

Artist in the spotlight

A LOOK AT ZHUANG HONG YI'S FLORAL VISIONS

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share my flowers with as
many people as possible."*

This is an exclusive interview with Zhuang Hong Yi by SmithDavidson Gallery.

Integrating Chinese techniques and Western allure, Zhuang Hong Yi is known for his daringly bold color palettes and dynamic floral works, most notably seen in his Flowerbed series. He was born in Sichuan, China, in 1962 and completed his education in Chongqing at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. Later, he and his wife, artist Lu Luo, moved to Groningen, The Netherlands to further their studies at the Minerva Academy. Since his move to The Netherlands, the artist has received international acclaim. His work is included in numerous esteemed collections and has been exhibited in prestigious venues like the Kunsthal in Rotterdam, the Groninger Museum, Venice Biennale, and Erarta Museum.



The Floral Motif

Although his works are highly technical, precise, and sophisticated, Zhuang remains spontaneous and open-minded in his approach to beginning a new piece, allowing the ideas to come to him during the creation process. "For example, I never fully plan in advance what a new landscape piece should look like; instead, I simply begin painting and see what ideas and movements arise during the process," he added. "I always say that the process itself is the inspiration. When it comes to the flowerbed series, ideas are drawn from nature and everyday life; it could be a flower, a cloud, a sunset, or even a poster or a specific shade I see on the street."



Zhuang Hong Yi, Waves of Serenity (2025)

Zhuang's well known Flowerbed works are crafted from delicate pieces of painted rice paper, which he has bent and meticulously folded into hundreds of tiny buds that subtly shift colors as you move your body and eyes from one side of the work to the other. He explained that rice paper is a traditional medium in China, used for calligraphy and painting and prized for its ability to absorb ink while still maintaining the flexibility to be folded and manipulated.

He has been experimenting with its use since he began as an artist. “I studied paper during my university years, and rice paper always stuck with me, not only because of its qualities, but also because of its connection to Chinese heritage,” Zhuang explained. “In recent years, I’ve also started incorporating other types of paper alongside rice paper, depending on the effect I wish to achieve. It’s a never-ending process!” His meticulous process of folding rice paper layered with acrylic and oil point displays an almost ascetic level of discipline, as well as genuine artistic sensibility.

His residence in the Netherlands over the past decades has profoundly influenced his work, as he works with a freedom of style, expressive and unconfined. Everywhere in Zhuang Hong Yi’s work is the flower. His Landscape works, influenced by Impressionism and Dutch tulip fields, blend vibrant, gestural acrylics with rice-paper elements, creating dynamic, nature-inspired pieces. This fusion reflects Zhuang’s personal journey, balancing his Chinese heritage and Western freedom of expression. In Chinese culture, the flower carries countless meanings and emotions. For him, the flower signifies universally prosperity, peace, and optimism.

He creates his artworks then in the hopes of sharing this positivity and beauty with the world. Additionally, Zhuang’s artistic practice is a nourishing lifeline for himself. “Creating these floral works keeps me happy and alive every single day, in and outside the studio. When I’m not in the studio, I am constantly looking for new colors, new patterns, and new inspiration that I can bring to life in my flower works. When I am in the studio, surrounded by my assistants, I enter a creative state where everything is possible. Some days I surprise myself with what I create, and some days I am disappointed - but every day, I look forward to the possibilities of creating art! I have worked with flowers for over two decades, but it still brings me energy and joy.”



Zhuang Hong Yi, *Swirling Petals* (2025)

