

FineArtConnoisseur™

THE PREMIER MAGAZINE FOR IMPORTANT COLLECTORS



JANUARY 2006

\$5.95 U.S. | \$7.95 CAN.



Volume 3, Issue 1

SALON d'Art

Today's Masters™



DETAIL OF
TIBETAN HIGHLANDS
HONGNIAN ZHANG
OIL ON CANVAS, 60 x 68 IN.

inside

IN THE CHINESE ACADEMIC TRADITION
HONGNIAN ZHANG
PO PIN LIN
HUIHAN LIU
MIAN SITU

NEW YORK

HongNian Zhang

A Cinematic Epic

IF HONGNIAN ZHANG'S LIFE could be captured on film, it would have all the grandeur and drama of a sweeping epic. In fact, his story is a lot like one of his enormous works that he orchestrates as if he were a maestro or movie director. His is definitely a case of art imitating life imitating art.

THE DEFIANT ONE

Zhang was born into a Chinese family about the time that Communism took hold in that country. It was a tumultuous time, and Zhang recalls that his early life was hard. Drawing was one of his few joys. At 14, Zhang decided to compete against millions of children the same age for a coveted spot in one of the country's art high schools. The entrance exam was to create a painting on the theme of summer, and Zhang's facility with painting bright summer sunlight earned him a place at the Central Art Academy in Beijing.

In the beginning, Zhang willingly followed the rigorous training guidelines of the Chinese system. Over time, however, his emotional, independent spirit began to chafe at the tight restrictions. He soon gained a reputation for pushing the envelope. A mischievous grin on his face, Zhang still recalls one particular incident: "When I was 15, I heard a concert performance of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. I was so moved, I did a painting of a dramatic sky with a figure, but I got in trouble for depicting such feeling! My fellow students were directed to criticize me, and my teacher told me that, as a young Communist, I should not identify with the feelings of Beethoven, who was a capitalist. I had to learn the hard way that there was a political aspect to what we did at the school."

Upon graduating high school, Zhang considered going to film school, thinking that movies would give him a more powerful platform for expressing his opinions. Instead, the Cultural Revolution began, and Zhang was sent to work in the



SELF-PORTRAIT
OIL ON CANVAS, 24 x 18 IN.



YEAR OF THE SHEEP
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 x 30 IN.

BREEZE ON THE HUDSON
OIL ON CANVAS, 24 x 30 IN.





