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## “A Seal of Unity: A Double Happiness” Phil Akashi Solo Exhibition

For his first solo exhibition entitled A Seal of Unity: A Double Happiness at Art+ Shanghai-Singapore Art Space, Phil Akashi presents his latest series of works Rings on Fire.

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## Press Release

Phil Akashi, who has garnered a notable artistic presence in Asia, will be presenting his solo exhibition at Art+ Shanghai, Singapore Art Space. Shortlisted for the Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize in 2015, Akashi seeks to engage with the public by bringing issues that affect contemporary society through the visual signifiers of his work. As a self-professed nomad “fascinated by the cultural complexity and aesthetics of Asia,” Akashi identifies himself through his Japanese pseudonym as well as his Chinese name Tao Cheng (涛程).

Through the repetitive gestures found in his artistic creations, which he meticulously inscribes or even jabs with 27,000 punches as he did for the Palo Alto Public Art Commission “Tribute to Mandela” (2013), Phil Akashi strives to rephrase the Asian literati tradition of text and image. Oftentimes, his text becomes the image and his images are comprised of characters, thus eliminating the categorical distinctions so that they are fluidly unified as a single entity.

This notion of merger is eloquently expressed in his current solo exhibition in the series Rings on Fire. He activates the Chinese character of Double Happiness (囍) as the symbol and metaphor of conjugal bliss to succinctly question the double meanings inherent in the realities associated with matrimony. While marriage, across various cultures and countries, is perceived as a bond of lasting love between two persons, such alliances have also been sustained throughout history as a form of social institution and arrangements of political and economic convenience. Through the accumulation and inundation of Double Happiness characters that are relentlessly imprinted upon the surface of the xuan paper, the visual emblem of the individual character becomes not only lost but appears distorted. Seemingly simple yet complexly poignant, Phil Akashi asks the viewer to reflect on the multiple readings and meanings of marriage and its association to happiness.

Through a process of mapping the Double Happiness as names of cities, Phil Akashi takes the viewer on a journey through the history of marriage... The Rings of Fires are a trilogy. The first chapter of his trilogy evokes marriage as tradition, then as a challenge and finally as a Wisdom of happiness.

Tradition refers to the social and cultural values of marriage. The artworks of this part are created according to the same and repeated gestures of a routine rhythm: the artist stamping the seal. Something alienating? Lost in an accumulation of happiness, the eyes look for a way to follow. Monochromatic in grey, black, white, blue or red, these artworks are composed with quiet tones which reinforce the feeling of loss inside a multitude.

The second chapter, Challenge, explores the contemporary revolution in marriage and its consequences. The artist photographed the works of the first chapter and then digitally transformed them and printed them on Hahnemuhle Fine Art paper. He then painted the prints with acrylic to create intriguing compositions, and adds a new gesture, ample and fluid. Explosions of colors - red, yellow, white. The new shades are bright and warm. Somehow, it recalls the dripping technique of Jackson Pollock. Combining tradition and challenge by then adding gold leaves and thin layers of acrylic using a bamboo stick, the artist closes and opens at the same time this trilogy in a spiritual way: The Wisdom of Happiness.

The multitude of happiness that the artist offers, besides embodying the notion of marriage, come to redraw a city and its identity. Like aerial views, the works provide a certain sense of vertigo.

Drawn according to the artist's own system, these cities sometimes seem labyrinthic, while others look like constellations.

Some of them seem joyful while others seem to fade in places, like a crumbling memory.

Phil Akashi's Rings on Fire work around harmony and breaks, to find a kind of wisdom, which would unite epochs pictorially and symbolically. He invented a cross-cultural language, melting the Eastern and Western cultures, elaborating an aesthetic vocabulary mixing past and present, in order to express his contemporary vision of an ancestral institution. The choice of his pseudonym –mixing European, Japanese and Chinese cultures- is intrinsically linked to this desire to combine cultures among themselves in order to shape a new identity.

Through his series, mixing ancestral media and contemporary vision, Phil Akashi highlights the multiple meanings of that alliance and explores its consequences: a projection of a future and its interpretation.

About the artist

Born 1978 in Brussels, Phil Akashi is a multi-award winning artist based between Brussels, Hong Kong and Singapore. Fascinated by the cultural complexity and aesthetics of Asia, Phil Akashi carved out a unique artistic identity. He chose the pseudonym "Akashi" meaning "bright stone" to express his passion for the multifaceted Japanese culture. While living in China, he also enriched his identity with a Chinese name Tao Cheng "涛程" meaning "big wave journey" where the two characters are intentionally reversed in order to challenge the structure of the Chinese language. Along with his Chinese name, Japanese pseudonym and Western background, Phil Akashi plays with paradoxes and shares how he views the world as a trans-cultural element. Phil Akashi has participated in solo and group exhibitions in the United States, Europe and Asia. His artworks are in the royal and in private collections worldwide and he has been featured in many international publications such as the MoMA, Guggenheim, Artribune, and Fine Art International.

<https://www.artsy.net/show/art-plus-shanghai-gallery-a-seal-of-unity-a-double-happiness-phil-akashi-solo-exhibition>