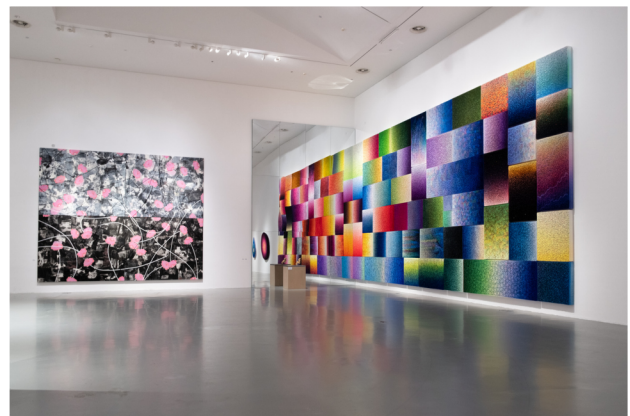
His newest series, *Wave*, shown in the solo exhibition *Waves of Colors* at SmithDavidson Gallery, blossomed from a subconscious attempt to continuously challenge himself and expand his oeuvre. “I vividly remember seeing a picture of the sea, calm yet gently rippling, with a magical warm glow over its surface. With that image in mind, I returned to the studio and created several prototypes.” Though he had already been gradually experimenting with different levels of depth within his *Flowerbed* works, *Wave* is a magnificent display of skill and innovation.

International Acclaim and Decades of Experience

With his Chinese heritage and education in combination with his career mostly based in Europe and the US, Zhuang Hong Yi is situated well to notice and reflect on the differences between East and West. “When I moved to the Netherlands in the 1990s, the art market in China was primarily focused on traditional art, whereas contemporary art was already a prominent movement in Europe. Since then, contemporary art has gained more and more attention and popularity in China, characterized by the rise of Chinese contemporary masters in the 2000s, and more recently by a generation of new artists and collectors.” Exemplary of this change is the artist’s own major solo exhibition at the Powerlong Museum, Shanghai.

Though currently residing in Switzerland, the artist still holds his main studio in Beijing where he goes several times a year to work, even after many years living in Europe. Between countless trips and exhibitions worldwide, a way to slow down during his fast-paced life, is to make time to be at home. “A few years ago, my wife and I moved to Switzerland, where we focus on resting, enjoying nature, and hiking,” he explained. But even then, Zhuang never really stops working. “When I’m in Switzerland, I take the time to rest and reflect, but at the same time, new ideas and inspirations often come to me, thoughts I later bring to life back in the studio.”

Zhuang Hong Yi has been an artist for over 30 years already and has been successful in his endeavors. Yet, when he first came to the Netherlands, he didn’t have any financial support, knowledge of the Dutch language, or the culture. He has always been supported and encouraged by his wife Lu Luo and his two children. “Even when we didn’t sell a single painting in a month, we were grateful for the things we had and could do.” The artist did however encounter the boundless opportunities in Europe, as apposed China. “Living in Europe gave me the opportunity to live close to the contemporary art world; prominent galleries, museums, and artists, which brought me many opportunities. I dedicated a lot of my success to not just the challenges I have been through, but also the luck and privileges that have come on my path.”



Installation shots of the exhibition *Kaleidoscope*, Powerlong Museum, Shanghai, China (2025).



Zhuang Hong Yi & David Smith in front of a piece from the Landscape series (2010).

Partnership with SmithDavidson Gallery

“SmithDavidson Gallery already noticed and supported my work very early on. They were the first gallery to bring my work to art fairs around the world, which in turn, resulted in other international galleries also taking notice of my work. I am very grateful towards David and Gabriëlle for always believing in my work and supporting me as partners and friends. This collaboration will always have a special place in my heart and I’m excited for what’s to come!”

SmithDavidson has been working with Zhuang Hong Yi for almost two decades ago and gallery owner David Smith and Zhuang have built a close friendship over the years. Engaging their extensive network, SmithDavidson Gallery introduced the artist internationally with presentations at Art Miami and TEFAF Maastricht. Over the summer of 2020, SmithDavidson Gallery presented *In Bloom*, a solo exhibition simultaneously held across three continents to celebrate the longstanding relationship with the artist.

In January 2025, David Smith opened Zhuang Hong Yi’s Museum Overview Kaleidoscope at the Powerlong Museum Shanghai. And now, in the Summer of 2025, the solo exhibition *Waves of Color* is on view at the gallery in Amsterdam.

Zhuang’s art continues to inspire worldwide. Through his mastery of color and form, the artist celebrates beauty, resilience, and cultural harmony in the face of global change. “Although I’m already 63, I feel young and inspired every day to share my work with people around the world. It truly touches my heart when someone tells me, either in person or online, how much joy my floral works bring them. This is my only goal: to share my flowers with as many people as possible.”