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**First Canadian Survey of Work by One of China's Most Respected
Contemporary Artists Opening at Vancouver Art Gallery**

Zhang Huan: Altered States

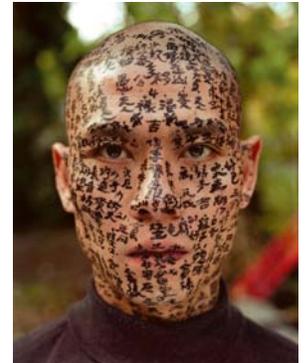
VANCOUVER, BC — For the first time in Canada, the **Vancouver Art Gallery** will present a major retrospective of work by **Zhang Huan**, one of the most important and widely recognized Chinese artists working in the United States and China. On view from **June 7 to October 5, 2008**, **Zhang Huan: Altered States** includes 55 of the artist's major works produced over the past 15 years in Beijing, New York and Shanghai, including photographs and sculpture.

Born in 1965 in An Yang, Henan Province, Zhang Huan is best known for his controversial early works in performance art. When he began his career in Beijing, his performances focused on physical endurance, pushing the limits of what was acceptable to authorities in the early 1990s, in post-Tiananmen Square, China. In 1998, he moved to New York, where he experienced greater freedom and established an international career with larger-scale performances that often involved the participation of scores of volunteers. In 2006, Zhang Huan moved to Shanghai, abandoning performance art in favour of works in sculpture, installation and painting. Many of these reveal deep connections to Chinese heritage and history.

"The Vancouver Art Gallery is extremely pleased to continue to bring the best of China's contemporary art world to Vancouver," said Vancouver Art Gallery director Kathleen Bartels. "Having presented the exhibitions *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective* in 2007 and *Wang Du* in 2005, the Gallery has established itself as an important North American visual arts institution presenting contemporary Chinese art. We are proud to continue this tradition with *Zhang Huan: Altered States*."

In 1991, Zhang Huan began advanced study in art at China's foremost art school, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, where his training concentrated on oil painting. While a student, he moved to an area on the eastern outskirts of the city and in 1993 established with his artist friends the legendary "Beijing East Village," named for New York's East Village. During this time, Zhang Huan began creating body-based performances showing his own body's response to extreme sets of conditions. One of the most memorable from this period, *12 Square Meters*, 1994, records the artist sitting in a latrine, covered in honey and fish oil to attract flies and insects. In 1995 he began staging larger-scale, collaborative performances such as *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain*, 1996 and *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond*, 1997.

The year 1998 was a turning point for Zhang Huan. Invited to participate in Asia Society's exhibition *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Zhang Huan travelled to New York and decided to stay in the United States. During this period the artist began to stage photographs with a performance element. *Family Tree*, 2000, offers nine views of Zhang Huan's face covered by an increasing amount of calligraphy in black ink, the



Zhang Huan, *Family Tree*, 2000
Color photograph of performance,
Amherst, New York, Collection of Larry
Warsh

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last photograph showing his faced completely covered. Other performance works, such as *Pilgrimage—Wind and Water in New York*, 1998 and *My New York*, 2002, reflected upon the artist's experiences in the United States.

Beginning two years ago, Zhang Huan travelled with greater frequency back to China. He has since established a studio in a former garment factory in Shanghai where he produces works on a larger scale than ever before. This marked the end of his experimentation in performance art. His interest in Buddhism, which always figured indirectly in his earlier work, became more defined. Three large copper sculptures featured in the exhibition are based on fragments from Buddhist monuments that the artist has collected since his first visit to Tibet in 2005. Works, such as *Ash Head No. 26*, are sculptures made of burnt incense ash from local Buddhist temples. Another series, *Memory Doors*, consists of works fashioned from antique wooden doors retrieved from Shanxi Province and intricately carved using historical photographs as a reference.

Zhang Huan: Altered States is accompanied by a fully illustrated hardcover 177-page catalogue that includes scholarly essays by curator Melissa Chiu and art critic Eleanor Heartney, first-hand accounts of Zhang Huan's early performance works in Beijing by the artist Kong Bu, and an essay by Zhang Huan, who provides his own perspective on his art and life.

Zhang Huan: Altered States is organized by Asia Society, New York with support from Morgan Stanley and Asia Society's Contemporary Art Council. The exhibition is curated by Melissa Chiu, director, Asia Society Museum and vice president, Global Visual Art Programs.

The Vancouver Art Gallery presentation of the exhibition is financially supported by the Associates of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Related Events

Curator's Tour

Saturday, June 7, 3pm, in the Gallery

Asia Society Museum director Melissa Chiu, curator of the exhibition, leads a special tour. Free with Gallery admission.

Public Talk: Shengtian Zheng on Chinese Art Post-1989

Tuesday, June 24, 7pm, in the Gallery

Free with Gallery admission.