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Instantaneous Copying and Monumentality: The Historic Logic of Permanence and Impermanence

Zhang Dali, *Permanence and Impermanence: New Works by Zhang Dali*, installation view at the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

In the two decades since the 1990s, Zhang Dali's artistic creations have revolved around several experimental projects. Among them, *Dialogue* (1995–2006), *One Hundred Chinese* and *Chinese Offspring* (2000–2010), and *Second History* (2005–2010) are major representative works in contemporary Chinese art.[1] Each of these projects incorporates new visual material and presentation methods, entailing experiments on three levels: one, the uncovering of unconventional mediums and visual techniques; two, the interaction with the Chinese historical experience and society; and three, a rethinking of the artist's own identity. The level of complexity and depth in these projects also bestows each of them with its own temporality—each project spans several years, sometimes a decade, but their historical dimensions are reflected in more than just the time period they span. More importantly, they are embodied in the constantly increasing depth of Zhang Dali's explorations.

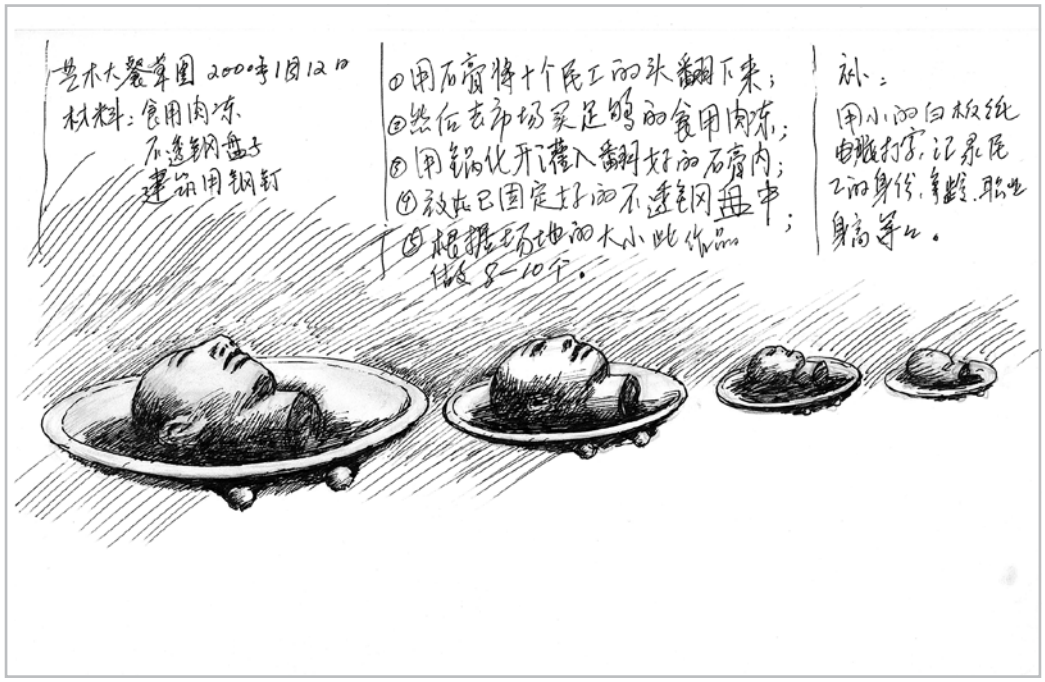
As a curator and researcher of contemporary art, my collaboration and interaction with Zhang Dali has been an integral component of these experimental art projects. My interest in him has also been mainly in these

Zhang Dali, *Permanence and Impermanence: New Works by Zhang Dali*, installation view at the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

well-defined projects, in tracing their origins and evolution, and in discovering the pursuits and references buried within them.[2] In my opinion, the two sets of artworks featured in his recent exhibition *Permanence and Impermanence: New Works by Zhang Dali*[3]—the white marble statues of migrant labourers and the cyanotype landscapes—also can be understood only through such a case study. The reason is that both have their own histories, and it is only if we place them within the sustained context of Zhang Dali's artistic creations can we discover the experimental nature of these works, the logic behind their emergence, and their historical significance.

The image of the migrant labourer first emerged in Zhang Dali's works in 2000, but his thinking about migrant labourers as a social phenomenon dates back much earlier. In 2003, he wrote, "For about ten years a feeling has lingered in my heart. I wanted to grab it, to observe it from up close, and to understand what it was. It is a kind of mist-like force. Only my kind is imbued with this spirit. . . ."[4] This idea of his own "kind" is a key term for understanding the works he created during this period, but as time has passed, the meaning of this term has undergone a subtle yet important shift. In these notes from 2003, it begins to take on a sweeping, generalized meaning, referring to a "vast ethnic group in East Asia near the Yellow Sea."[5] But when using this term in 2000, he treated it as a special signifier of social subject. This subject comprises the various populations who come from outside the cities for work, including himself, "bumming in Beijing."[6]

In February 2000, the fashionable bar Club Vogue located in Beijing's Sanlitun neighbourhood hosted a contemporary art event titled *Art as Food*.[7] As one of eight participating artists, Zhang Dali affixed a row of stainless steel trays to the wall, each of them carrying a brown human head made of pigskin gelatin (*roupidong* 肉皮冻 in Beijing dialect). The gelatin was mixed with instant noodles, which in the end resembled maggots, delivering considerable physical and psychological discomfort for the viewer. Pigskin gelatin is a traditional food in Beijing, and it is said that it was invented and passed down by the Manchus. It is made by shaving and washing a piece of pigskin, cutting it into blocks, and boiling it until it



