

Press release

Tang Zhigang - The Book of Laughter and Forgetting

March 23st – May 15th, 2020



Tang Zhigang (b. 1959), *Order*, 2018, oil on canvas, 118 1/8 × 157 1/2 in (300 x 400 cm)

New York, Mar 26th - “I keep using children images in my creations, because I always adhere to refuse growing up in my deep mind. My little heart, which grew up in the farming civilization, cannot bear the changes that the modernization brought to Chinese societies, politics, economies, cultures and nature. In the face of smog pollutions, mortgages, European refugees, terrorisms, COVID-19 and the other problems, I am sure that now is not only me have a wish to live in the childhood and never wake up. In addition to the external social care and internal question meanings, no matter in which of my life stages, play the role of a never grow up child is my era choice of the culture.”

--- Tang Zhigang

W.Ming is thrilled to present Tang Zhigang’s online exhibition “The Book of Laughter and Forgetting” on its official website and Artsy from March 23rd to May 15th, 2020. This exhibition displays artist’s 29 oil paintings during 2009 to 2018, and seven oil paintings before 2009. From leaping in different stages, viewers can see the artist keeps his keen, innovative and constantly breakthrough manner of his arts. For this show, W.Ming seeks to exhibit a relative clear context for viewers, and to analyze the ideological art of “children”.

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting is a novel by Czech writer Milan Kundera, published in France in 1979. This book is composed of seven independent narratives which united by some common themes - the nature of forgetting. Forgetting occurs in histories, politics and life in general. In the book, the writer used the genre of magic realism to tell different stories. "Tang Zhigang: The Book of Laughter and Forgetting" exhibition is curated by Chen Leru. The curator quoted Milan Kundera's book title for this exhibition, and describes Tang Zhigang's works as follows:

On the first impression of Tang Zhigang's works, you will usually feel interesting and fun. Especially when you see the series of soldiers who are having meetings, you will even laugh out loudly. In a traditional impression, soldiers are well-disciplined, stereotypes and serious, but the artist turns this impression into a cartoon image. The works have an obvious sense of playful, not only childlike but also audacious in the extreme. The context of the Chinese contemporary art is different from the past, and



Tang Zhigang (b. 1959), *The Army Day*, 2011, oil on canvas, 66 15/16 x 98 7/16 in (170 x 250 cm)

many artists create their works with the attitude of pop art or cynical realism. However, using the soldier's theme to express the specific and vivid scene which still completely overturned our imagination of the soldier's life. It let everyone worry about Tang Zhigang's situation in the political environment, which the soldier's image cannot be disfigured. When Tang Zhigang converted the series of "Soldiers in Meeting" into the series of "Children in Meeting", many people consider this action is intentional, is a satire and

criticism of the reality, or is a kind of provocation after being suppressed. But, in fact, these are just our interpretation of Tang Zhigang's work. We lack a deeper understanding of the works' inner meanings.

Tang Zhigang, who has military experience, explained his main works before 2010 in a specific and sincere way:

"When people asked me why I painted 'Children in Meetings', I usually answered that, in the previous 'Soldiers in Meeting', some people took it personally and even caused troubles. Therefore, I simply changed them to children characters. Chose children's images because I had been doing young people's art education for a long time. In the army, I was a propaganda cadre and worked in a political section. Except set up various venues, wrote slogans and took photos, there was another special task which was to teach art classes for the children in the army compounds. In order to prevent the children to vandalize the camps, the head of the army assigned me to discipline these children by arts and paintings. I had been doing this job for eight or nine years. Until today, I still could not get rid of it. In that time, my studio was the classroom. In front of the 'Army's Meeting' painting, children were raising their hands up to answer my questions. In this scene, the painting and the children were too easily to connect each other. It happened by accident, but the final decision of using children as the special symbols was made after careful consideration. It was not to entirely avoid accusations. "

Tang Zhigang explained why he used the children images as the unusual symbols, and even questioned the associations of linking the art works with social problems and political issues. However, he also admitted that "no matter how much I compressed the pictures and reduce the superfluous elements of the reality, the original plot characteristics in my descent were unconsciously exposed and noticed by the others". This important self-narration paragraph of the "Children in Meetings" was mentioned in the past of Tang Zhigang's reviews. Normally, viewers' interpretations of works often deviate from artists' explanations. Our purpose of this exhibition is not to deliberately sort out Tang Zhigang's personal creative history or background. By understanding of the art perspectives, we want to drive viewers to the pure art itself. A person's growth track cannot be ignored by those who do creative jobs. For many artists, the tracks even determine their artistic directions.

