



## ZHANG DING: TRIGGERED AT ANY TIME

For those who have observed Zhang Ding's works or performances, one word may pop up in their mind: stirring.

When SHMOG began to consider the cross-border cooperation projects, it was thinking hard how to encourage contemporary artists to make something different out of this ordinary mixture of silica, and how to successfully present the valuable efforts together by the artist and the museum. Therefore, the museum was very cautious in the choice of the first artist for the project. Thanks to the efforts of project curator Ms. Lisa Li, SHMOG, who had been outside the contemporary art circle, was honored to be in contact with ShanghART Gallery, a famous Chinese contemporary art gallery. After several rounds of in-depth communication with the gallery founder, Mr. Lorenz, SHMOG gained trust from the gallery. Zhang Ding, a "stirring" and cool post-80s artist who is skilled in a variety of materials for various artistic types, naturally became a candidate for SHMOG's scheme.

Zhang Ding's installation works often center around the strength of the senses and the will. Whether it is wood, foaming agent or steel, the use of materials in the installations is the focus for the artist to control and materialize: centering around the control over specific factors such as the senses and the will, Zhang Ding uses a mix of materials to establish passionate and confrontational scenes. "We intended to find an artist who has great use and control of materials." As the first artist to participate in the project,

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Zhang Ding said that he had conducted some examinations and research on glass before signing up in the project, but had finally given up using this material for work when he understood the production process and the cycle. Thanks to this project, Zhang Ding picked up glass again as the major material for creation. “Glass is fragile and breakable; it can also be damaging, but it no doubt possess visual beauty.” In Zhang Ding’s view, glass has its own particularity, “This is not some material I can easily control. It will limit the size of what I make, because small items may be no problem, while bigger ones may be troublesome. I can’t control the production time, either, and I can’t be sure what comes out of the furnace is what I expected.”

Fortunately, for Zhang Ding, “everything that may solved is not difficult.” In the final presentation of the works, the artist fully tapped into the physical properties of glass—fragile and hard, transparent and dense, hot in process and cold in finish—and build a spatial balance in the sense of an artist in three ways. “I do not think that glass and contemporary art are out of tune, because any idea will have to be landed in the physical space.” In this landing process, one has diverse choices of materials. Glass possesses both decorative beauty and a capacity for expression. “It all depends on the artist’s own choice.”

“Although I regret that I did not have a deeper understanding of glass, I am very happy to complete a very good piece of work.” This “very good” piece of work is “Black Substance”, which was made out of glass and steel. This artwork, which bears the same name of the exhibition, was display at the Hong Kong Basel Art Fair in the same year before the project, which immediately won great attention. What’s more interesting, this artwork is also Zhang Ding’s WeChat avatar.

“What I wanted to build was an atmosphere of danger, which could be trigger at any time,” Zhang Ding values natural forces between materials, “Glass and steel are very hard materials, and we already have fixed impression about them. Being bound by such impressions, to me, constitutes a feeling of danger.” How to break out of such impressions and stereotypes? Black represents a mysterious and unknown space, and

when black meets glass, the round glass balls, like fisheyes, reflect the surrounding space where there is no color; the transparent glass in the black feels like a strange world. It seems fragile, but it supports and is supported by the hard steel plates that are stacked in layers. It stands quietly in an atmosphere of crisis that may break out at any time. The artist succeeded in finding a balance where he expresses the sense of pressure in steel and a smooth texture of glass. Through sophisticated calculation and combination, the round black balls achieve a subtle balance with the steel plates without any extra support. With the most simple and basic ways to show the most original properties of two materials, Zhang Ding skillfully provoked the hidden uncertainty, giving the viewers a clear sense of tension. Such tension exist not only between the audience and the work, but also during communication between the museum and the artist. The revamping of exhibition space, the design of the exhibition and promotion materials, and the planning for the opening ceremony ... Such seemingly trivial exchanges and divergences in ideas were also a beneficial lesson for the SHMOG, who was just stepping into the world of contemporary art.

In recent years, Zhang Ding is having a more dynamic presence in contemporary art at home and abroad. In 2014, at Zhang Ding's Solo Exhibition "Orbit of Rock", all chemical actions arising from the mixture of factors twisted into sculptures of mood and atmospheres. Later, he started a series of projects and set up his own art label "Control Club", trying to open up his ways of working to generate more possibilities. From the "18 Cubes", a massive installation, to "Vortex" which is on display at ShanghART Gallery, and from "Enter the Dragon" and "Devouring Time" to projects that integrate various materials and artistic types such as "Invisible", Zhang Ding has brought the audience more surprises and a curiosity what will happen next time. Zhang Ding modestly said, "I am a bit lazy, so I would like to use more materials that are processed through cold working instead of through forging, so as to make the works more industrial." Maybe in the future, we can see more works from Zhang Ding that combine new materials with glass. The artist has made this ancient material a carrier for more abstract concepts in the context of contemporary art. "I hope that better works can appear in the future 'Annealing' projects, and artists need to turn glass from a material into a language, rather than simply form a shape out of it."

As the prelude to the SHMOG's "Annealing" project, Zhang Ding's "Black Substance" exhibition undoubtedly laid the foundation and a standard for the development of the project, and also represented the beginning of the dialogue between glass and contemporary art. Both SHMOG and contemporary artists will face more challenges and collisions which may include tense confrontations as well as new products after the contact and integration.

"Annealing" was triggered well for a brighter future.

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