

Stella Zhang's Expressive Body
张爽：具有表现力的身体

Betti-Sue Hertz

Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.

审视身体，同时也是在审视呼吸和言语。书写自我。你的身体必须得到聆听。唯有此时，无意识的庞大资源才能够涌现出来。

— 埃莱娜·西苏（Hélène Cixous）

The recent art of Stella Zhang, the Chinese-born San Francisco-based artist, embraces artistic process as an act of feminist will. Highly inventive, her work is a public display of an emotional encounter with a personal and intimate self-referential bodily experience—and is an exploration of both female (and also male) bodies. Muscle, fat, flesh, and skin are represented in various materials including fabric, acrylic paint and metallic thread, and in various formats—including painting sculpture and installation. The tension between their visual and haptic aspects draws the viewer into the kinesthetic and physiological process of their making.

出生于中国的旧金山艺术家张爽在其最近的作品中将创作过程视为女权主义意识的行为。她以极具创造性的作品展示出一次私密的个体身体体验与情感邂逅，是一次对女性（及男性）身体表现的探索。作品通过多种织物，线，金属与颜料的使用来表现身体，肌肉、脂肪和皮肤。以绘画、雕塑和装置的多种形式促成视觉与触觉间的张力将观众带入了创作的动感与心理体验的过程之中。

Zhang's choice and use of materials connect her to numerous women artists of the past several decades for whom the body and its imperatives are central concerns. Indeed, it's no exaggeration to suggest that this is a key part of the past half century's *zeitgeist*. Consider the painting and sculpture of Louise Bourgeois, Lee Bontecou, and Yayoi Kusama as well as Sonia Gomes, Shinique Smith and Kaari Upton, all of whom reorient textile-based craft and applied arts into a language of feminist critique. Like Zhang, they push materials associated with women's work and formerly of low status—fabric and thread—into emblems of power and desire.

张爽对材料的选择和使用将她与过去数十年间了解到的诸多女艺术家联系起来。她们最关心的问题是身体及其必然性。诚然，若说这是过去半个世纪时代精神的核心所在也毫不夸张。例如 Louise Bourgeois、Lee Bontecou、Yayoi Kusama、Sonia Gomes、Shinique Smith 和 Kaari Upton 的绘画和雕塑作品，这些艺术家们都把纺织工艺和应用艺术重塑成女权主义批判式的语言。张爽亦是如此，将与女性工作相关且质地朴素的材料——织物和线——转换成了表现的媒介和能量。

In Zhang's search for a visual language that connects viewers to an unnamable, female struggle she employs the concept of "0," which appears in a variety of works. She employs, in paintings such as *0-Viewpoint-8-5*, 2015 and *0-Viewpoint-8-17*, 2014, slits, ovoids, or gaping holes in a

pictorial field of monochrome or near monochrome color featuring centrally located openings. Through it we can even see the wall beyond, a disruptive effect vis-à-vis the traditional acceptance of the canvas as its own world. In cases where the holes are a part of a larger pictorial scene such as *0-Viewpoint-02*, 2010, other actions—wrapping and knot ties, twisted fabric and bulges stuffed with cotton batten—displace the primacy of the opening—replacing wholeness with messy landscapes of creases, bunching and folds. The actual physical rending of fabric is an undeniable recognition of a more turbulent and psychological relationship within the self and a manifestation of a restless soul.

张爽在寻找一种新的视觉语言，能够将观众与个体性别与身份联系起来。她采用了“0”的概念，这在其诸多作品中都有体现。在2015年的 *0-Viewpoint-8-5* 和2014年的 *0-Viewpoint-8-17* 等作品中，张爽在单色的画面中运用了撕裂、椭圆抑或空白的开口占据作品的中央。透过裂口看到背后的墙壁，这种破坏性的效果打破了画布即世界的传统观念。在2010年的 *0-Viewpoint-02* 等作品中，这些孔洞只是更大的画面场景的一部分，包裹、打结、扭曲的织物和棉条填充的凸起等其它方式取代了空的主体位置，整体性被褶皱、凸起和折叠的交错所置换。这种对织物的撕扯不容置否地表现了内部更为动荡的心理关系，亦是精神上纠葛的潜在表现。

