

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

76 GRAND STREET NEW YORK NY 10013



## ZHANG HUAN *MY AMERICA* APRIL 15 – MAY 27, 2000

“The body is the only direct way through which I come to know society and society comes to know me.”

Zhang Huan in conversation with Qian Zhijian

Deitch Projects is pleased to present *My America*, a startling exhibition of photographs and video based on Zhang Huan’s November 1999 performance, *Hard to Acclimatize*, at the Seattle Asian Art Museum. The artist constructed a three-tiered scaffold in the museum’s central court and directed an astonishing performance with fifty-six naked volunteers.

The performance was like a concentrated pilgrimage, fusing Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality. The artist assembled a group of ordinary Americans of various ages and backgrounds. He gave them a set of twelve simple instructions to describe the sequence of actions that would constitute the performance. He then led them through a series of rituals that ranged from the solemn to the ecstatic. The performers were instructed to, among other things, act and sound like animals, lie face down on the floor without moving, follow the artist in Tai Chi exercises, and run to “catch the center of a circle.” The climax occurred when the performers were instructed to throw bread at the artist as he sat stoically in a child’s swimming pool in front of the scaffold. The photographs and the video capture this manic moment when a shower of bread descends onto the artist, like manna from heaven.

Zhang Huan is trying to open a new approach to performance art, bringing it closer to dance and theater, and to life. He is working to combine the charismatic power of the great solo performance artists with the epic imagery of ambitious theatrical productions. He is also trying to create a performative structure in which the intense physical, intellectual and emotional experiences of the artist can be shared with his fellow performers and with the audience.

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Much of the power of Zhang Huan's work comes from the direct, frontal sculptural structure of his imagery. His images have a confrontational power and a solidity that gives them an enduring resonance. The performances on which the photographic images are based are built up like sculptures, with structure balancing the random quality of the actions. The penetrating power of Zhang Huan's images derives not just from their formal strength, but from their ability to communicate the artist's profound insights into the human condition. His earlier work captures the resolute will to endure the difficulties of life in China and face a future where change appears to happen but really doesn't. The new work celebrates the freedom the artist finds in America tempered with an Eastern sense of spiritual purpose. The body becomes the vehicle to experience the world and communicate these experiences to others.

Zhang Huan first became known to the American art audience through his participation in the 1998 "Inside Out" exhibition organized by the Asia Society, P.S. 1, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His unforgettable photographic work, *To add one meter to the fishpond*, was the cover image of the catalogue and the exhibition poster. Zhang Huan was born in He Nan, China in 1965. He was part of a small group of underground artists who introduced a new form of radical performance art to China. Beginning in 1992 he created a group of extraordinary performances using local peasants and artist friends. Most of these took place in an impoverished village outside of Beijing where Zhang Huan and his colleagues had established an artist's colony known as "Beijing East Village." After violent confrontations with the Chinese authorities, Zhang Huan emigrated to New York, where he now lives.

The performance *Hard to Acclimatize*, on which *My America* is based, was commissioned by the Seattle Art Museum and the Henry Art Gallery.

**GALLERY HOURS ARE TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 12 – 6 PM.**

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT SUZANNE GEISS AT 343-7300.**