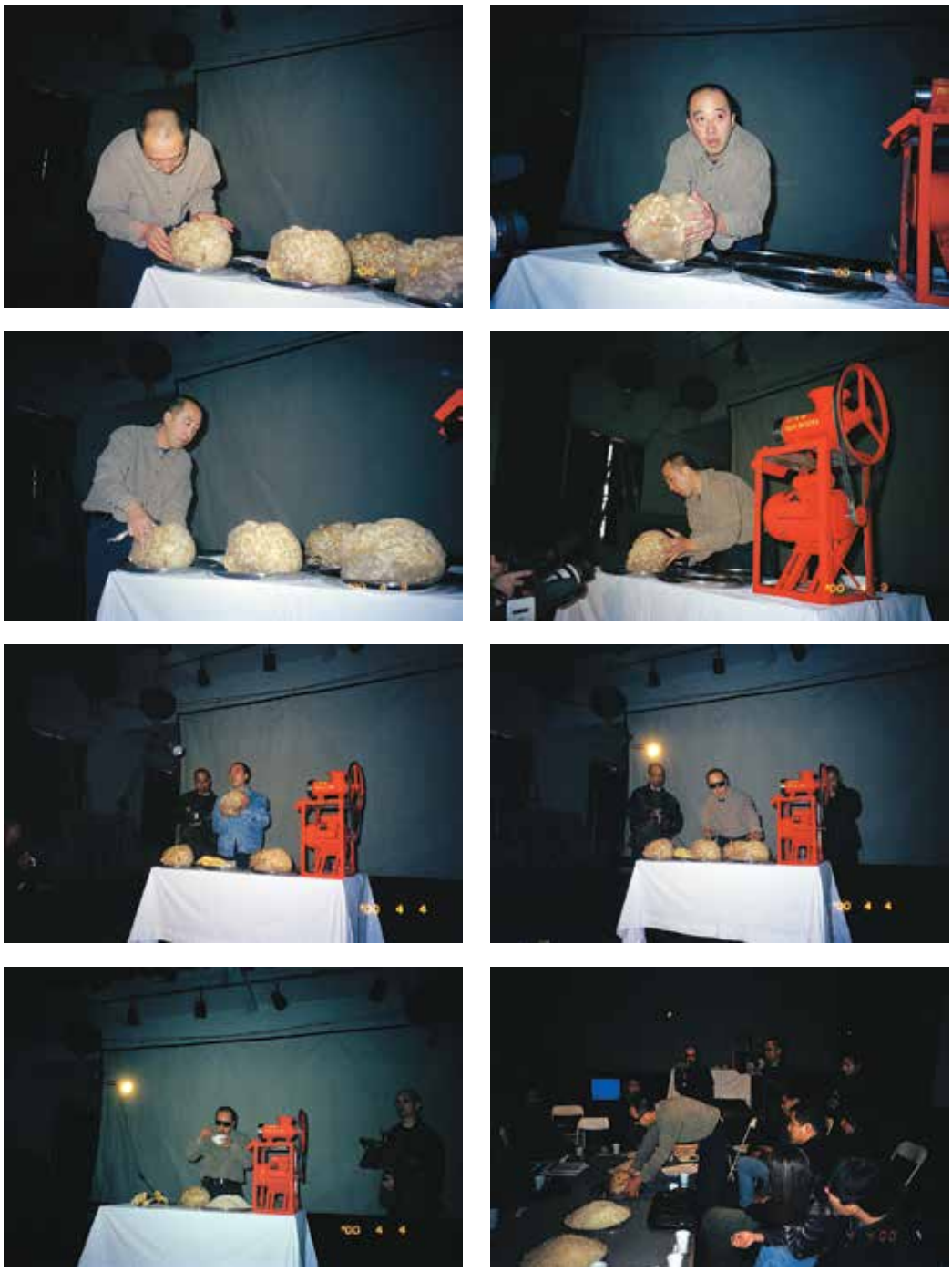
fuses with the water to create a gelatinous material. The sticky fluid is then poured into a container and allowed to harden. In Zhang Dali's proposal for this exhibition, he clearly wrote down the four steps behind creating this artwork titled *Mingong* or *Migrant Laborers*: "1. Cast ten heads of migrant labourers in plaster; 2. Purchase sufficient edible gelatin from the market; 3. Use a pot to [melt down the gelatin] and pour it into the plaster [molds]; 4. Place on stainless steel trays." There are two core elements that are abundantly clear from this passage, one being that the molds are made from the heads of actual migrant labourers, and the other being that the sculptures are made in gelatin. In an interview with *Southern Weekend* reporter Zhu Youke, Zhang Dali explained the meaning behind these two elements and the connection between them:

Top: Zhang Dali, *Migrant Laborers,* 2000, pigskin gelatin, noodles, steel trays, installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Bottom: Zhang Dali, study for *Migrant Laborers*, 2000, drawing. Courtesy of the artist.

