KEEPING IT SIMPLE From top: *Space* (2013); the eponymous *Space Painting* (2014) installation

cardboard boxes and tangles of wires to public toilets and empty cupboards. Thematically, he is interested in exploring the inherent differences between states of mind and the environment in which they exist, a path that has led to his recent series of “space paintings”, a collection of works that seek to echo their surroundings in an abstract way. Prior to the Hong Kong show, Zhang created a site-specific space painting installation at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London between October and December of last year.

The focal point of his debut Hong Kong solo exhibition is the piece the exhibition is named for—a low-ceilinged chamber made of cardboard boxes that sits in the centre of the white-walled pop-up venue. Created on site, its exterior evokes thoughts of order and mundanity, with its rows and columns of numbered boxes held together by packing tape seemingly applied in haste. Step within the chamber, however, and the feeling changes drastically. Every inch of the walls and ceiling are covered in thick, deliberate watercolour brushstrokes of greens, yellows, oranges, browns and the occasional patch of blue, creating a cocoon of sorts that is both womb-like and slightly claustrophobic as one follows its short path round the central pillar to a dead end. It’s a work that embodies Zhang’s personal response to Hong Kong—



the city’s geometric shapes, its densely packed environment and myriad contrasts—and a fascinating example of the artist’s technique.

On the far wall behind this installation is another of Zhang’s new space paintings created for the Hong Kong show, also comprised of watercolour on cardboard boxes. It’s here that the similarities end, however, as this work features a background of pure white, broken only by an undulating line of green that recalls both a snake and a garden hose suspended by supports at its uppermost curves.

The exhibition is completed by three of Zhang’s earlier oil-on-canvas works, each hung on different walls near the entrance to allow the viewer to give them their full attention. Two of these works, *Untitled* and *Container*, are from 2002, while *Space*—by far the largest and most intriguing of the three—was created in 2013.

IMAGES COURTESY OF K11 ART FOUNDATION

COMING HOME Cheng and Zhang inside Zhang’s *Space Painting* installation

“Zhang Enli was creating the memory of home, leaving little traces of paint that show the idea of human presence”

Zhang was present for the exhibition opening and, through a translator, took part in a discussion about his work alongside curator Cheng and moderator Judith Benhamou-Huet, a prominent French art writer. Cheng explained that he had been familiar with Zhang’s work for many years, but was moved to collaborate with the artist on the current show after being “extremely impressed” upon seeing his work at the ICA in 2013.

“From 2007 to 2010, Zhang Enli was creating the memory of the idea of home, his house, leaving little traces of paint that show the idea of human presence and also a sense of emptiness—but the participant becomes the balancing voice,” said Cheng of the artist’s earlier space paintings. “But from 2011 to 2013, his aesthetic vision changed a little bit by using a lot of colourful brushstrokes in his painting, like in [the chamber created for Hong Kong].”

Cheng continued: “The colour when he was doing the space painting was much more vivid, especially at ICA. In one of the interviews, he put out the idea of echoing

the colours of London, but it’s very subconscious and it’s not totally rational, so it’s nothing he has calculated. It’s a subconscious spontaneity to the location of the work.”

Zhang and Cheng discussed the concept of home as being

central to the work, an idea that stemmed from a time when Zhang was moving apartments, causing him to reflect upon the changing nature of “home”. The chamber, said Cheng, is a shelter, and harks back to feelings from childhood—of being in a warm, safe and perhaps secret place. Cheng also explained that they had chosen a venue close to the hustle and bustle of fast-paced Central to create a greater sense of contrast between the surrounding area and this work.

The pair also talked about the notion of art as “fading memory”, a concept that is reflected in the temporary nature of the space and the perishable materials used by Zhang to create the new works. In a city and a country that changes so rapidly, it’s a notion that seems particularly fitting—although fading away is the last thing we’d expect from this particular artist and curator. ❶

Space Painting by Zhang Enli runs until July 13 at K11 Art Foundation Pop-up Space, G/F, Cosco Tower, Grand Millennium Plaza, 183 Queen’s Road Central, Sheung Wan. k11artfoundation.org

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

K11 Art Foundation’s swift expansion

Founded by Adrian Cheng in 2010 with the aim of advancing the development of Chinese contemporary art, the not-for-profit K11 Art Foundation (KAF) has made huge strides in the past four years. Recently named one of the organisations of the year by *The Art Newspaper Asia*, KAF is committed to creating an effective ecosystem in China that educates the masses about art, and that gives emerging artists the support and platform on which to develop and gain attention.

To this end, the organisation has established art villages in Wuhan and Guiyang, including artist-in-residency programmes, to cultivate young Chinese talent. KAF also promotes art through its K11 Art Malls, including the current young Chinese artist group show in Hong Kong and a Claude Monet exhibition in Shanghai. Nine more K11 locations are due to open in China by 2019.

Stretching its reach across the globe, KAF recently initiated a three-year partnership with the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. It’s one that aims to establish a relationship between young Chinese and French artists, beginning with a co-curated exhibition in Paris in October.

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