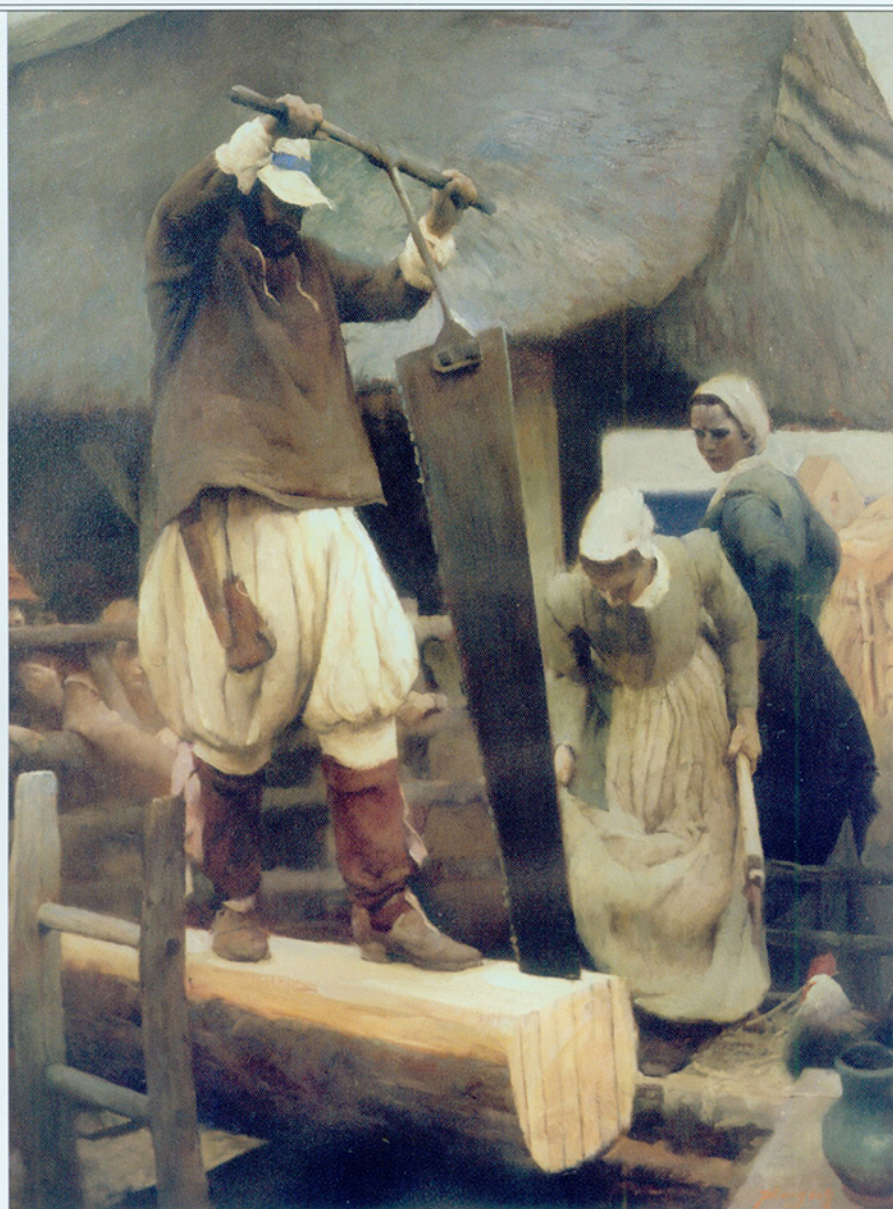
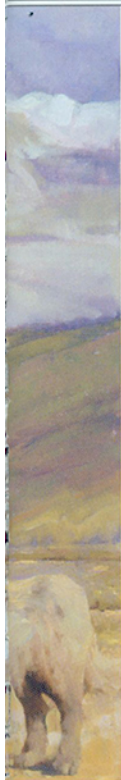
FROM THE ROOF OF THE WORLD
OIL ON CANVAS, 24 x 48 IN.

THE FLORAL WREATH
OIL ON CANVAS, 24 x 20 IN.

countryside for seven years. He did not paint during that entire time. Eventually, the government gave him what he describes as “the best job.” Zhang was designated an artist in residence, which meant he was paid to travel the country creating art. His supervisors, however, made it clear that they would hold his rebellious nature in check by requiring him to create only paintings that would support the Communist regime. Nevertheless, Zhang was overjoyed to have such a rare opportunity to hone his craftsmanship and utilize his creativity.

By the time he returned to the Central Art Academy to further his education, he was so accomplished that the school immediately awarded him an undergraduate degree. He studied there for another year and a half before moving to New York to earn his master’s degree at City College. In the U.S., he says, he was exposed to many new and modern ideas, which he incorporated into his classical training to produce his own unique style.





New Home
OIL ON CANVAS, 40 x 30 IN.

PAINTINGS WITH SOUL

Career-wise, Zhang met with almost immediate success. A 57th Street gallery picked him up right away, and his first show of paintings sold out. Yet his personal life was quite the opposite. His wife died, leaving him to care for their young daughter alone.

More than ever, Zhang poured out his emotions in his work. He painted more scenes of Tibet to express his spiritual connection to Asia. He painted images of America's early pilgrims because he identified with the hardship of making a new life in a foreign land, and he painted contemporary American subjects to share his positive outlook about his adopted home. He even did several paintings of angels to comfort himself when he felt uncertain and lonely.

This emotional content became the foundation of Zhang's high standing, earning him numerous awards, several key teaching opportunities, and unmitigated devotion from his collectors. "I cannot paint what others tell me to do," he now says. "Unless I have some emotional connection to the subject, the painting is empty to me. People understand that. They identify with my paintings because they see that my art is from my heart."

Zhang's life is very happy now. He has since remarried, remains close to his daughter, and has made a home in Woodstock, New York. Today, he reserves all the drama for his paintings, especially for the large-scale, multi-figure works that are his pride and joy. Through his work, he hopes to provide viewers of today and tomorrow with a glimpse into a sensitive man's soul. ■