

Zeng Fanzhi

Untitled (Branch) No.2

ShanghART Gallery #S3

at Frieze London Sculpture Park 2016

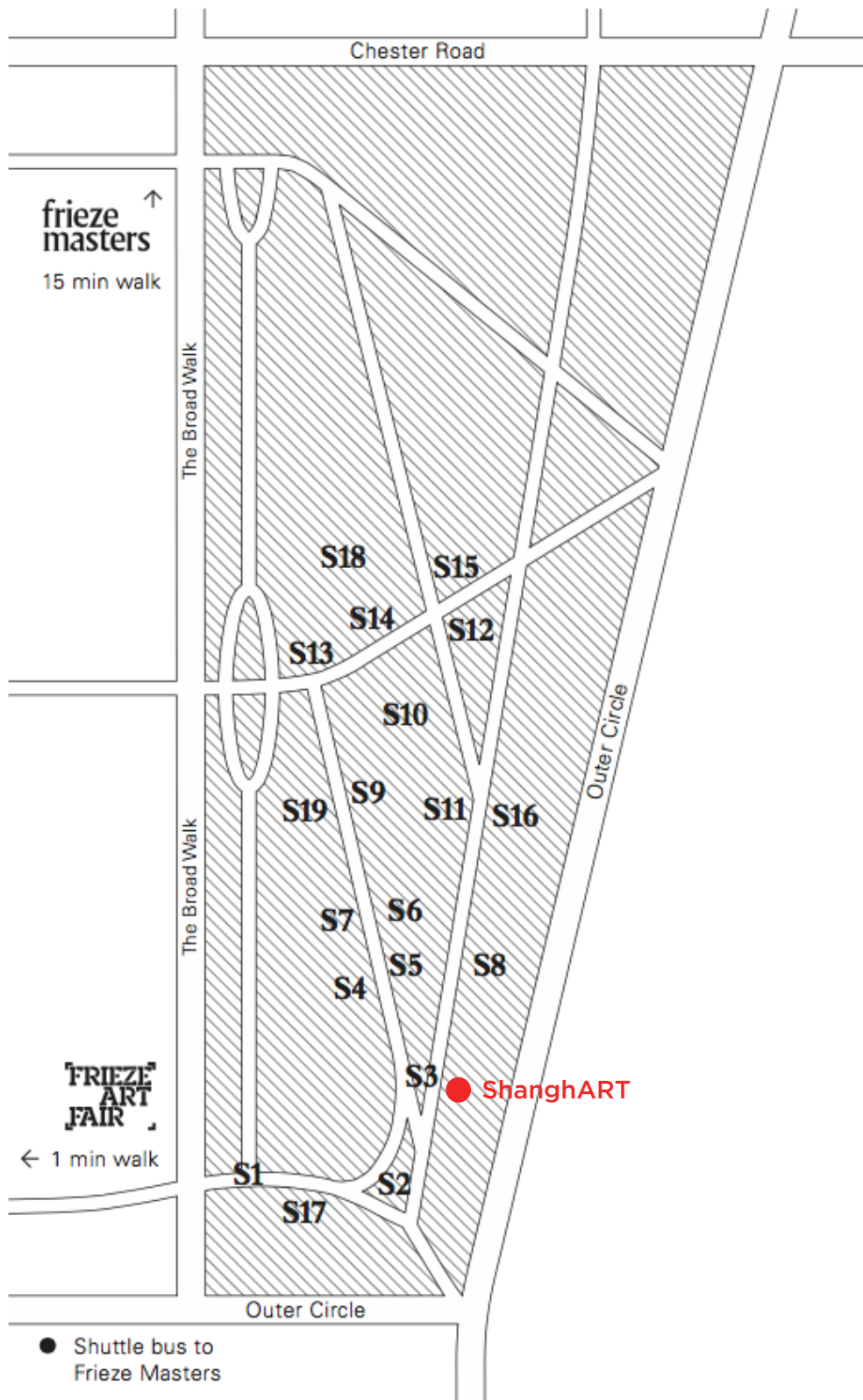


ZENG FANZHI 曾梵志
Untitled (Branch) No.2, 2016
920*615*150cm
Cast in bronze, Patinated

#S3 see map below

ShanghART
香格纳画廊

Map



In Search of Plum through Snowscape is one of those grandest sculpture among Zeng Fanzhi's oeuvre to date. It has heralded the advent of a broader aesthetic and thematic exploration, and is a revelation of the artist's greater ambition to incorporate refined elements from traditional Chinese art into contemporary art. The line, which was utilized for spatial construction in the previous "Abstract Landscapes", is singled out and evolved from its planar setting into a self-standing three-dimensional sculpture of twists and undulations. Zeng's exploration in sculpture began in 2008. In spite of the echo in theme often found between his sculptures and oil paintings, Zeng has managed to present variation on the same theme by giving full play to the medium of sculpture according to its material characteristics, texture, mass and extensity. The sculpture imitates the shape of a plum tree branch standing in cold wintry snow. It twists and turns with steep interruption and undulation as it stretches diagonally from right to left. It might remind one of the famous "tow-broken stroke" well practiced in Classical Chinese painting by Ma Yuan (ca. 1190-1224), a renowned Chinese painter in the Southern Song Dynasty. In Zeng's case, the artist observed nature and rotted branches, from empirical world has he distilled a distinctive style of brushstroke and line, exerting a breathtaking abstract appeal and visual strength to the audience's eyes.



Left: Zeng Fanzhi, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 2012

Right: Southern Song Dynasty, Ma Yuan (c. 1190-1224), *Two Herons under the Snowy Cliff*, Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

Made of bronze, *In Search of Plum through Snowscape*, is however coated with a dark, matt, black tone, simulating the mellow lustre one could find on glazed Chinese antiques. Its hexagonal cross-section but yet irregular spatial extension endows the sculpture with many light reflecting surfaces. The vision experienced by the spectator seeing the mellow, bright whiteness as reflected by some parts of the work suggests yet another association – the Chinese, after handling and admiring a plaything, could always observe the lustrous beauty as his or her tactility goes along its surface, and by extension could contemplate a consciousness of time gradually slipping away. All these philosophical thoughts are only

gained after a dedicated period of collecting antiques. The extended research and thinking resulted from this activity are slowly forming an influence in my own creation of art.

When placed under specific illumination and space, the upper part of the line receives intermittent lighting, resembling a plum tree branch covered in a layer of snow. This situates the sculpture into a unique artistic setting recurring in traditional Chinese art— in heavy winter, while all flower blossoms wither away, only a cold-resistant plum tree branch is left standing in the deserted snow, waiting to be found by poets or artists. It is the most common scene in traditional Chinese painting, and a frequently adopted backdrop against which poems and novels unfold. It symbolizes the solitude one must go through in the quest of art, as well as the ideal realm of life that the Chinese aspires— the ability for an individual to persist and thrive under extreme adversity as worse as the bitter cold. *In Search of Plum through Snowscape* is more than mere presentation of the abstract expressiveness of line, it enables the artist to reproduce the aesthetic aura and realm exclusive of Chinese art through the use of line, and to implicitly convey his thought and feeling. The line and sculpture created by Zeng have thus defined an emerging contemporary art style in which the Chinese tradition and its gist are embedded.