HUXLEY-PARLOUR

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Zhang Kechun

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Stone in the Middle of the River, 2013

Beetles+Huxley are pleased to announce the first UK solo exhibition of award-winning Chinese photographer, Zhang Kechun.

Born in 1980 in Sichuan, China, Zhang produces epic vistas that dwell on the significance of the landscape in modern Chinese national identity. Zhang's first series The Yellow River documents the effects of modernisation along the third longest river in Asia. He found inspiration for the series in Chengzhi Zhang's novel *River of the North*. The project took him on a journey along the river from the coastal flats of Shandong to the mountains of Qinghai on a fold-up bicycle, all the time carrying with him a large format Linhof camera. The Yellow River is considered the cradle of Chinese civilisation but also to be a threat, capable of breaking its banks at any time. The areas surrounding it have been devastated by flooding in recent years and Zhang's photographs capture the emotional impact of this on the local population with an eerily quiet atmosphere. The river constantly dwarfs the people who rely on it, rendering them vulnerable to its might.

"I wanted to photograph the river respectfully", Zhang has said, "it represents the root of the nation". Whilst the project was not initially intended to confront environmental issues, Zhang found that ecological matters became unavoidable and the series hums with melancholy for the lost landscape. "I started off wanting to photograph my ideal of the river, but I kept running into pollution," he has said, "I realised that I couldn't run away from it, and that I didn't need to run away from it."

Zhang's second series, Between the Mountains and the Water, continued to explore the relationship between the people and land on which they live and work. Charming scenes include a poster of Chairman Mao attached to a rubber ring floating on a river, surrounded by a group of swimmers, and a gathering of people taking tea in amongst concrete ruins on the riverside.

Gallery director, Giles Huxley-Parlour says: "Zhang Kechun is one of a growing number of exciting Chinese photographers making their names known in Europe and the United States. His sublime views of the industrial wastelands consuming rural China are invested with both political and sociological pertinence. Whilst Zhang imbues the altered landscape of China with a tragic beauty, his photographs also are often witty, showing the frequently absurd scenarios in which the inhabitants of the river's surroundings find themselves."

Zhang has been exhibited at Photoquai, Paris; the Beijing Photo Biennale and the Delhi Photo Festival, India. He won the Discovery Award at Les Rencontres d'Arles for The Yellow River in 2014.

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