

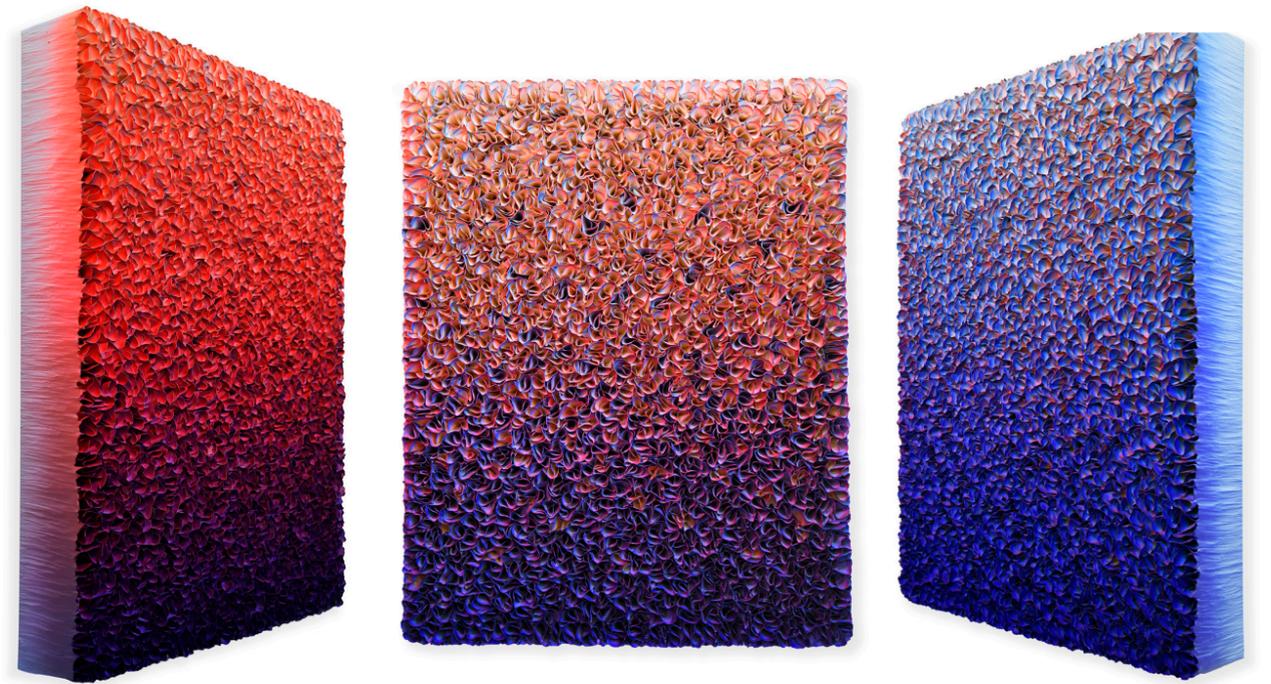
CONNECTING THROUGH FLOWERS

BY REBECCA BISSET

I remember being fascinated when I first saw artist Zhuang Hong Yi's work at REDSEA Gallery back in 2015 – the textures, colours and almost 3D feel made his artworks feel like a mix of sculpture and painting. Now he's returning to the gallery with a new exhibition of amazing flower-themed canvases.



Photo by Orion Nijman



Born in 1962 in Sichuan, Zhuang is considered one of China's most influential artists. He now shares his time between his studio in China and his residence in Switzerland, and it's this mix of Chinese background and European influence that really marks his work.

Zhuang's work has been showcased in over a hundred exhibitions across the globe, including solo exhibitions at the Found Museum in China, the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands, Germany's Ulm Museum, the Erarta Museum in Russia, and at the 55th Venice Biennale in Italy in 2013.

The photographs of him "in action" give a hint of the joy and energy that go into his work – and his answers below confirm this. As he says, "We might not all speak the same language, but we can all read flowers..."

You've come a long way since your move from China to the Netherlands in 1992. What's been the biggest change in your art perspective or creative approach since then?

The most significant evolution in my artistic career has been the transition from abstract art to a contemporary and impressionistic style. Prior to creating my first flowerbed piece in 2005, my focus primarily revolved around painting abstract portraits and landscapes on large canvases. During this period, my work often delved into weightier subjects and often featured some darker colours.

However, when I introduced the colour-changing technique to my flowerbed series in 2015, my artistic endeavours began to garner increased recognition and appeal. Since then, my style has gradually transformed into a more contemporary approach, characterised by the use of flowers, bold colours and expressive strokes of paint.

