

# Introduction

The Art of Zhen, Shan, Ren (Truthfulness, Compassion and Tolerance) was first conceived in 2003. It consists of oil paintings and Chinese watercolours by a diverse group of artists from around the world who share a vision. That vision was initially articulated by the project's organiser, sculptor and painter Zhang Kunlun. It grew out of the crucible of his own poignant experiences when he was incarcerated in China as a prisoner of conscience. Zhang, who practises the spiritual discipline of Falun Gong, was made to plumb the depths of suffering when he was tortured physically and mentally in the Chinese labour camp system – China's answer to the Soviet gulag. Afterwards he was able to mend his body and soul by practising the spiritual discipline for which he was persecuted and by that which he had explored and taught for decades in his life – by art. By 2004 Zhang had brought together other artists whose experiences paralleled his own or who shared his concerns. They all felt a call to give their voice – visually – to the experiences of people in China who had, merely for their beliefs, become targets of what one leading human rights lawyer has labelled as a “terrible form of genocide”.

Truthfulness, Compassion and Tolerance are universal principles. These principles are the cornerstone of human morality and the foundation of peace and freedom that transcend time and space, culture, religion, and politics.

The exhibition captures the interest of a wide range of people. It appeals those who appreciate new explorations of the fine arts, to those who are interested in the relation of art to our society, to those who are more broadly interested in the human experience and in the human capacity to overcome

adversity. Those who are concerned with the contemporary world, particularly in China, will find a special importance in the issues the painters have engaged. Much of what this art depicts is currently unfolding and indeed, is drawn from real events. That is why the exhibition is particularly timely and relevant today.

The technique of painting and the style of the paintings are mostly classical. The artists apply classical oil painting techniques once used by the old masters. Thus the artists refer to their art form as “New Renaissance”. Several other works also involve classical Chinese motifs, and are painted on silk or paper.

Finally, the exhibition is also a tribute to the timelessness of a sacred art. These works are not meant so much to entertain or delight, as to spark a reflection, inspire the soul and ennoble the spirit. This art is meant to benefit as well as to inform. The viewer is reminded of the power of the human spirit and of the capacity mankind has to confront and overcome acts of evil. Furthermore, in the tradition of China's Buddhist, Taoist and literati arts, this art seeks to extol moral righteousness and its fruits. It probes into the relation of man with the divine and suggests new horizons for understanding and appreciating this connection. There is a certain purity and depth marking these works. Most of the paintings, if not all, were born from a deep and sustained inner contemplation. Many visitors of the exhibition have mentioned a sense of peace, calmness and beauty, they felt when standing in front of these works. Others felt a new-found sense of shared humanity with those in China who, although separated by oceans, share a common desire for goodness and greatness with the viewer.