> In 2000, I began to think of the urban environment as just one aspect of the sweeping changes around us, and that people may be more important because they decide which changes are made. Additionally, the migrant populations that were coming to the city to earn a wage were an increasingly important facet of the country. Their sheer numbers were massive, and their ways of thinking and ways of life were changing the country, which seems to indicate to me that they were representative of China. I wanted to find a medium that expressed this sentiment. Bronze and marble weren't suitable. I searched for an appropriate material for a long time. One day, as I was walking through a market, I saw a group of migrant labourers buying pork jelly and carrying it on trolleys back to their construction site. Pork jelly is an aspic made by stewing pork skin in water. It has the taste of pork, although contains no meat. It's less expensive than real meat and it's eaten as a protein substitute. I thought this gelatinous substance could represent the migrant workers' identity and their corporeality, that they have a similar construction. They are human, but aren't considered as such. The pork and pork jelly, migrant workers and the population at large, had some correspondence.[8]

This artwork did not attract much attention. When a curatorial team from documenta in Kassel visited Beijing, Zhang Dali held a performance action for them, titled *Idea Grinder*, at the Artists Warehouse in Beijing's Dongsi 8 Tiao, but these international curators, including Okwui Enwezor, made no comment. Perhaps they did not grasp the meaning of the gelatin and were thus unable to understand why the artist would use this material to create heads of migrant labourers, let alone why he would grind the heads up and invite the audience to eat them. I believe, however, that these early migrant-labourer-themed works, including the installation at Club Vogue and the performance at Artists Warehouse, are of crucial significance to Zhang Dali's artistic development. I make this conclusion for several reasons, the first being that these works reflect a shift in the artist's focus from the "environment" to "people." As implied in the quote above, his focus in *Dialogue*, his main decade-long artwork from the 1990s, was on issues about the environment, in which he used graffiti on the walls of *hutong* that were being demolished to create interaction between himself and the drastic changes taking place around him. In 2000, however, he realized that "people may be more important." Second, the graffiti-like head in *Dialogue* was based on Zhang Dali's own appearance,[9] but in this new series, as I will explain below, he began to consider others within social reality. Third, these works marked a "material turn" in Zhang Dali's artistic experimentation: "material" and "medium" were beginning to take on increasingly important functions, joining "appearance" as carriers of meaning, and this also marked the beginning of his sculptures and installations made with unconventional materials and techniques.



Zhang Dali, *Idea Grinder*, 2000, performance. Courtesy of the artist.

Here I must raise and explain a rather controversial issue. It is well known that a major trend in Chinese art after the Cultural Revolution was to represent groups that exist on the bottom rungs of society within the realm of artistic observation and expression. The artistic project of depicting "labourers" who sold their physical strength in the cities was widespread in the late 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century. Critics held differing views on this phenomenon. Some rejected these artworks, saying they were "merely turning migrant labourers into artistic material" and "profiting off of the image of the lower classes and the masses."[10] I view this as a complex artistic and social phenomenon that cannot be judged through sweeping generalizations. As far as Zhang Dali's *Migrant Laborers* rendered in gelatin are concerned, they have never possessed any commercial value,

and like many other experimental artists at the time, Zhang Dali had yet to reach fame, so there was in essence no "profit" motive. More important, however, is that any discussion of contemporary art cannot be removed from the historical circumstances of the time or from the artist's original intent. If one examines his writings and interviews from that period, one can see that a main reason for Zhang Dali's interest in this subject matter of labourers was the intimate connection to his own experience. In the previously cited interview with Zhu Youke, he refused to delineate the migrant labourers into "us and them." In the heat of the moment, he added, "My own identity is the same as theirs. I don't know how other people feel, but I come from a small town. . . . My life after university was more dire than that of the migrant worker, but it was motivated by the same desire to change my circumstances by moving to the city. But migrant workers lack the connections, capital, education and skill set, so their lives are very difficult. Who created this situation? Did the migrants themselves? Who is responsible?"[11]

Zhang Dali, *Dialogue*, 1998, performance. Courtesy of the artist and Klein Sun Fine Art, New York.

What Zhang Dali was expressing here was more of an essential kinship with migrant labourers, rather than some concrete form of equality. Although in 2000 he left the Yuanmingyuan Artist Village and the uncertain future that came with the bohemian lifestyle associated with that place, deep down he still felt an affinity with these migrant labourers and saw himself as being like one of "them." The information conveyed by transforming heads of migrant labourers into gelatin was more than just a probing of external social issues—it also embodied self-mockery. These two aspects were radicalized in his "meat grinding" performance at Artists Warehouse: what was "consumed" in this performance was not just the gelatinous material but the anonymous labourer as a social group that was represented by the heads.

The deep connection between the artist (Zhang Dali) and his subject matter (migrant labourers) explains the endurance of this subject matter

in his art. If we look back to the artworks he has created since that time, we see that at least seven of his major projects have incorporated images of migrant labourers. These include the previously mentioned *Migrant Laborers* (2000), *One Hundred Chinese* (2000), and *Chinese Offspring* (2003), and more recent projects such as *Man and Beast* (2007), *Brownian Motion* (2011), *Square* (2014), as well as the white marble sculptures featured in the United Art Museum exhibition *Permanence and Impermanence*. In this process, the significance of the representation of "migrant labourers" in Zhang Dali's work underwent sustained shifts, from a definite reference to a specific social group to a means of reflecting on broad issues of ethnicity and humanity, the ephemeral and the permanent, as well as reality and historical memory. The nature of these images is no longer limited to representing some objective reality, but, instead, is bestowed with a significance akin to a "medium,"[12] carrying constantly changing information and providing a channel for exchange between artist and audience. Thus, these images can be seen as an individualized visual vocabulary in Zhang Dali's artistic creations. Through their arrangement, appropriation, expansion, and exchange, and through control and adjustment of their materials, production techniques, and exhibition conditions, Zhang Dali has constructed a thread that links the past, present, and future of his artistic journey.