Zhang, who was born in 1965, grew up raised in a household steeped in the arts. Her father was Zhang Ping (1934-2015), a highly regarded brush-and-ink painter of landscapes and nature and a professor at the prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). She attended CAFA for both high school and college, yet despite her social connections and her good fortune—to have largely escaped the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, it ended when she was ten—she recalls much isolation and loneliness. “I only felt safe at home,” she wrote, “where I would have the leisure to read and copy art books my dad collected.” Later, Zhang would again, become discouraged with the outside world, not surprisingly, when a brief period of liberalization in the mid-1980s, she experienced a more repressive period for artists represented by the near-simultaneous opening and closing of the China Avant Garde exhibition at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. 张爽出生于1965年。成长于一个艺术家庭，父亲是著名的水墨山水画家、中央美术学院（CAFA）教授张凭（1934-2015）。张爽先后就读于中央美院附中和中央美院，应该算是那个年代的幸运儿。文革结束时她十岁，基本上避开了当时的恐怖。尽管如此，她的记忆中仍旧充满了隔离与孤独。“我只有在家的时候才觉得安全，”她写道，“在家里我可以悠闲地阅读和临摹父亲收藏的画册”。之后，八十年代中期中国出现过一段短暂的自由化时期，但随着中国美术馆举办的中国现代艺术展闪电落幕，艺术家们又面临的是一段沉闷与压抑。张爽再一次对外界感到了彷徨。

In 1990 Zhang moved from Beijing to Tokyo, seeking refreshment and renewal by immersing herself in a different cultural context. She studied Japanese traditional painting at Tama Art University before transferring to Tokyo Art University where she earned an M.F.A. She also discovered another form of repression in Japan that was not overtly political, as in China, but culturally engrained—the repression of women. Zhang felt that this entrenched patriarchy was inhibiting her development as an artist and woman. In 2003, she moved again, this time to the United States, with her 6 year-old daughter, Ellen. She settled first in Palo Alto, where she has been associated with Stanford University, and later, in 2016 to nearby San Francisco. How

remarkable is Zhang's trajectory—like that of so many Chinese artists—from her youth in Cultural Revolution Beijing to her present life in San Francisco, a bastion of free-wheeling creativity.

1990年，张爽到东京留学，希望在不同的文化环境中能够更新自我。她先在多摩美术学院学习日本传统绘画，然后又到东京艺术大学深造并获得艺术硕士学位。然而，她在日本发现了另一种形式的压抑。与中国的情况不同，这种压抑并非来自政治，而是植根于文化，即对女性性别本位的抑制。张爽认为这种根深蒂固的父权制度会压制艺术家和女性的发展。2003年，她带着6岁的女儿Ellen来到了美国。她先居住在Palo Alto，并与斯坦福大学有所联系。之后，又于2016年搬到了不远处的旧金山。与许多中国艺术家一样，张爽有着不同寻常的人生轨迹，从儿时文革时期的北京到现在的旧金山，她体会到一种从城堡中放飞自由。

Zhang's recent ink paintings are imbued with an urgency in the flow of the ink signifying both expertise and experience. Traditional Chinese landscape painting is a conversation between the artist and outer world, feeling expressed as atmosphere and set in a space that customarily dwarfs mere humans. The vertical linearity of the central image in *0-Transformation-7*, 2016 and *0-Transformation-8*, 2016 mimics the notched vertebrae of a human spine. Zhang's marriage of body and landscape is deft and unusual in form, although perhaps not in motivation. Her attitude seems to extend back nearly a millennium to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Its artists cultivated "mind landscape," in which description is enriched by personal feelings. Ancient ideas about landscape painting such as this are also apparent in the works that combine Chinese and Western painting techniques. *0-Transformation-2016-1*, 2016 and *0-Transformation-2016-2*, 2016, with their emergent high relief surfaces that make literal the topologies of landscape and strike a supernatural tone featuring auratic centers, to suggest starlit nocturnal views.