Memory is an important part of human beings. It is unlike blood and genes, but it is also irreplaceable and indispensable. In some ways, our lives are continued by memories. The "Soldiers in Meeting" and "Children in Meeting" series became the past of Tang Zhigang's creations. He recorded his earlier memories by drawing these paintings. This was a way for him to recall his past; this was a way to confide his memories. The process of drawing the memories was to dispatch all the past uncertain emotions and real feelings, then combed them again and again ritually. There have remembrances, satires, resistances, angers, sentimentalities, and even self-deprecations. In the end, Tang Zhigang used his artistic language to make you laugh. Lu Peng, an art historian and critic, commented on Tang Zhigang's works: "Art rarely has the opportunities to solve real problems and to raise rational questions like philosophy. However, people's understandings of reality need to be emotional, and have some kinds of hints that cannot be delivered in words. Perhaps, just one "laughter" can make people to reflect on various problems". In this orderly or disorderly combing process, new artistic inspirations and directions will always reappear. For the present, every step in the past is accumulation for the future.

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In the recent decade, the features of Tang Zhigang's works has been changed significantly. Why Tang Zhigang made such a big change? He said, "It's because of my health. During 2009 to 2015, I stayed in hospitals several times and had a serious surgery. Due to the treatment process, I started to pay attention on my body health. The past works were more focused on the external world. The difference directions of the works were closely related to my personal life experience. In the past, I paid more attention on the social public level, such as the societies, politics and life experiences. Now, I have more concerns about the meanings and values of life, artistic languages and the ontology. In the first stage, I put more emphasis on the narrations. In the latter stage, I put more focus on the expressions. These two have the essence differences. For artists, they will have several phases in their life. The styles' changing for each phase is related to the special experiences that they have in the corresponding time. These changes are easily reflected on the paintings".

In Tang Zhigang's early creative time, the content and story were the main features of his works. In the later works, he de-emphasized the storylines, although the content's carrier still using the traditional narration method. Tang Zhigang paid more attention on the usage, refinement and expression of the artistic language. The painting's modeling was free and bold. It freed from the figurative realism in the earlier works, and the color tended to be subjective, emphasizing the inner expression and emotional rendering with rich gray tones. Recent period works were more about the explorations and experiences of self-life.

"The Book of Laughter and Forgetting" exhibition displays Tang Zhigang's 36 works, mainly were painted from 2009 to 2018. Meanwhile, we also selected several representative works before 2009, in order to better compare the connection between Tang Zhigang's recent decade creations and the past's; and how his artistic direction and ideas developed and changed. By comparing the past and exploring the truth through the artist's spiritual journey, we hope to make present day much clearer. Let viewers observe how Tang Zhigang's painting history changed and transformed during this period. This is also the mission of our exhibition.

The artistic sightseeing, which float on the surface, is like appreciate the cherry blossoms in every spring. How can we have the ultimate pleasure of lasting forms and spiritual harmony? Tang Zhigang's friends said that Tang Zhigang has always been accepting the traction in both directions: "the past and the present."

Milan Kundera said: "We must never allow the future to collapse under the burden of memory." This is also the reflection of re-finding the artistic truth and the spiritual truth from memory. Tang Zhigang uses laughter to refuse oblivion.

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About the Artist

Tang Zhigang (Chinese, b. 1959) was born in Kunming, Yunnan province. He grew up in a Chinese military family and joined the PLA army directly after graduating from the secondary school. Tang Zhigang learnt oil painting at the PLA Art Academy in Beijing in the late of 1980s. Currently, he lives and works in Kunming and Beijing. Tang Zhigang's early works were more focus on his life in the Chinese army. From the late 1990s to 2012, he created the iconic "*Children in Meeting*", "*Chinese Fairy Tale*", and "*Never Grow Up*"