Zhang Dali, *One Hundred Chinese*, 2000, installation view at Courtyard Gallery, Beijing. Courtesy of the artist.

One Hundred Chinese and *Chinese Offspring*, created in the early 2000s, continued the experiment he began with *Migrant Laborers*, but in these two series, the artist reworked his concept of materiality. In *Migrant Laborers*, from 2000, the materiality emerged directly as the gelatin that comprised the artworks. Though the production process required in casting the heads of the migrant labourers in plaster is elaborate, this step of the process is not emphasized in the resultant work; nor is it highlighted in the work's display in the exhibition. However, Zhang Dali quickly realized the importance of this copying process. When he adopted the method of directly reproducing his subject in plaster instead of using the tools of painting and sculpture, the distinction between "representation" and "presentation" of the migrant worker became naturally blurred and thus subverted the conventional norms of artistic expression. Furthermore, this direct process of copying "freezes" the unique state of the subject at a specific moment, giving it properties of the instantaneous. Zhang Dali's self-awareness of this form of "instantaneous copying" (*sunshi kaobei*) is reflected in his highlighting of

Zhang Dali, *Chinese Offspring,* 2003, installation. Courtesy of the artist.

the reproduction process in *One Hundred Chinese* and *Chinese Offspring*, which, to a great extent, shifts the significance of these artworks from the final product to the process of instantaneous copying. The definition of materiality in this case is therefore no longer limited only to the material used in the sculptures, but, instead, in the production process that references the interaction between person and material, subject and object. From this perspective, if the gelatin in *Migrant Laborers* and their material existence presented a static social allegory, then *One Hundred Chinese* and *Chinese Offspring* used the documentation and presentation of reproduction and interaction to engage in a rethinking of the power relationships and economic operations of consumer society in the name of "contemporary art."

We must be aware that this approach entails risks for the artist—not only does the temporary employer-employee relationship created between himself and his migrant labourer models reproduce the social power relations and economic operations he aims to criticize, but the act of

Zhang Dali, making plaster cast for *One Hundred Chinese,* 2000. Courtesy of the artist.

producing a model of the subject in plaster also evokes the utility and brutality of these power relations and economic structures. Zhang Dali's response to this thorny issue has been to reveal his process of copying these bodies. Sociologists and economists frequently emphasize the ability of the operations of power to conceal themselves. In Zhang Dali's case, however, not only does he intentionally lay bare the traces of his reproduction process, he also uses photography to transform the process into an object of artistic expression, thus reframing a potential issue of artistic morality into the self-marginalization of avant-garde art. In the exhibition catalogue for *One Hundred Chinese*, eight photographs show a hired migrant labourer

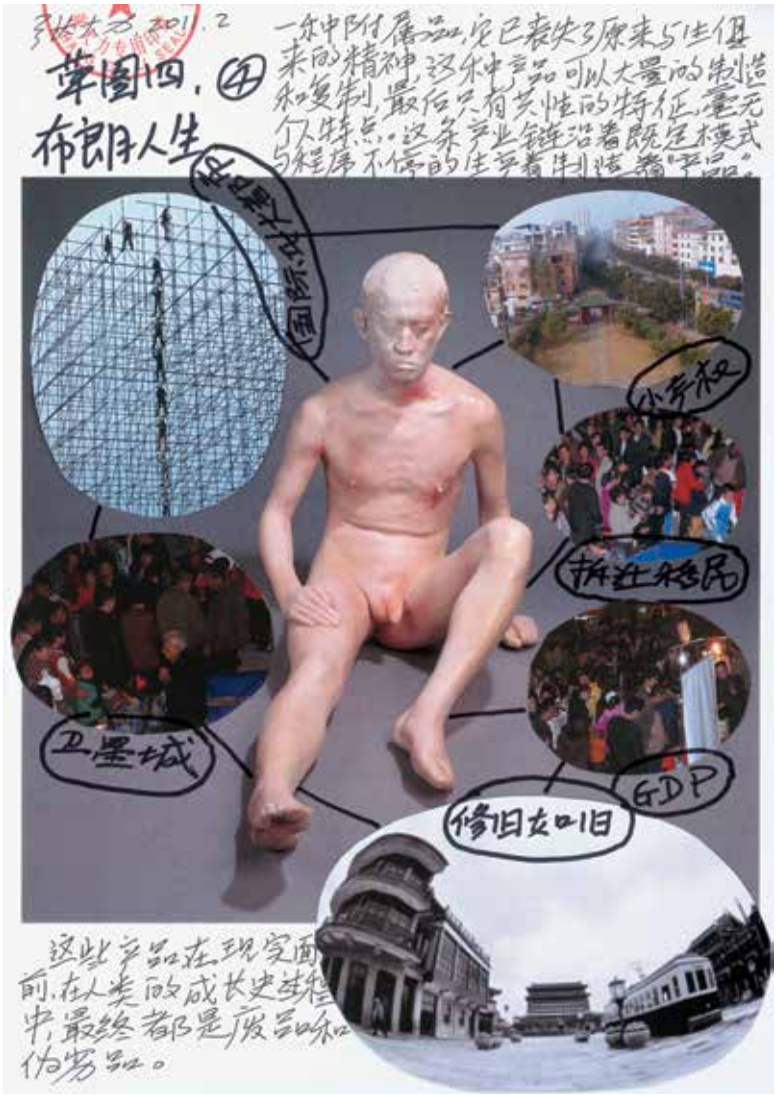
with plastic straws in his noses while his face was covered in thick layers of white plaster; one can only imagine the discomfort they experienced in this process.[13] Other photographs show these models' neighbours or family members watching the execution of this project around the workers' dormitories, with their facial expressions ranging from curiosity to indifference. In some photographs, the models pose with their plaster portraits and with the artist. When these photographs documenting the production scenes are presented together with the three-dimensional heads and bodies, they evoke a shifting or transitory subjectivity. The evasiveness of such subjectivity at once blurs the boundary between prototype and artwork, while also negating the fixation of a dichotomy between the labourers and the image of them that is created. When facing these sculptures and photographs, people might think that these hired migrant labourer models have been alienated into lifeless objects, but perhaps they can also imagine that a reproduction can retain the touch, warmth, and even emotion of the person represented. In terms of this second meaning, one can understand why Zhang Dali has repeatedly stressed that these works possess "souls" and why he considers this direct, instantaneous copying to be the most sensitive and truthful way that he could possibly find to record human existence:




