



ZHANG HE

春意甜 Rhapsody

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Cover:
Detail of Heartbeat
oil on canvas
48 × 36" / 122 × 92 cm

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In Zhang He's recent set of paintings, colour is enacted to describe the world, albeit without words; and meanwhile these paintings appear to enter into a spacious dialogue with this same world and how we perceive it.

The thick paint he applies to the surface becomes an interlocutor between how he sees the world and the essence of the world itself. This process of becoming releases a cacophony of emotions through his gestures, his application of the material of paint, and the movement caught in between these gestures and material. Thick accumulations of oil paint swell across the canvas in fleshy mounds and generous ridges, pushing the medium toward an effervescent condition somewhere between perception and the physical world the artist perceives. These surfaces do not simply hold a sense of visibility in paint – they *become* the event of the artist's perception itself, and in so doing, they exclaim the artist's fondness and curiosity for the world. These paintings, we might say, celebrate life.

Over the past two decades, Zhang He's work has moved steadily from representational subjects toward increasingly expressive abstraction. Yet this evolution is less a departure from the visible world than an intensification of his study of this world. Floral forms, landscapes, and apparently organic structures continue to haunt the paintings as latent presences, even as they appear to dissipate from representation in the very gestures of paint and collisions of colour, making up the visible decision-making that the artist reveals to us. His paintings hover at the threshold of visibility, dissolving into passages of colour and movement before briefly re-emerging as something else, a kind of creature darting back and forth before our eyes, resolving in this inbetweenness rather than a steady form. In this oscillation between appearance and disappearance, the

image remains pleasantly, and perhaps even intentionally, unresolved – caught between recognition and sensation, familiarity and unfamiliarity.

Zhang's distinctive material language is grounded in a deep engagement with the physical properties of oil paint. Applied with extraordinary density, pigment gathers into textured fields whose topography catches and refracts light. Each mark appears almost carved into the surface – indeed the process he works with the paint makes it so – as though the painting were sculpted from – or rather stripped out from – a universe of colour of its own. This tactile intensity and use of colour could also be said to invite the viewer into a heightened awareness of perception. One's eye travels across the terrain of a composition of paint acting upon the surface of the canvas much as a dancer moves through space – registering shifts in density, rhythm, weight, while revealing a melody of colour and expression.

Originally trained in China and long living and working between Quebec and China, we might gather that Zhang approaches painting between these different contexts as both a sensorial and philosophical pursuit. Working with the canvas laid flat on the studio floor, he allows gestures to emerge through bodily movement rather than careful orchestration. In this position, the painter's body becomes an instrument of mark-making, and each gesture retains the trace of its origin in lived action. The painting registers not only an image but the duration of its own making – a record of energy, hesitation, and discovery. This feels very deliberate in the expression of colour and form he produces in each picture.

It could be argued that, at the core of this practice, as with many painters, lies a productive uncertainty: a form of paint-

erly doubt. Artists often navigate themselves through the notion of doubt as the very means of creating form and, indeed, meaning. Rather than seeking to stabilize meaning, Zhang allows the painting to remain open – to resist closure. We may feel hints at floral depictions or landscapes but a dedication to abstraction as a kind of painterly vocation takes over and wipes out a clarity of representation, while still beckoning to the what of representation. In this sense, we could argue that the work unfolds as a phenomenological experiment, probing how colour, material, and movement might evoke the moment when perception – whether our perception or the artist's – unites with the world it calls upon.

Zhang himself describes his paintings as attempts to capture transient moments of beauty – glimpses drawn from nature, seasonal change, human relationships, and the shared vitality of living beings. This is a labour of love. Yet these moments, we might note, resist permanence. They surface only briefly within the flux of life, and here within the painted field, dissolve again into a play of abstraction. The result is a pictorial language that acknowledges both the desire to hold onto experience and the impossibility of fixing it, with the bittersweet paradox of course, that a painting is in itself a fixed image that will outlast us.

Within this process, abstraction becomes less a stylistic category than an active and shifting field of perception. The artist's paintings are clearly influenced by twentieth century abstraction – the gestural density of Abstract Expressionism, the atmospheric openness of Lyrical Abstraction, and the experimental ethos of Quebec's Automatistes. Comparisons have been long made with figures such as Jean Paul Riopelle, who pursued an art in which gesture, matter, and spontaneity could open painting toward new possibilities and, arguably, a freeing up of consciousness.

Zhang has long charted a path of his own. His practice absorbs diverse influences – from the chromatic expansiveness of Helen Frankenthaler to the expressive intensity of Chaim Soutine and Egon Schiele, all artists that he admires – while remaining anchored in the singular materiality of his process. What emerges from this convergence is a form of painting that insists on the primacy of experience. Zhang's canvases operate as perceptual events – moments in which colour, texture, and gesture briefly align before dispersing again. They remind us that seeing is never neutral but embodied, shaped by movement, time, and attention.

