



ASIAN ART MUSEUM

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ON GOLD MOUNTAIN: SCULPTURES FROM THE SIERRA BY ZHAN WANG

February 15 – May 25, 2008

Artist creates installation exploring
Chinese immigrant experience—both old and new—in San Francisco.

San Francisco, CA, November 27, 2007: Beginning February 15, the Asian Art Museum will present *On Gold Mountain: Sculptures from the Sierra by Zhan Wang*, an exhibition of site-specific sculptures

by one of China's most celebrated contemporary artists. The exhibition incorporates elements from two strains of the artist's work: his "scholar's rocks," sculptures in which Zhan creates shiny stainless steel replicas of the weather-worn boulders traditionally used in China for contemplation and reflection; and his "cityscape" sculptures in which Zhan creates topographical models of urban landscapes using



Urban landscape, 2003, stainless steel pots and pans. Photo courtesy of the artist.

mirrored utensils, steel pots, and pans. Combining these two distinct styles, Zhan will create an original work for the museum that will carry a unified theme drawing upon San Francisco and its history. The rocks on display in *On Gold Mountain* were all mined from the Sierra Nevada foothills before being transported to the artist's studio in Beijing. These rocks allude to the gold rush, which brought Chinese immigrants to this country in the 19th century. San Francisco was the portal for most of these immigrants, who named the city "Gold Mountain." Amidst these rocks, *On Gold Mountain* will also include a topographical map of San Francisco and its environs using shiny culinary tools as its building blocks. Together, the rocks and the cityscape speak to the Chinese immigrant experience and juxtapose the old and the new. Curated by Jeff Kelley, the Asian Art Museum's consulting curator of contemporary art, *On Gold Mountain* will be on view through May 25, 2008, in the museum's North Court and Lee Gallery located on the first floor.

In 1995, Zhan Wang began making stainless steel copies of Chinese scholars' rocks (*jiashanshi*), the graceful, craggy boulders found in several provinces around China that

traditionally have served as subjects of contemplation. Zhan's versions in stainless steel address tensions between landscape and industrialization, tradition and modernity. "Placed in a traditional courtyard, rockery satisfied people's desire to return to nature by offering them stone fragments from nature," the artist explains. "But huge changes in the world have made this traditional ideal increasingly out of date. I have thus used stainless steel to duplicate and transform natural rockery into manufactured forms. The material's glittering surface, ostentatious glamour and illusory appearance make it an ideal medium to convey new dreams."

Zhan collects rocks that range from palm-size to monumental. He pounds, bends, heats, and molds sections of stainless steel plate across the topography of each rock. In essence, Zhan applies a modern industrial skin to an ancient geologic body. After the steel has been shaped around the rock, it is peeled away in sections, welded together as a single hollow unit, and polished to a flawless steel sheen. The resulting play of light upon their mirrored surfaces seems to disembody and even liquefy the steel sculptures, underscoring the sense that, although having taken their shapes from massive primordial stones, they are somehow luminous floating masses. Hence, these are also known as "floating rocks."

Zhan Wang has also created urban cityscape sculptures for cities such as London, Beijing, Chicago, and Buffalo. In these works the artist creates topographic representations of urban landscapes using rocks, mirrored silverware, and stainless steel pots and pans. The mirrored stainless steel objects create infinite reflections, illusions, and ultimately, a practically borderless landscape.

Exhibition Overview

The installation begins in the museum's North Court where one of Zhan's stainless steel rock sculptures is paired with its original three- to four-ton model. These extraordinary objects highlight the contrasts that are at the root of much of Zhan Wang's work. Although the two boulders share the same shape, in other ways they are opposites. The original rock is natural, formed by ancient geologic processes. It is dull, massive, and inert. The manufactured rock is light in weight and is formed from contemporary, high tech materials. Its slick surface ripples with shimmering patterns that have more the quality of water than of stone. Perhaps the ancient dark stone represents the quality of *yin* and the bright modern duplicate represents the quality of *yang*.