Zhang Dali, making plaster cast for *Chinese Offspring*, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

While I was using this very primitive way to copy and record each body of these offspring, I believe I was also solidifying at the precise moment the roving soul hidden inside their flesh. Each and every external feature of their bodies is simply the earth's crust taking form from the magma of their soul. The soul shapes the body's flesh; the reproduction of each body becomes a specimen of its inner being.[14]

As I mentioned above, when Zhang Dali wrote this text in 2004, the copied image of the migrant labourer was already beginning to take on



Zhang Dali, *Brownian Motion*, 2011, 30 x 42 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Zhang Dali, *Man and Beast*, 2007, bronze, 180 x 50 x 145 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

increasingly abstract meaning and was increasingly becoming a basic visual vocabulary in his art. This trend continued to develop after *One Hundred Chinese* and *Chinese Offspring*. In the *Man and Beast* series, begun in 2007, copies of migrant labourers were fused, juxtaposed, and integrated with imaginary animals in various ways to convey the human and animal aspects of the human spiritual world. In the 2011 work *Brownian Motion*, the copies and reproductions of migrant labourers formed relationships with environmental changes, social events, policies, and human affairs that are perhaps undetectable but certain to exist. In the 2014 exhibition *Square*, the copies of migrant labourers became a historical symbol representing Zhang Dali's memory of the "tens and hundreds of thousands" who gathered in Tian'anmen Square to speak in a unified voice.

Zhang Dali, *Square*, 2014, installation view at Klein Sun Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Klein Sun Gallery, New York.

It was also the *Square* exhibition that saw the emergence of two easily overlooked aspects of Zhang Dali's work. They led to a new series of experiments in Zhang Dali's creations, eventually resulting in the *Permanence and Impermanence* exhibition. The first aspect was Zhang Dali's pairing of casts of migrant labourers with cyanotype works. This pairing might seem difficult to understand at first, as these two groups of artworks are completely different, whether in terms of material, dimensions, or content. If, however, we consider why cyanotype imaging would inspire Zhang Dali's creative desire at this time, we discover a logic that is intimately connected to the instantaneous copying previously discussed. In an essay he wrote for this new experimental project, Zhang Dali passionately described the roots of his cyanotype works:

Zhang Dali, flowers in an empty lot at Heiqiao Village, 2009, colour photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

> On the west side of my studio in Heiqiao Village there is an abandoned field, where wild grasses of unknown names grow. In springtime the field is covered with small purple wildflowers. I know this space is all too temporary: soon bulldozers will come and flatten the field, Heiqiao Village, and my studio will cease to exist, remaining perhaps as a baffling and bygone name on a map, or maybe not even the name will remain, and no one will remember the history of this place, and all memories related to it will also be gone. I wanted to document the ecology of this abandoned field, where the wildflowers freely intertwine and grow in an effort to never wither. Here there is a natural order and division of labour, and each of the seasons displays their most elegant side in the change.[15]

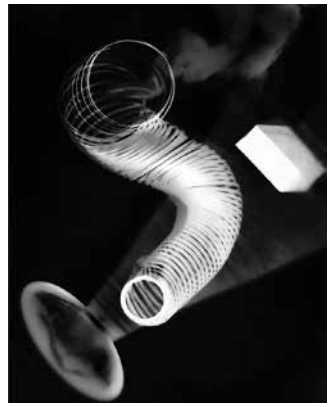
Zhang Dali, the artist with flowers in an empty lot at Heiqiao Village, 2009, colour photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

