

Wanxin Zhang

Totem

November 8, 2014 – January 3, 2015

Join us for an opening with the artist
on Saturday, November 8
from 4:00-6:00 pm



Wanxin Zhang

The Refluent Tide
2014

24 x 24 x 32 inches

High fired clay with glaze

All works suitable for indoor or outdoor display

San Francisco, CA: Catharine Clark Gallery presents Wanxin Zhang | *Totem* with an exhibition of life-size ceramic sculptures. *Totem* is deeply inspired by Zhang's upbringing in Maoist China, his subsequent disillusionment, and his ultimate relocation to California as a young artist in the 1990s. The work in the exhibit reflects both a geographical journey and an ideological search. *Totem* demonstrates Zhang's mastery of the malleable and expressive qualities of clay to disrupt and reshape both the form and meaning of traditional symbols and icons.

Zhang's new monumental clay figures feature the artist's signature style—a blend that reflects Bay Area Figurative and California Funk traditions with nods to Chinese history. Inspired by his time studying with Peter Voulkos, and by the innovations of Robert Arneson and Stephen De Staebler, Zhang's figures explore the organic, evocative qualities of clay, and the impact of popular culture on the body. *Pink Warrior* (2014) exemplifies the departure and hybridity in Zhang's new work: an androgynous soldier coated in a glossy bubble-gum pink sheen; face and body a landscape of finger prints, gouges, coils and layers; inscribed with individual emotion rather than blank anonymity. This warrior retains the freeform construction and visual weight of Zhang's well known *Pit #5* series, but is an entirely new ensign of power structure dismantlement. Zhang's *Pieta* figures further exemplify the cross-cultural reshaping unique to the artist's aesthetic. *The Refluent Tide* (2013) melds influences across centuries and continents from the Delft

School to the Italian Renaissance to Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese porcelain. Dripping with blue glaze, the figures seem to fuse, suggesting sexual ambiguity and erasure of boundaries between mother and child. The embraced figure, though obscured, is clothed in a way that suggests the present, the street, the everyman. Zhang is one of several contemporary artists, including Akio Takamori, Mark Alberghina, Mounir Fatmi and Grayson Perry, who are exploiting the potential of ceramics to create figurative sculpture that explores sociopolitical themes. The momentum created by Zhang and others has garnered recognition for contemporary ceramics as fine art; worthy of exhibitions at canon-creating institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Art and Design in New York. The time is now for a West Coast resurgence in showcasing ceramic artists. Nancy M. Servis, Northern California ceramics historian, writer and scholar, says of Zhang's work, "The sculpture of Wanxin Zhang is compelling in its cultural duality voiced through expressionist ceramic sculpture with painterly glaze. Decades of artistic focus has led to his current body of work which acknowledges artistic forbearers, like Funk art and Bay Area figuration, while unleashing spirited originality and verve." Catharine Clark Gallery debuted our interest in ceramics with the inclusion of work by Nicole Cherubini in a group show in 2009. This is the gallery's first solo exhibition of an artist working in ceramics.

Wanxin Zhang | *Totem*

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Saturday, November 8 : Opening reception with the artist 4:00 - 6:00 pm, Artist walk-thru at 3:00 pm

This event is free and open to the public. Media inquiries contact Allison Stockman: marketing@cclarkgallery.com

*Please note closings for gallery winter holidays: **(2014)** Closed Nov 27 – Dec 1 & Dec 23 – Dec 31; **(2015)** Closed Jan 1

Wanxin Zhang was born in ChangChun, China, and spent his formative childhood years under Mao's regime during the 1960's and 1970's. He was part of the first young generation to receive a formal art education in college after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, graduating in 1985 from the Sculpture program from the LuXun Academy of Fine Art. Zhang relocated to California in 1992. He has received several grants and awards including the Joan Mitchell Painter and Sculptor Grant in 2004 and the Virginia A. Groot Foundation Grant in 2006. In 2010, the exhibition, *Wanxin Zhang : A Ten Year Survey*, curated by Peter Held, opened at Arizona State University Art Museum, and later travelled to Idaho, Florida, Washington, Montana, and California. Zhang was the subject of a solo exhibition featured at the Fresno Art Museum in California in 2007 and the Alden B. Dow Museum of Science and Art in Michigan in 2008. Zhang exhibited in the 22nd UBC Sculpture Biennial in Japan in 2007, the Taipei Ceramics Biennial in Taiwan in 2008, and the Da Tong City 2nd International Sculpture Biennial in China in 2013. His work was included in the book "Confrontational Ceramics" by Judith Schwartz and reviewed in publications including *Art in America*, *Sculpture*, and *American Ceramics*. In 2012, the San Francisco Chronicle picked Zhang's exhibition at the Richmond Art Center to be one of the Top 10 Exhibitions in the San Francisco Bay Area. This is Wanxin Zhang's first exhibit at Catharine Clark Gallery.