Together the monolithic rock sculptures guard the entrance to the Lee Gallery where the installation continues. Inside the Lee Gallery are more manufactured rocks paired with their original models surrounding an elaborate cityscape representing San Francisco comprised of

stainless steel pots, pans, and mirrored silverware. The cityscape with the familiar forms of its buildings and landmarks is perched on a mirrored platform in the shape of the peninsula. Surrounding the city, more stainless steel rocks and their models will be positioned to represent the foothills of the Sierra Nevada.

All the rocks in the installation were selected from the foothills of the Sierra Nevada before being transported to the artist's studio in China. The source of the rocks alludes to the nineteenth-century Chinese immigrant experience of mining gold from this region. San Francisco served as a staging area for this operation, and a large Chinese community has remained in the city as a result of this history. The brilliant combination of shimmering copies of Sierra rocks and a mirrored San Francisco cityscape made up of shiny kitchen objects reflects and illuminates the Chinese immigrant experience. These stainless steel sculptures reflect the colors of the surrounding environment, constantly reflecting and seemingly evolving but never rusting or physically changing.

This work explores a sense of place, discovery, and exploration while touching upon the histories of China, the American Western frontier, and Chinese American immigration. Enhancing the exhibition will be a dedicated catalogue and related programming, underscoring the historical themes and metaphorical nature of the work.

About Zhan Wang

Born in Beijing in 1962, Zhan Wang is recognized world wide as one of the preeminent artists of his generation. Over the past decade he has gained international acclaim through his series of solo and collaborative exhibitions. His work has been on view throughout Europe, Asia, the U.S., and Australia.

Exhibition Organization

On Gold Mountain: Sculpture from the Sierra by Zhan Wang was organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. This exhibition is made possible by support from United Airlines and the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation. Additional support is provided by an anonymous donor.

Exhibition catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue of approximately 104 pages, featuring essays by exhibition curator Jeff Kelley, the Asian Art Museum's consulting curator of contemporary art, and Britta Erickson, a leading authority on contemporary Chinese art. The catalogue is available at the Asian Art Museum store. (softcover, price tbd). 415-581-3600 or shop@asianart.org.

Media Preview

A media preview for *On Gold Mountain: Sculpture from the Sierra by Zhan Wang* will be held on Wednesday, February 13, 2008 at 10 am. It will be held in conjunction with the preview for the exhibition *Drama and Desire: Japanese Paintings from the Floating World 1690-1850* which runs from February 15 – May 4, 2008. The previews will be followed at noon by the museum's annual press luncheon designed to present an overview of the museum's exhibition schedule for 2008 and beyond. For more information and to RSVP, please email pr@asianart.org or call (415) 581-3713.

About the Asian Art Museum

The Asian Art Museum is a public institution whose mission is to lead a diverse global audience in discovering the unique material, aesthetic, and intellectual achievements of Asian art and culture. Holding nearly 17,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history, the museum is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. Once located in Golden Gate Park, the museum now resides at its new, expanded facility at Civic Center Plaza. An architectural gem featuring a dynamic blend of beaux arts and modern design elements, the museum's new home is the result of a dramatic transformation of San Francisco's former main library building by renowned architect Gae Aulenti (designer of Paris's Musée d'Orsay) into a showcase for the museum's acclaimed collection and exhibitions.

- **Information:** (415) 581-3500 or www.asianart.org.
- **Location:** 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.
- **Hours:** The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, with extended hours until 9:00 pm every Thursday.
- **Admission:** \$12 for adults, \$8 for seniors, \$7 for youth 13–17, and free for children under 12. Thursday evenings after 5 pm admission is just \$5 for all visitors except those under 12 and members, who are always free. **Target Tuesdays:** The museum offers FREE admission to all on the **first Tuesday** of every month, courtesy of Target Stores. **Beginning in May, Target Tuesdays will be replaced with Target Sundays, with FREE admission offered on the first Sunday of the month.**
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.