For an artist, once the passion for expression is kindled, it is followed by the question of how to express. This is always a difficult question for Zhang Dali because he is never satisfied with existing, conventional methods and techniques. When faced with a new project, his response is not to grab a paintbrush or a camera, but, instead, to spend long periods contemplating what this particular project is about: What is unique about it? What expressive methods are demanded or "hoped for" by its uniqueness? When he chose to present migrant labourers in his works over twenty years ago, he wrote, "I wanted to find a medium that expressed this sentiment. I searched a long time for a material that was appropriate for them, that was them."[16] Now, with the wildflowers in the abandoned field at Heiqiao Village, he once again faced such a challenge: "How to document them was a problem. Each instance of artistic expression should utilize the means that most approximate its essence. Such means are a magical rediscovery and new understanding."[17]

Interestingly, Zhang Dali eventually decided upon a technique akin to direct copying of the subject, an approach consistent with his earlier work. The cyanotype is a primitive form of photography invented by John Herschel in 1842. Compared to conventional photography, its most distinctive quality is that it does not use a camera or film, but, instead, uses light and chemicals directly on a flat medium to record an image. We can thus view the cyanotype as a special form of "imprinting" or direct copying. The most famous application of this technology was by the nineteenth-century British botanist Anna Atkins, whose 1843 book *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* is considered by photography historians to be among the earliest photography books. Atkins placed algae specimens onto paper treated with chemicals and used light to accurately record the dimensions and appearance of those specimens. Beyond their scientific value, these images created a special aesthetic—the algae leaves were spread elegantly across the blue page, their white negative images appearing like weightless shadows.

It is quite possible that Atkins's book inspired Zhang Dali's exploration of cyanotype. There are two reasons for this conjecture. The first is that

Anna Atkins, illustration from *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions,* 1843. Courtesy of Wu Hung.



Man Ray, *Untitled,* 1922, rayograph. © 2013 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

Zhang Dali also documented plants in the natural world, and the second is that he has specifically mentioned Atkins in his writing.[18] Another possible source of inspiration, though perhaps this is only a coincidence, are Man Ray's "Rayographs"—this founding figure of Dada discarded the camera and produced images directly on photographic paper using only light and cast shadows. What I wish to emphasize here, however, is not the possible inspiration or influence for Zhang Dali's cyanotype works, but the deep, independent roots of these works in his artistic experimentation. These roots are not necessarily readily visible, and past commentators have not clearly pointed them out. But the discussion in this essay shows that Zhang Dali's discarding of conventional tools of representation—the paintbrush or carving knife—and his use of instantaneous copying to directly reproduce the subject, have always been an important logic in his experimentation. His early migrant labourer images drew upon this logic, and the imprint-like cyanotype works continue it.

Zhang Dali, Pagoda No. 4, 2010, cyanotype photogram mounted on linen, 360 x 260 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Zhang Dali, the artist making cyanotype at Liao dynasty pagoda, colour photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Zhang Dali did not duplicate fully the techniques of Atkins and Man Ray, who placed the objects directly onto the photographic paper to cast a shadow, but, instead, he maintained a considerable physical distance between the object to be reproduced and the photosensitive surface of the paper, and this allowed the dimensions of the image to expand. The image that is recorded, then, is not the true shape and profile of the photographed object, but its enlarged shadow. He writes, "Images placed in front of the fabric are captured in silhouette, and, within a few minutes of exposure to the sun's rays, negative images or shadows start to form. Areas not exposed to light remain white, while those exposed to the light result in different tones of blue."[19] Here again we discover the deep connections between these works and the copies of migrant labourers. Earlier, I quoted

