

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ZENG FANZHI | VAN GOGH**  
**VAN GOGH MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM**  
**20 OCTOBER 2017 – 25 FEBRUARY 2018**



Zeng Fanzhi, *Van Gogh IV*, 2017

In *Zeng Fanzhi | Van Gogh*, the Van Gogh Museum presents five works by Zeng Fanzhi (b. 1964), one of the best-known contemporary Chinese artists, whose work has exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Art Museum of China and Musée du Louvre, among others. Zeng, a fervent admirer of Vincent van Gogh, has made a set of six paintings inspired by Van Gogh's self-portraits especially for the Van Gogh Museum. From 20 October 2017 to 25 February 2019, Zeng's new work will go on public display for the first time at the Van Gogh Museum. The exhibition will include three portraits alongside a painting of Zeng's shoes (*Boots*) and a large-scale work inspired by Van Gogh's masterpiece *Wheatfield with Crows*.

Zeng combines his own style with the work of Van Gogh in a swirling pattern of lines that reflects the tradition of Chinese calligraphy, prompting the viewer to look again at Van Gogh's work, his brushstrokes, his use of colour and his artistic vision. Zeng says of Van Gogh, "He has become a legend in my heart".

Axel Rüger, Director of the Van Gogh Museum, says: "*Zeng Fanzhi | Van Gogh* fits into a series of feature exhibitions of modern and contemporary art in the Van Gogh Museum that show the influence Van Gogh had on the generations that followed him. This exhibition shows that Van Gogh is still a source of inspiration to this day. We are extremely honoured that Zeng Fanzhi has made these works for the museum and we are particularly proud of the end result."

## Self-Portraits

Van Gogh made dozens of self-portraits during his career and self-portraiture is also an important part of Zeng Fanzhi's oeuvre. He explains: "With each major change in my life I always feel a strong craving to paint a self-portrait. All these self-portraits have now become a kind of documentary of my life."

Zeng Fanzhi made a set of six portraits especially for the Van Gogh Museum, all inspired by Van Gogh's self-portraits, three of which are now being exhibited in the exhibition *Zeng Fanzhi | Van Gogh*. Zeng continues: "I try to re-experience Van Gogh's self-image when I paint his face on the canvas. As the process progresses I get the feeling that I'm getting to know this stranger better and better."

Van Gogh is known for his distinctive style, and Zeng's own trademark style comes from Chinese calligraphy, a very different culture. In Zeng's versions, he employs swirling lines to link his own style and identity to the life and work of Van Gogh.

## Two Pairs of Cornfields and Shoes

Alongside the self-portraits, the exhibition showcases an impressive painting measuring 200 x 350 cm inspired by Van Gogh's masterpiece *Wheatfield with Crows*. Zeng's *Wheatfield* hangs in sight of Van Gogh's so that visitors can discover the similarities.

*Boots*, an earlier painting by Zeng Fanzhi, made in 2009, likewise has a strong link with Van Gogh: it is a clear allusion to Van Gogh's famous still lifes of shoes. Whereas Van Gogh painted old, worn-out work shoes, Zeng took his new boots as his subject. In both cases, the shoes reflect the way Van Gogh and Zeng Fanzhi saw themselves at that point in their lives. These two paintings of shoes hang side by side in the exhibition.

## Van Gogh Inspires

This exhibition of Zeng Fanzhi's work is one of a series of exhibitions of modern and contemporary art at the Van Gogh Museum. These displays show the way many generations of artists have been inspired by Van Gogh's work. Since 2014, there have been exhibitions of paintings by Francis Bacon, Edvard Munch, Frank Auerbach, Willem de Kooning and Expressionist works from the Merzbacher Collection.

These modern and contemporary artists were not just inspired by Van Gogh himself; they were also influenced by the way Van Gogh's work is looked at now and will be looked at in the future. Zeng Fanzhi contributes to this process in an entirely individual way, giving Van Gogh's work his own meaning. A comprehensive publication will accompany the *Zeng Fanzhi | Van Gogh* exhibition, in which the artistic links between the two artists are discussed in detail.

This presentation was made in close collaboration with the Fanzhi Foundation and the artist's studio team. It was made possible thanks to the exclusive and generous support of Mr. Chung-kiu Cheung and Mrs. Cecilia Cheung, members of The Yellow House.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### About Zeng Fanzhi

Zeng Fanzhi (b. 1964) is one of the most successful and best-known contemporary Chinese artists. He studied at the Hubei Academy of Fine Arts. While he was still training, he was inspired by Expressionism, which was unusual at that time. Zeng grew up during the Cultural Revolution and its consequences are still perceptible; personal expression was forbidden for a long time – even in the art world. From the outset, however, Zeng's paintings were powerful individualistic statements with a personal vision and quirkily-chosen subjects.

One example is the *Hospital* series, which Zeng began while he was still at the academy in Wuhan. This series was based on the scenes Zeng witnessed in a neighbouring hospital. They are painted with so much expression that it is clear Zeng was also personally affected by the suffering of the patients. This tension between the individual personality, the outside world and the work of the artist is extremely important to Zeng and reflects a link with Vincent van Gogh. Van Gogh's work, too, is frequently about dilemmas like identity and personality and whether you can control them yourself or to what extent they are influenced by the outside world.

In 1993 Zeng moved to the vast metropolis of Beijing. His feeling of alienation and the fear of adjusting to this new, huge city inspired his *Mask* series: perhaps his best-known group of works. In this series, the figures portrayed wear masks and are sometimes accompanied by a strange, indefinable shadow. These motifs depict alienation and also stand for a contrast between the individual and the collective. This sort of theme often recurs in Zeng's work – another link with Van Gogh: at the end of his career he, too, was frequently occupied with subjects like isolation, individuality and struggling with society.

From 2000 onwards Zeng added a new dimension to his art and demonstrated an association with the tradition of Chinese calligraphy in his abstract, expressive landscapes. He often held a number of brushes in his hand at the same time for the Landscapes series and used them to paint a swirling pattern of lines. These controlled, writhing lines have become Zeng's personal trademark over the past few years and we see them in the work that he made for the Van Gogh Museum.

### **About the Van Gogh Museum**

The Van Gogh Museum houses and manages the world's largest collection of works and letters by Vincent van Gogh and makes his life and work and the art of his contemporaries available to as many people as possible.

[www.vangoghmuseum.nl](http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl)

### **PRESS CONTACT**

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