



YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2024

ZHANG FUMING

ZHANG FUMING (b. 1989) is a Singapore-based artist whose practice revolves around printmaking, with an emphasis on traditional black-and-white woodblock prints. Deeply invested in the hands-on, physical process of relief wood-carving, the work uses the medium's immediacy and precision to craft striking social commentaries through a realist lens.

Fuming's dedication to woodblock prints transcends the conventional use of paper as a support. Embracing the medium's inherent materiality, the artist leverages the textures and contours of wood to amplify the gestures and moods embedded within the carvings. The commitment to this technique is unwavering, reflecting its unique depth and impact, consistently making the art resonate on a deeper level.

The working titles of Fuming's exhibitions weave a non-linear narrative, capturing the diverse influences that shape the artist's evolving practice. These titles reflect a layered, multifaceted approach which defines the themes of the oeuvre, inviting audiences to explore the various dimensions of the creative journey.

The recipient of the AAF Young Talent Programme 2014/2015 presented a debut solo exhibition, 'The Quest; The Exquisite Rice Bowl,' at Ion Arts Gallery in 2015. Subsequent solo exhibitions include 'Poised for Success' (AC43 Gallery, 2016), 'v. atas' (Telok Ayer Arts Club, 2019), and 'Props and Poses' (AC43 Gallery, 2022). Group exhibitions include 'Spatial Narratives' (Art Porters, Singapore, 2023), 'Bon á Tirer' (AC43, 2018), and 'The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Art Week' (Xiamen, 2016).

Fuming is a passionate advocate for printmaking. The active practitioner organises print exchanges, exhibitions, and workshops while collaborating with institutions on events and outreach programmes, often providing technical support and mentoring young practitioners.

Fuming is also the owner of Drawing Etc. Art Supplies & Creative Space, an artist-run supply store and events space established in 2022. Beyond providing goods and services, the venue is a hub for creative expression and collaboration. The arts organiser has also hosted exhibitions, masterclasses, and outreach programmes, remaining deeply committed to advancing printmaking and promoting creative expression in Singapore.



Rice Bowl
145cm x 120cm
2024
Woodcut print on paper



A CONVERSATION WITH ZHANG FUMING

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences in the visual arts?

I have always been interested in doodling and drawing since I was a child, but I never fit in the classroom model when my Mum enrolled me in art class. I refused to follow the syllabus and use bright colours, for one.

I got into LASALLE College of the Arts intending to take up design. One day I chanced upon the works of German Expressionist artist Käthe Kollwitz and I learnt that what I was looking at was called a “woodcut.” Its boldness captivated me.

That discovery turned into an obsession of exploration and I decided to major in Fine Arts Printmaking instead.



Installation View of ‘Spatial Narrative’ at Art Porters Gallery, 2023.

Please share what a typical day in your life as a Printmaker is like.

On days where I am fortunate to start my day making art, it will have to start with a long journey to my studio. As my work is informed by activity and social commentary, I will read the news (hard copy) or observe my surroundings for inspiration.

Every woodcut starts with lots of drawings as a form of practical brainstorming and compositional studies. In woodcut, you can’t undo a carving, so drawing makes me familiar with the image.

When I eventually carve, I carve obsessively and print them with a wooden spoon.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your artistic journey and what motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

One cannot underestimate the challenge of trying to make a living. On top of that, art-making can be a very lonely process.

What motivates me to keep going on, other than the fact that I’m inherently stubborn, is that I truly believe in the value of the work I’m privileged to produce.

What do you want the audience to experience through your works?

My works are often large-scale and features bold, figurative imagery. One could say the work is almost confrontational.

As the attention span gets shorter, I want to create images that compel my viewer to pause and discover the elements I place within the work, and the textures from my carving processes.

I tend not to speak much about individual pieces, but rather I’d encourage audiences to discover the hidden motifs in them.

One motif I use quite a lot is the rice bowl, which signifies the livelihood of a person.

What advice would you give the younger generation who would like to pursue a career in the arts?

I am a big believer of purpose, value, and work. As long as we truly feel we have them, it’s easier to get to work.

Find your artistic language and discover something you are obsessed with sharing with the world. Stay curious, productive and keep an open mind without compromising your beliefs. Surround yourself with great friends who are also your best critics.



For the Future
145cm × 120cm
Woodcut print on paper
2015

Keep creating work for yourself, especially when it seems like no one is interested and opportunities don't come your way.

Most importantly, let's address the elephant in the room. Know that there's nothing wrong with having a job to sustain your practice.

What are your hopes and vision for Singapore's visual arts scene?

The audience plays an important role in the creative exchange of art – it's the currency visual artists deal with.

I hope to see more audiences participate in the visual arts scene, so that there is a deeper appreciation and understanding of works produced by Singaporean artists. I also envision more people develop an interest in art that resonates with their own experiences, fostering a stronger connection between artists and the community.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you?

Receiving this award is a tremendous honour for me as it validates the work I've done. With this award, it presents me a platform where I can reach out to a broader audience, and I now have a sense of renewed energy to continue my art form in the development of Singapore's printmaking and visual arts scene.

Tell us more about how you would like to further grow and contribute to the arts scene?

While great efforts have been made to raise the visibility of Singapore's visual arts scene through art fairs and events internationally, there remains a noticeable gap in local interest.

Many local audiences are still not deeply engaged with the arts, and I hope to help bridge this gap. I aim to build a vibrant community through shared learning, collaboration, and appreciation. Fostering a collective spirit among printmakers and art enthusiasts, I hope I can enhance the visibility of this traditional art form but also inspire a deeper engagement with the broader visual arts scene in Singapore.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

I am deeply grateful to National Arts Council for honouring me with the Young Artist Award. This recognition validates the work I've done and fuels me for the journey ahead.

To all the galleries, institutions, and collectors I've had the pleasure of working with, thank you for keeping faith in my work.

I am also grateful to my friends, peers, and mentors I've met along the way. Your encouragement meant the world to me, especially during times of uncertainty. Your honest feedback and critiques have added immense value to my practice.

To Jia Qi, my wife, studio mate, and friend: thank you for all your support through my ups and downs over the years. Without you, there's no doubt I wouldn't be where I am today. I look forward to meeting our new addition and starting this exciting new journey together as a family.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my father and sisters, who have endured the inconsistencies of my life as I pursued my artistic vision. To my late mother, who never saw the person I became, I dedicate this award to her memory.