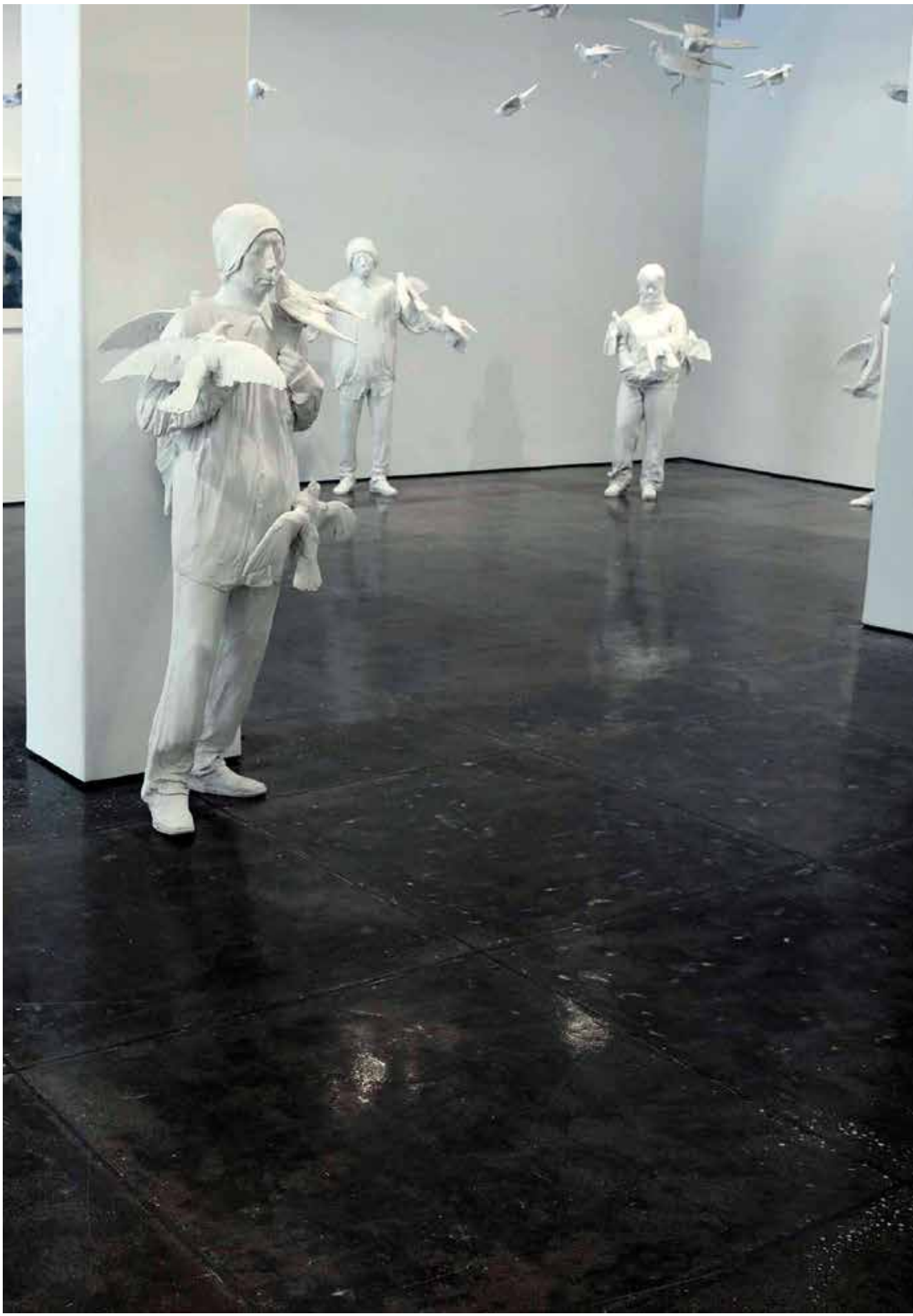
Zhang Dali, *Pine (23)*, 2016, cyanotype, 195 x 124 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Zhang Dali's explanation of these three-dimensional copies of the labourers, where he described the process as "solidifying at the precise moment the roving soul hidden inside their flesh." Similar aims drove his experiments in cyanotype photography. One day while travelling to a valley in Changping, on the outskirts of Beijing, he saw a group of Liao dynasty pagodas that were eroded but still towered over the land: "I used large size cotton canvas to record the shadows [of the pagodas]. These shadows are testament to the history and process of their existence in this world of limitation. The shadows look like the souls of the pagodas, and call to mind the Shroud of Turin [that bears a shadowy image of Jesus]. . . . The shadows of these ancient pagodas, which have been cast every day for nearly a thousand years, now leap onto the canvas. This is a magical process."[20]

Zhang Dali, 2014, the artist painting synthetic resin cast. Courtesy of the artist.

Let me return to the 2014 exhibition *Square*. I mentioned above that two changes emerged in this exhibition that led to the works in the *Permanence and Impermanence* exhibition. One of those changes was that this was the first time he paired the images migrant labourers with cyanotype artworks. The other change was that in this exhibition Zhang Dali used a new material, fiberglass and baking varnish, to make copies of the migrant labourers. I would guess that originally he was thinking about visual effect—when paired with blueish cyanotype images, a pure white sculpture of a migrant labourer would generate a dreamlike atmosphere and references historical memories of the "square." At the same time, Zhang Dali was also experimenting with painting synthetic resin castings of migrant labourers in blue, which clearly revealed his intention to establish a connection between the sculptures and the cyanotypes.

This change in material was little noticed. The reason I see this shift as worthy of attention is that though these sculptures are still copies of the appearance of migrant labourers, the white resin or plaster they are made from have specific visual effects and evoke metaphorical significances that are entirely different from those of *One Hundred Chinese* and *Chinese Offspring*. The earth-toned *One Hundred Chinese* and the partially coloured *Chinese Offspring* lead the viewer to directly imagine the bodies of the migrant labourers they were cast from, as a stand-in for the real body. The pure white sculptures in *Square*, on the other hand, evoke classical sculptures found in museums—the relationship to their corporal models



Previous page: Zhang Dali, *Square*, 2014, installation view at Klein Sun Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Klein Sun Gallery, New York.

Zhang Dali, *Permanence and Impermanence: New Works by Zhang Dali*, installation view at Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

recedes to a secondary level of perception. Thus, what occurred here was more than a simple switching of materials. It was a crucial conceptual shift: the goal of copying was no longer to challenge the distinction between a subject and its representation, or art and reality, but to spark the imagination to contemplate the sublime and the permanent; they therefore mark the introduction of monumentality into his work.[21] But plaster or resin cannot truly attain the goal of monumentality—both materials are too common and inexpensive and cannot awaken a sense of the sublime or the permanent. The materials that awaken these senses are, in Western art, marble, and, in Chinese art, *hanbaiyu* (literally "Chinese white jade"). Zhang Dali writes:

> In the Chinese cultural context, white *hanbaiyu* is a unique stone material representing noble status. Only palaces and highly ranked temples were allowed to use it. Gelatin represents lowly status and impermanence, while *hanbaiyu* represents nobility and permanence. The same people flit between different materials, tasting both the permanent and fleeting life. You can see them as monuments, as a pile of useless stones, or as pure chemical elements. They are everything and nothing. Depending on your perspective and methods, they are in the very air.[22]