张爽近期的水墨作品中在墨色流淌深处弥漫着一丝紧迫感，作品同时体现了她的水墨素养和经验。中国传统山水画是艺术家与外界的对话，通过氛围来表现感觉，而且人在画中常常显得渺小。张爽的水墨作品2016年的*0-Transformation-7*和*0-Transformation-8*画面中央的垂直线性表现带有缺口的身体脊椎。张爽对身体与山水的结合形式巧妙，不同寻常，而在创作意图上却并非仅仅如此。回溯至元朝（1271-1368），当时的艺术家们雕琢出“心灵山水”，随个人的感觉使得艺术描绘而丰富。张爽在对传统山水画的思考中结合了自我意识亦有明显体现，例如2016年的*0-Transformation-2016-1*和*0-Transformation-2016-2*。凸出的浮雕表面与山水形态相呼应，超自然的色晕体现了空间的神秘。

Although considering Zhang's work without acknowledging its roots in brush-and-ink painting, would render its characterization incomplete, her art practice does not fit comfortably within only a Chinese reading either. One key to the synthesis that animates Zhang work lies in philosophy. In classical Chinese thought the order of the world dwells in the things themselves; the artist turns them into works of art. For the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) things have essential qualities that resist human control.ⁱⁱ Zhang's sculptures live between these two cultural and philosophical worlds, Western dualistic thought and Chinese concepts of continuity and flow; an unstable state where things are mutually shaping and being shaped.ⁱⁱⁱ Zhang navigates a path in which things and experiences are named and owned,

struggling against binaries, while still dependent on them for definition and communication. As she relies on them they melt away in her midst—male/female, black/white, pure/tainted, flat/dimensional. Zhang speaks of tenderness and flexibility as well as the space between reality and dream.^{iv}

如果没有认识到张爽的水墨画根源，那么对她作品的思考就不完整，但是她的艺术实践也并非仅仅限于从中国角度来解读。张爽作品中集成的一个关键在于哲学理念。中国古典思想认为，世界的秩序在于事物本身，艺术家将其转变成艺术作品。德国哲学家马丁·海德格尔（Martin Heidegger）（1889-1976）则认为，事物具有抵制人类控制的本质特征。张爽的艺术处在这两种文化与哲学世界之间，即西方的二元思想与中国的连续和流动观念；这是一个不稳定的状态，事物相互塑造与被塑造。张爽从中寻找平衡，事物与经验被命名、被拥有，反对二元制，但同时又依靠它们来定义和沟通。张爽依靠它们，它们也在男与女、黑与白、纯粹与污染、平面与空间之中融化。张爽所表达的空间存在于温柔与灵活以及现实与梦想之间。

Post-war Japanese “anti-art” offers another clue to Zhang’s search for liberation. The influence of the Gutai group of artists (1954-1972), in particular, was key. Its members’ desire to reject totalitarianism and the authoritarian state was realized by collapsing the distinction between materials, body and process. This is exemplified in both Shozo Shimamoto’s *Holes* (1954) and Saburō Murakami’s *Laceration of Paper* (1956), where the artist hurled his body through a series of paper screens. Zhang’s work combines such forceful aggression with an admiration for the minimalist work of a slightly later art movement, Mono-ha (or School of Things) (1968-1975). Adherents of this approach advocated a return to a more traditional respect for natural materials and their inherent thingness to create sometimes monumental sculptural works of beauty. Nobuo Sekine’s *Phase of Nothingness—Cloth and Stone*, 1970/1994, for instance, emphasizes contrasts in the materials evoked in the title.^v In a search for an abstract feminist art, Zhang works at the intersection of these two seemingly diametrically opposed Japanese impulses, at times tipping toward one or the other. *0-Viewpoint-010*, 2012—an elongated sac-like form that droops down from the wall to the floor, straining at its physical limitations and evoking the body through its incorporation of weight and gravity—is a nod to Mono-ha and its preoccupation with the natural. 战后日本的“反艺术”为张爽的艺术释放提供了另一条线索。艺术家“具体小组（Gutai Group）”（1954-1972）的影响尤为重要，小组成员通过瓦解物质、身体和过程之间的差别实现了反对极权主义和专制国家的愿望。这在 Shozo Shimamoto 的 *Holes*（1954）和 Saburō Murakami 的 *Laceration of Paper*（1956）中都有体现，作品中艺术家用自己的身体穿过了一系列的纸屏。张爽在作品中将这种强力的入侵与对稍晚时期物派艺术运动（1968-1975）极简主义作品的欣赏结合在一起。物派（Mono-ha）主张回归对天然材料的传统尊重以及强调材料本身的物体属性，从中创作出不朽的美之作品。例如，Nobuo Sekine 的 *Phase of Nothingness — Cloth and Stone*, 1970/1994 就强调了由标题所唤起的材料对比。在追寻抽象女权主义艺术的过程中，张爽游走于似乎截然对立的两种日本艺术潮流之中。2012 年的 *0-Viewpoint-010* 是一个细长的囊状体，从墙壁垂落至地面，绷紧至自身的物理限制，通过重量和重力的合并而唤醒身体。该作品是艺术家向物派及其对自然材料的注重而致敬。

