

# Empire of Cotton

## Zhao Zhao

MASSIMODECARLO Gallery Pop Up at K11 MUSEA is pleased to present *Empire of Cotton* a solo presentation by artist Zhao Zhao which relates to his solo exhibition *the Buddha* on view at the Hong Kong gallery in Pedder Building.

Cotton is an important image and also a poignant element in the artist's life. Growing up in Xinjiang, the furthest province in Western China, Zhao spent most of his childhood in the production corps performing voluntary labor and working picking up cotton.

This project premieres five newly created wall sculptures and one large installation work. Titled *Spread* the series of wall works and installation are all made out of cotton.

The natural fiber is at the core of Zhao Zhao's thinking, it relates to his earlier work *White*, 2020 but, most importantly, it shows the artist's emotional journey throughout 2020. White is the colour of cotton, and white is a symbol of light after chaos. It is synonymous with beginnings, encompassing both everything and nothing.

The events of 2020 have shown how one incident can spread; expanding spatially and unstopably, like in a maze. As a consequence, the changes brought about are still impacting people's lives, including the artist's.

Recalling his time in the production corps, Zhao remembered that after the picking the remaining cotton stalks would be burned and the ashes would be used as nutrients for the next year. Picking cotton was onerous and painful work, but the burning afterwards was a spectacular and exultant moment for Zhao.

In *Spread* Zhao burns the cotton; bearing in mind that cotton cannot be controlled while burning, as dampening it damages the surfaces, the artist has to concentrate carefully on the ignition point so it does not develop into an open fire and it stops at its critical point.

This is the most arduous part of the process which requires great experimentation and precision before it reaches stability. When the point of ignition is reached, it doesn't create an open fire but it spreads quickly.

Zhao is intrigued by this state: the brown and black burning traces starts to 'paint' the white cotton, he is thrilled by the 'weight' of this state, more than a visual phenomenon, the burning spread becomes a metaphor for the spreading of production methods, trading, and culture.

Ignition is also a fundamental component in this process because it symbolises the most primitive and ancient relationship, the relationship between things and nature. The act of burning is like stepping into civilization while its spreading and multiplying relates to restraint and intervention.

Rich in metaphors, *Empire of Cotton* is on view through the 14th June. For more information please contact the gallery at:  
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**Zhao Zhao**

Zhao Zhao was born in 1982 in Xinjiang, China, and he currently lives and works in Beijing and Los Angeles. In his art, he engages with real subjects in multiple mediums and plays with art forms, emphasizing an exploration of the relationship between the individual and the rest of society. His work is developed around the subtle emotional changes that take place as we are confronted with diverse cultural influences. He brings together the expressive methods of contemporary art and traditional culture to create metaphors for people's living circumstances and modern society's real conditions in a globalized world. His work also reflects his attitudes toward the coexistence of collective and individual ideals.

In recent years, Zhao Zhao's bold, radical artistic practice has attracted international attention. He has presented solo exhibitions and personal projects at the Alexander Ochs Gallery (Berlin), Carl Kostyál (Stockholm), Roberts & Tilton (Los Angeles), Chambers Gallery (New York), Mizuma and One Gallery (Beijing), Lin & Lin Gallery (Taipei), Tang Contemporary Art (Hong Kong), Tang Contemporary Art (Beijing), China Art Archives and Warehouse (Beijing), Song Art Museum (Beijing), and Fusion Art Center (Beijing). His work has been shown in group exhibitions and collected by many institutions, including MoMA PS1 (New York), the Tampa Museum of Art (Tampa), Pinchuk Art Center (Kiev), Groninger Museum (Groningen), the Museum of Asian Art (Berlin), Hamburger Bahnhof Museum for Contemporary Art (Berlin), Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea (Milan), MAXXI National Museum of 21st Century Art (Rome), the DSL Collection (Paris), Castellón Contemporary Art Space (Castellón), the White Rabbit Gallery (Sydney), M+ (Hong Kong), the Minsheng Art Museum (Beijing), the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (Beijing), the New Century Art Foundation (Beijing), Taikang Space (Beijing), Luxelakes · A4 Art Museum (Chengdu), Minsheng Art Museum (Shanghai), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Shanghai), Start Museum (Shanghai), Ming Contemporary Art Museum (Shanghai), Tianjin Art Museum (Tianjin),

the Hubei Museum of Art (Wuhan), the He Xiangning Art Museum (Shenzhen), Wanlin Art Museum at Wuhan University (Wuhan), the Wuzhen Contemporary Art Exhibition 2019 (Wuzhen), and the Yokohama Triennale (Yokohama).

He has developed artistic collaborations with Louis Vuitton, Land Rover, Nike, Vans, Venvennet, and other brands.

In 2019, Zhao Zhao won the Artist of the Year Award at the Thirteenth Award of Art China (AAC). In 2017, his piece Project Taklamakan was selected as the poster and catalog cover image for the Yokohama Triennale. That same year, Zhao Zhao was named one of China's top 10 artists by CoBo and he won the Young Artist of the Year Nomination Award at the Eleventh Award of Art China (AAC). In 2014, Modern Painters named Zhao Zhao one of the world's top 25 artists to watch.