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series. Tang Zhigang's works are closely related to his unique experience. Through the art of humorous language, by children's naughty figures and serious political conference scenes, to create a great contrast and funny sense of images, he vaguely depicted the real situations and highlighted his own critical attitude and the exploration of human nature. His works have been exhibited in the following art institutions: Shenzheng Art Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, Liu Haisu Art Museum, National Art Museum of China, Yunnan Provincial Museum, Bulgarian National Telecommunications Museum Art Center, Czech National Gallery, Yuan Xiaocen Arts Center, Guangdong Art Museum, Tang Contemporary Art, Red Bridge Gallery, doArt Gallery and more. Recently, he has held solo and group exhibitions at CGK Contemporary Gallery (2019), Wenda Gallery (2018), IWE Art Museum (2018), Manege Central Exhibition Hall (2017), Yunnan Art Museum (2016), Hanart TZ Gallery (2015), Yuan Xiaocen Art Museum (2015), Yunnan Provincial Museum (2014), Four-Face Space Art Centre (2014), Guangxi Art Museum (2013), National Art Museum of Romania (2013), Guangxi Art Museum (2013), Red Bridge Gallery (2013).

W.MING 蓮藝國際

W.MING is a private art advisory and consulting company founded in 2010 by Xiaoming Zhang. W.MING provides private sales, art advisor and art education consulting services for private and institutional clients globally. The works we've promoted have been exhibited around the globe at many museums such as the Metropolitan Museum and the Guggenheim Museum. W.MING works with artists to represent their exhibitions and sales, promoting the development of the art industry globally. The company specializes in international classic and modern and contemporary art. W.MING currently has offices in Beijing, Shanghai and New York.

www.wmingart.com

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Peng, Lü. *Tang Zhigang: Rewriting Memory through Paintings*. Journal of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. Issue 3, 2017 (Lü Peng: Art historian, curator, and critic. Now he is the President of L-Art University.)

Write by

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新闻稿

笑忘书——唐志冈的绘画

2020年3月23日-5月15日

纽约·3月26日 – “创作中始终坚持的儿童形象背后其实藏着拒绝长大的时代心里，我这颗从农耕文明中发育生长起来的小心脏承受不了现代化给人类社会、以及自然所带来的改变，面对雾霾、房贷和欧洲难民，恐怖主义，新冠肺炎等问题，我相信在今天，不仅是我个人才会有这种想要永远活在儿童时代而不愿醒来的愿望。除了外在的社会关照和内在的意义诘问，无论是哪一个阶段，扮演永远不长的儿童形象是我对文化的一种时代选择。”

--唐志冈



唐志冈（生于1959年）·《受命》·2018年·布面油画·300 x 400厘米

莲艺 (W.Ming) 很喜悦于线上推出艺术家唐志冈的个展《笑忘书——唐志冈绘画作品》。此次，所展出的36幅油画作品基本由艺术家创造于2009年至2018年间，亦加入几幅2009年以前的代表作。从不同阶段的跨越，可见艺术家保持敏锐，革新，且不断突破的态度，而我们的展览力图让观众呈现一个较为清晰的脉络，去剖析一个“儿童”的思想艺术。展览自2020年3月23日至5月15日。

“笑忘书”是1979年捷克流亡作家米兰·昆德拉 (Milan Kundera) 在法国出版的小说。小说由七个独立的叙事组成，并结合了一些共同的主题 - 遗忘的性质，因为遗忘发生在历史，政治和一般生活中，作家以魔幻现实主义去叙述不同的故事。

《笑忘书——唐志冈绘画作品》由陈乐孺策展。策展人引用了欧洲作家的标题，如此叙述唐志冈的作品：

W.MING 蓮藝

初见唐志冈的作品，第一印象通常会觉得有趣、好玩儿，尤其看到画中那些一本正经开会的军人，还会呵呵笑出声来——把中国人印象中规矩、刻板、严肃的军人画得如此卡通，甚至带着明显的玩味，不仅童趣未泯，还胆大包天。虽然中国现当代绘画的语境与过去不可同日而语，不少画家也以波普或者玩世现实主义的姿态进行创作，但拿军人题材去表现描绘细节具体生动的场景，完全颠覆了我们对军人生活的想象，让大家为在这个军人形象不容丑化的政治环境里替唐志冈捏一把汗。当他从“军人开会”系列，转变为“儿童开会”系列，军人变成儿童的形象之后，许多人更是认为这是故意的，是对现实的讽刺与批判，或者是被压制之后的一种挑衅。