To encounter these paintings is therefore to participate in their unfolding and their beckoning towards the ephemeral quality of life. The viewer's gaze is invited to move across the surface as though navigating a landscape of sensation. Zhang's work engages with these histories of painting through a shared belief in the autonomy and vitality of the painted mark: an ethos of painting, and what it can accomplish no matter what epoch it is created in. This is not nostalgia, but rather, a calling for this very human openness to the world around us.

In this space between matter and perception, painting becomes a site of continual questioning. It is here – within the tension between the physicality of paint and a vitalistic exploring of doubt – that Zhang He's work remains open, alive, and delightfully unresolved, maybe as we all should be.

Séamus Kealy
Executive Director, Oakville Galleries

Leaping
oil on canvas
84 × 60" / 213 × 152 cm





Spring Awakening, oil on canvas, 40 × 72" / 102 × 183 cm



Open Road
oil on canvas
60 × 48" / 152 × 122 cm

Heartbeat
oil on canvas
48 x 36" / 122 x 92 cm





Straight Ahead
oil on canvas
36 × 48" / 92 × 122 cm



Belonging
oil on canvas
48 × 36" / 122 × 92 cm



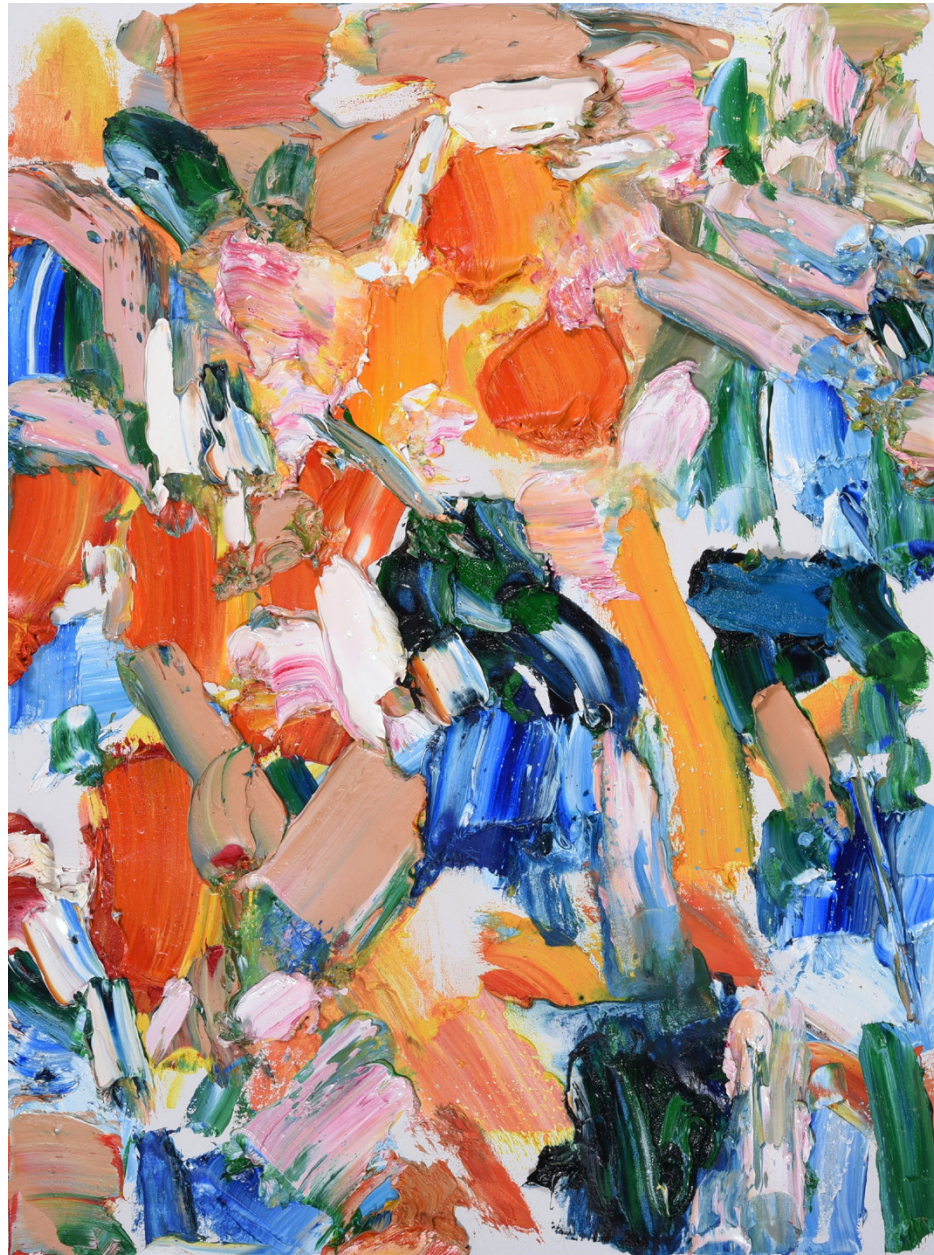
Whispering
oil on canvas
40 × 40" / 102 × 102 cm