In one way, this reflects the prospering journey of myself as an artist throughout the decades. In another way, it reflects my aspiration for the flower as a universal symbol of prosperity and happiness.

How would you describe your art to someone who hadn't seen it before?

My art is about colour, happiness and enrichment; I want people to feel joy by reconnecting them with the calmness of nature, which is why the flower is so dominant in my paintings. Everywhere around the world, flowers represent peace, happiness and prosperity.

What's your current favourite artwork from your latest collection?

My favourite artwork from this new collection at REDSEA Gallery would be "Maggiore", which is the largest oval flowerbed that I have made to date, with a size of 180 by 300 centimetres. If you look closely enough, you can recognise a horizon and a lake that bends around a coast; this is the magical view that I see of Lago Maggiore from my residence in Switzerland. Therefore, the title represents both the lake and the unique size of the flowerbed (*maggiore* means "large" in Italian).

Can you share the most memorable or touching thing anyone has ever shared about your works?

I continuously receive kind messages on social media and in person from my followers and collectors who often share that my works bring them a feeling of joy and calmness on a daily basis; this always moves me as it is exactly what I aspire to achieve through my art.

These days, where do you typically turn to for inspiration and ideas?

Around my residence in Switzerland, the scenes of nature are very diverse. From the mountains, the animals and the palm trees, to the ever-changing horizons, I often get my inspiration during my daily strolls around the area. Additionally, when I find myself travelling around the world, I always bring my iPhone with me to capture pictures of special colours and scenes that I see throughout the day; I then revisit these pictures once I am back in the studio for inspiration.

When you're not in your art studio, where can we find you?

Either in the Swiss mountains or abroad, attending art exhibitions around the world – both my own exhibitions and exhibitions of other artists.

What is your life philosophy?

My purpose in life is to inspire people with the colours and patterns of my flower-themed works, allowing them to take a break from all the social disarray in our controversial, disconnected world. Connection with people of all cultures and backgrounds is my biggest aspiration: we might not all speak the same language, but we can all read flowers.

What advice would you give to someone looking to buy their first art piece?

Visit many exhibitions at various art galleries to get a grasp at what the art world has to offer at different levels; ask and look around. Nowadays, there are so many emerging artists with amazing talent that I find online or in person; purchasing a piece can be both a great financial and emotional investment.

You'll soon be unveiling your latest collection at REDSEA Gallery and flying to Singapore for the solo exhibition. What are you most excited about for your visit?

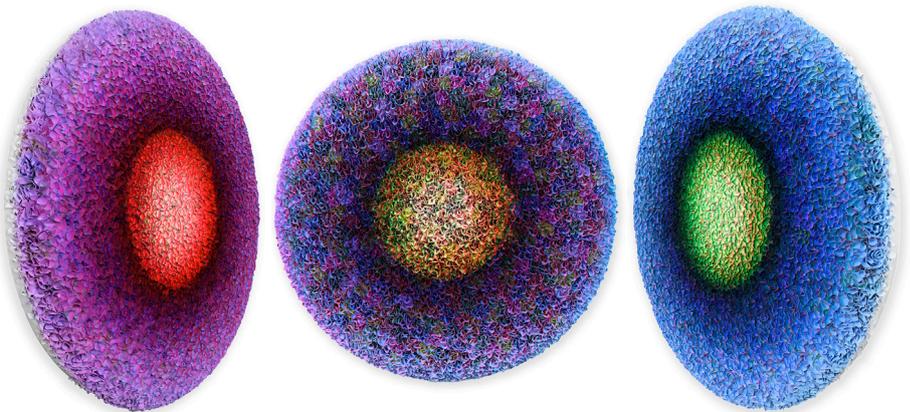
I have been to Singapore several times already but I always look forward to the amazing food and people! It's also always a pleasure to meet with my collectors in Singapore at my exhibitions with REDSEA Gallery; especially now after such a long time since COVID.

Finally, you've had several solo exhibitions over the years, what do you hope viewers take away from going to one of your shows?

I hope that the viewers of my exhibitions experience my work as a journey of happiness, colour and inspiration. I hope they get the opportunity to disconnect with the hassles of daily life and immerse themselves in the feelings of joy that I aspire to share with them through my art; the joy that I get to experience when observing the beauty in the small things in life and in the process of creating my flower works. α



Photo by Orion Nijman



"Iridescence" will be on display from 30 September at REDSEA Gallery (Block 9 Dempsey Road, #01-11 Dempsey Hill). Email info@redseagallery.com or call 6732 6711 for more information. Admission is free.