唐志冈 (生于 1959 年) · 《建军节》· 2018 年 · 布面油画 · 170 x 150 厘米

但事实上，这是我们对唐志冈作品想当然的解读，对其作品表象的背后缺乏更深入的认知。有军人经历的唐志冈对 2010 年之前的主要创作有具体且诚恳地说明：

“一般人问起为什么画‘儿童开会’，我通常的回答是因为在此之前的‘军人开会’常有人会对号入座，甚至找麻烦，为此干脆画成了儿童。而利用儿童形象是因为我一直在做儿童美术教育的

工作。在部队我是宣传干部，在政治处工作，除了布置各类会场、写标语、拍照片外，还有一项特殊的任务，那就是为部队大院的孩子办美术班。学校假期为避免小孩子们在营区内搞破坏，部队首长指派我用美术、绘画管教他们，这个工作一干就是八九年，直到今天都还没有脱手。我的画室就是教室，‘部队开会’的画面前是小孩子们在举手回答我的问题，它们之间太容易发生联系了。事出偶然，但确定用儿童作为专门符号确定下来还是经过认真考虑的，不完全是逃避指责。”

唐志冈为自己使用“确定儿童作为专门符号”进行解释，他甚至质疑那种将作品与社会和政治问题联系起来的联想，可是他也承认：“无论我怎样的尽可能压缩画面，减少多余的其他现实因素，那种我血统中原有的情节特点还是会不自觉地流露在外面而被人注意到。”

这段关于“儿童开会”系列诞生的自述，在过去对唐志冈的评论中经常会被提到。这很重要。读者对艺术家作品的解读常常和艺术家自己的解释相背离。我们做这个展览，并不是刻意要去梳理唐志冈的个人创作史或背景史。从解读艺术的角度，我们更希望观者能回归到纯粹的艺术研究中来。许多博物馆或艺术机构，直到现在，还是通过讲故事，或者以猎奇的角度通过艺术家的轶事来稀释我们对艺术本体的解读，给艺术家贴上符号化的标签。唐志冈的个人经历很容易让我们也陷入这样的语境，我们甚至有些警惕这样的行为。但一个人成长的轨迹，是不可能被以创造性为职业的人忽略掉的，对很多艺术家而言，甚至会决定他的艺术方向。

记忆，是构成为人的一个重要组成部分，不同于血液，不同于基因，却一样无可替代不可或缺，某种意义上来说，我们的生命是由记忆延续的。“军人开会”、“儿童开会”这两个系列已经成为唐志冈创作经历里的过去，是他在过去，用绘画书写了他更早的记忆，是追忆也是倾述。在用绘画书写的过程中，就像是他将自己的过去所有不明确的情绪或者真实的感受再次调度出来，进行一次次仪式性地梳理。有缅怀、有讽刺、有反抗、有抵触、有愤怒、有感伤、甚至也有自嘲。最后他所呈现的是一种让你发笑的艺术语言。美术史学家、评论家吕澎评论唐志冈的作品就说过，“艺术很少有机会能够解决现实问题，能够像哲学那样提出理性的质疑，可是，人们对现实的理解需要感性，需要某种难以用言语来表达的提示。可能，仅仅是“笑”，就能够让人们反思各种问题。”在这种有序或无序的梳理过程中，新的艺术灵感与方向也总会再次出现。对现在而言，过去的每一步，都是积淀。

最近这十年，唐志冈的作品面貌有着明显的改变。

W.MING 蓮藝

为什么会有这么大的一个变化呢？唐志冈说，“还是跟我身体有关系。我 2009 年至 2015 年间住了几次医院，做了很大的手术。因为这样的一次的疾病治疗过程的体验，我开始关注自己身体内部的方面。过去的作品更关注身体外在的世界。两个阶段的作品方向的不同，是跟个人的人生经验有密切的关系的。过去所关注的社会、政治、人生经验都是社会公共层面上的东西，后面关注生命的意义、生命的存在价值、艺术语言与本体的问题；过去更看重于叙述性描述，后一个阶段更看重于表达、抒发，这是本质上的差别。艺术家一生会有很多时期，每个时期的风格样式的变化，都会和他那个时期的特殊经验经历关联。这会很容易反应到绘画创作的面貌上来。”