To use the language of art criticism, the ideas Zhang Dali is expounding here can be interpreted as the establishment of a "system of material references" within his art. Although he has in fact been making images of "the same people," the materials and presentation methods have gradually shifted, leading to the constant expansion of this representational system of references. As a result, the distance between Zhang Dali's artistic making and external reality has been increasing step by step and is increasingly defined by the system's own inner logic. From this perspective, the exhibition *Permanence and Impermanence* reflects the intersection and confluence of two threads that span sixteen years of Zhang Dali's artistic creation. One thread is the negotiation between art, reality, and symbolism, which finds its concentrated expression in the migrant worker theme. The other thread is his skepticism about a stable relationship between subject and object, which finds concentrated expression in his use and updating of "instantaneous copying" technology. While the earlier series *Migrant Laborers*, *One*

Hundred Chinese, and *Chinese Offspring* conflate these two threads, in the *Permanence and Impermanence* exhibition, the cyanotype landscapes continued his experiments with the instantaneous copy, with the white marble sculptures extricating the image of the migrant labourer from this line of experimentation. These statues, carefully sculpted from a precious material, no longer reveal traces of primitive copying. Their serene material and subtle shapes seem to dissolve in the air, and through their embrace of monumentality, they return to the eternal realm of the permanent.

Translated by Jeff Crosby. This essay is a revised version of the forthcoming catalogue Permanence and Impermanence: New Works by Zhang Dali *published by the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum.*

Notes

1. For more comprehensive coverage of these art projects, see *Zhang Dali* (Wuhan: United Art Museum, 2015).
2. My first collaboration with Zhang Dali was for the 2000 exhibition *Art as Food* (jointly curated with Zhang Zhaohui), for which I interviewed the artist. My critique of his *Dialogue* series first appeared in *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000), 749–68, under the title, "Zhang Dali's *Dialogue*: Conversation with a City." I went on to exhibit this series in the First Guangzhou Triennial (2002), of which I was lead curator, and the exhibition *Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China* (2006), held in New York and Chicago. Zhang Dali's *Second History* was first exhibited in the 798 Art District in October 2005. I served as curator for that exhibition. These works were later exhibited at the Sixth Gwangju Biennale, Walsh Gallery in Chicago, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, for which I published essays. A chapter in my book *Zooming In: Histories of Photography in China* (Londong, 2016), entitled "A Second History: An Archive of Manipulated Photographs," discusses this group of work (pp. 189-218). The 2016 exhibition *Permanence and Impermanence: New Works by Zhang Dali* and its accompanying catalogue, which I curated and edited, can be considered our fourth collaboration.
3. This exhibition, curated by the author, took place from July 2 to August 3, 2016, in the United (Minsheng) Art Museum, Beijing.
4. Zhang Dali, *Chinese Offspring*, December 2004, published in *Zhang Dali*, 366.
5. Ibid.
6. *Bumming in Beijing* is the title of a film made by documentary filmmaker Wu Wenguang between 1988 and 1990. Zhang Dali is one of the four itinerant artists and writers featured in the film.
7. This exhibition was curated by Zhang Zhaohui and me. For details, see Wu Hung, *An Exhibition About Exhibitions: Displaying Contemporary Art in the 1990s* (Beijing: China Nationalities Photography Press, 2016), 230–37.
8. Zhu Youke Interviews Zhang Dali, *Southern Weekend*, April 2, 2009, published in *Zhang Dali*, 339.
9. He explained his graffiti head once in an interview: "This sign is derived from my own appearance. It is an abstraction of my appearance. I use this sight to represent my interaction with this city. I want to understand this city's circumstances, its changes, and its structure. I call this activity a 'dialogue'." Leng Lin, "Dialogue with a City—Interview with Zhang Dali," in *It's Me* (Beijing: China Wenlian Publishing Company, 2000), 168.
10. Zhu Qi, "Dangdai yishu zhong de diceng shehui: Zhengzhi yinshen, geti quewei" (Lower class society in contemporary art: Invisible politics and the absence of Individuals), *Art-Ba-ba*, http://www.art-ba-ba.com/main/main.art?threadId=87965&forumId=8/.
11. "Zhu Youke Interviews Zhang Dali," *Southern Weekend*, April 2, 2009, published in *Zhang Dali*, 339.
12. Here I am inspired by my colleague W. J. T. Mitchell's redefinition of landscape as a "medium." Instead of being a subject or genre, he argues, landscape is a medium because it "*circulates* as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity." W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2.
13. *Zhang Dali: One Hundred Chinese 2001–2002* (Beijing Jiaxinda Artistic Printing Company, 2002), 5–18.
14. Zhang Dali, *Chinese Offspring*, December 2004, published in *Zhang Dali*, 366.
15. Zhang Dali, "World's Shadow," published in *Zhang Dali*, 568.
16. "Zhu Youke Interviews Zhang Dali," 339.
17. Zhang Dali, "World's Shadow," 568.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. For a discussion of this concept, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1995).
22. Wu Hung, ed., *Permanence and Impermanence: New Works by Zhang Dali* (Beijing: Minsheng Art Museum, 2017), forthcoming, 53.