Rhapsody Whispers
oil on canvas
40 × 40" / 102 × 102 cm





Rhapsody Whispers II
oil on canvas
39 × 39" / 100 × 100 cm



Radiance
oil on canvas
40 × 30" / 102 × 76 cm



Subtly
oil on canvas
35 × 35" / 89 × 89 cm



ZHANG HE

Born in 1963 in Shenyang, China
Works and lives in Montreal, Canada and Shenyang, China

Solo exhibitions (since 2002)

- 2026 Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto
- 2025 Place of Longing, Halcyon Gallery, Shanghai, China
Artist Residency Exhibition, MAM Modern Art Museum, Shanghai, China
- 2023 Jennifer Kostuik Gallery, Vancouver
- 2022 In It Together, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto
- 2020 Floral Breeze, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal
- 2019 New Paintings, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto
- 2016 New Paintings, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto
- 2013 Chun, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto
- 2011 Impasto Impression, Gallery DeNovo, Ketchum, Idaho, USA
- 2010 New Paintings, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto
- 2009 Artbank Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2008 LuXun Art Institute, Shenyang, China
Zhang He, Galerie d'Este, Montreal
- 2007 Qi, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto
Zhang He, Galerie Pangée, Montreal
- 2003 Fiore agitati II, Han Art contemporain, Montreal
- 2002 Frantic Flowers, Gallery DeNovo, Ketchum, Idaho, USA
Fiore agitati, Han Art contemporain, Montreal
Zhang He, Gallery DeNovo, Ketchum, Idaho, USA
Galerie au Fond de la Cour, Paris, France

Group exhibitions (since 2002)

- 2004-25 Art Toronto, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto
- 2024-25 Art Miami, Miami, USA
Seattle Art Fair, Seattle, USA
- 2023 Clarendon Galleries, UK
Art on Paper, New York, USA
Seattle Art Fair, Seattle, USA
- 2022 New Arrivals, Momentum Gallery, Nice, France
25th Anniversary Exhibition, Jennifer Kostuik Gallery, Vancouver
- 2020 Pictura, Z Art Space, Montreal
- 2017 Art Palm Beach, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Palm Beach, USA
- 2015 Z Art Space, Montreal
- 2011 Chinese Artists Contemporary Art Exhibition, Thailand National Art Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
International Art Meeting, Palazzo del Turismo, Florence, Italy
LuminArt Gallery, Dallas, USA
- 2010 International Biennale Artists Miami, Nina Torres Fine Art Gallery, Miami, USA
Art and Integration, Palazvrte Contemporanea, Florence, Italy
Continuum: Abstraction from Canada, Sunshine Art Museum, Beijing, China
Art Westmount, Montreal
- 2008 Shanghai High Noon Art & Culture Centre, Shanghai, China
Maison de la culture Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal
- 2007 Group Show, Galerie d'Este, Montreal
- 2006 Textures, Elliott Louis Gallery, Vancouver
- 2004 Abstractions of Spring II, Gallery DeNovo, Ketchum, Idaho, USA
Christin Gallery, Toronto
- 2002 Han Art contemporain, Montreal

Collections

- Association du Nouveau Monde, Hong Kong
- Bertrand Deslauriers, Montréal, QC
- Cormark Securities, Toronto, ON
- Elements, Toronto, ON
- Fraser Milner Casgrain
- Graphic Design Studio Paul Tom Inc., Montreal, QC
- Hot & Spicy International, Montréal, QC & Toronto, ON & Singapore, China
- Howard Szalavetz Properties, Montreal, QC
- HUI Architecte, Montréal, QC
- IACO International Aviation Corp., Montréal, QC
- JSF Capital
- La Coop Fédérée
- L'Équipe Uomo, Montréal, QC
- Lise Watier International, Montréal, QC & Paris, FR
- Louis Vuitton
- LVMH Group
- Monit International, Montréal, QC & Miami, FL
- Peter Marino
- Piffner Management, Montréal, QC & Zurich, Switzerland
- Proment Corporation, Montreal, QC
- Studio Versatile Ltée, Montréal, QC
- Swatow Group, Montreal, QC
- Ta Yu Association, Seoul, South Korea
- Tiffany & Co



Artist Residency Exhibition 2025, MAM Modern Art Museum, Shanghai, China



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Back cover Rhapsody Whispers, oil on canvas, 40 × 40"



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