In *0-Viewpoint-3-71*, 2017, a work about Mother and Child, the gestating form is emerging from the body-as-landscape in a process of becoming as if the entire uterine sac is caught between the interior and exterior world. It is a powerful work where the body as an active and organic site of production in the biological sense is reimagined as a process for the making of an artwork. The writings of the poststructuralist Hélène Cixous addresses this matter precisely. Deploying her concept of *l'écriture féminine* through such useful metaphors as milk, orgasmic experience, and the ocean; she simultaneously disrupts and deconstructs the stability of the phallogocentric Symbolic Order,^{vi} “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self,” she counsels. “Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.”^{vii} For Zhang, the drama of desire and the universal resonance of the Symbolic, are as real as the things she makes and uses in their making. Through a journey incorporating brush-and-ink painting, conceptual and anti-art and voluptuous sculptural references to the body, she has found the confident voice within.

2017年的0-Viewpoint-3-71是关于母子关系的一件作品，通过母体化作景观的形式来表现妊娠，仿佛整个子宫囊夹在了内部和外部世界之间。母体在生物学上本是一个活跃而有机的生产场所，这件强有力的作品却能将想象带入一个艺术创造的过程。后结构主义者 Hélène Cixous 对这类问题有着准确的阐释，通过牛奶、高潮和海洋等比喻提出了“女性写作 (*l'écriture féminine*)”这一概念。她同时破坏并解构了男权中心象征秩序的稳定性。

“审视身体，同时也是在审视呼吸和言语。书写自我。”她提出来。“你的身体必须得到聆听。唯有此时，无意识的庞大资源才能够涌现出来。”对于张爽来说，人性中欲望的戏剧性以及象征性和普遍性的存在共鸣与她制作的作品和使用的工具一样真实。通过一段融合了水墨、概念、反艺术以及与身体相关的感官性创作的旅程，她发现了内在自信的声音。

ⁱ Email to the author, July 31, 2017

ⁱⁱ “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Martin Heidegger, The Essential Writings*. New York, HarperCollins, 2008, 152-156

ⁱⁱⁱ Roger T. Ames, “Introduction,” *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare*, trans. Roger T. Ames. New York, 1993, 55.

^{iv} Stella Zhang Shuang, *O-Viewpoint*, exh. cat., Galerie du Monde. Hong Kong, 2015, 22

^v Many of the artists of this group graduated from Tama Art University, one of the art schools that Zhang attended when she was living in Tokyo.

^{vi} <http://bloombsburyliterarystudies.typepad.com/continuum-literary-studie/2012/03/lecriture-feminine.html>. Retrieved Aug. 5, 2017

^{vii} Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 1976, (PDF) on lavachequiliterary.typepad.com/files/cixous-read.pdf. Retrieved August 12, 2017

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