显然，由过去军队群体生活中的个人记忆转变为对自我身体和个人经验的记忆是唐志冈转变的根本。

唐志冈这个时期的作品更注意表现性语言的运用。早期的作品内容与故事性是其主要特点，但后面这批作品已经不再强调故事性了，尽管内容的载体没离开像过去那样传统的叙述方式。他将注意力更集中在绘画语言的锤炼上，造型自由大胆写意，摆脱了早期作品中的具象写实，色彩也倾向于主观，用丰富的灰色调强调内心的表达与情绪的渲染，这一时期的作品更多的是对自我生命的探究与体验。

这次展览共 36 张作品。大部分是唐志冈 2009 年至 2018 年的作品，同时我们也认真地选择了几幅在 2009 年以前的代表作品，就是为了更好比对近十年唐志冈的创作和过去的联系，他的艺术方向与思路如何发展与改变。我们希望通过对照过去，通过艺术家的心灵旅程去探索真相，从而让现在变得更加清晰起来。让观者观察唐志冈的个人绘画史在这一时期是如何转折和变革的，这也是我们这次展览的使命所在。我们的目的，就是想把目光聚焦在当下，希望在世界艺术各种风潮与流派的争涌表现寻找话语权的时候，看到唐志冈如何突破“一直在开会”。

浮于表象的艺术观光，就如看每年观赏春天的樱花，又如何能拥有持久性的形式与精神共融的极致愉悦呢？

唐志冈的朋友说，他一直在接受着两个方向的牵引：“历史的和当下的。”

米兰·昆德拉说：“我们绝不能让未来在回忆的重压下崩溃。”这也是唐志冈近十年来，用笑拒绝遗忘，从记忆中重新寻求艺术真实与精神真实的诉求与写照。

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关于艺术家

唐志冈 1959 年出生于云南省昆明市，成长于一个中国军人家庭并在高中毕业后直接加入解放军，在 1980 年代末进入中国人民解放军艺术学院学习油画，现居住、工作于昆明和北京。唐志冈的早期艺术作品以表现中国军队生活为主。于 1990 年代后期至 2012 年，他创作出标志性“儿童开会”，“中国童话”，“永远长不大”系列艺术作品。唐志冈的艺术作品与他独特的经历密切相关，通过幽默诙谐的艺术语言，借以儿童天真懵懂形象与严肃的政治会议等场景创作出极具反差、荒谬的画面感，隐晦的描绘出现实中的处境同时凸显了自己的批判态度以及对人性的探索。他的作品曾在深圳美术馆、上海当代艺术馆、刘海粟美术馆、中国美术馆、云南省博物馆、保加利亚国家电信博物馆艺术中心、捷克国家美术馆、袁晓岑美术馆、广东美术馆、当代唐人艺术中心、上海红桥画廊，北京都亚特画廊等机构举办过个展及联展。他近期在以下机构举办了个展及联展，包括 CGK 昆明当代美术馆（2019 年）、文达画廊（2018 年）、艾维美术馆（2017 年）、马涅日中央展览厅（2017 年）、云南美术馆（2016 年）汉雅轩（2015 年）、袁晓岑美术馆（2015 年）、云南省博物馆（2014 年）、四面空间艺术中心（2014 年）、广西美术馆（2013 年）、罗马尼亚国家当代艺术博物馆（2013 年）、广西美术馆（2013 年）、红桥画廊（2013 年）。

W.MING 莲艺国际

莲艺国际艺术公司成立于 2010 年。莲艺为全球私人，美术馆和机构客户提供艺术私洽销售，艺术咨询和艺术教育咨询。莲艺销售作品曾在美国大都会美术馆，古根海姆美术馆等国际现当代美术馆展出。莲艺也参与文化和商业发展。莲艺同艺术家合作，进行展览、销售和 international 推广。推动全球艺术和文化的生态发展，创立价值。莲艺团队于欧洲，美国和亚洲皆有专业的员工；本公司专注于国际古典和现当代艺术。目前办公地点分别位于中国北京、上海和美国纽约。

www.wmingart.com

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2. 《记忆的改写——唐志冈的绘画》吕澎 天津美术学院学报 2017 年 03 期
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