My Dear Friends 6

lithograph

2002

47 x 38 cm

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Zhang Xiaogang

Zhang Xiaogang is arguably China's leading contemporary artist, showing and selling works all over the world. Zhang, who currently lives in Beijing, was born in Kunming in 1958 and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sichuan in 1982. A symbolic surrealist, he is a member of the avant garde. Picasso and Dali are key influences on his work.

Zhang Xiaogang's work in the Eighties took repression and sadness as its subject, rendering them in an expressive style. It was a difficult period for the painter, as he suffered from depression and alcoholism. It was not until the early Nineties that his work began to attract widespread attention. In 1993 he started to make 'family portraits', paintings in which he set his own personal past and memories against the contextual cultural setting of recent Chinese history.

Zhang is reserved and detached. He hoped to live in a free atmosphere. When he opened a small pub in Chengdu, bought with the money he had made with his paintings, it immediately became a favourite hangout for young artists, musicians and authors.

The western pub culture chimes with the tradition of drinking and discussing literature among Chinese intellectuals. Thus the small pub became the centre of the arts, with many young artists renting or buying a room near it in the city's Shaziyan district. To them the pub represented a place of freedom within China's constantly developing capitalist society.

Zhang Xiaogang leads a quiet and simple life that belies his global success. His fame as an artist rests on his unique aesthetic, that combines traditional Chinese drawing with western surrealism. Chinese critics regard him as the symbol of an era that will never return

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