

UN VILLAGES SANS FRONTIÈRES

20.09.2025 – 07.01.2026

Opening Saturday 20 September 2025 | 17.00 – 22.00

In September **GALLERIA CONTINUA** celebrates the thirty-fifth anniversary of the opening of its first exhibition space in the medieval town of San Gimignano. A moment that marks over three decades of commitment to dialogue and cultural exchange through contemporary art. Accompanying this celebration, together with the solo shows of Alicja Kwade, Yoan Capote and Michelangelo Pistoletto, is an exhibition dedicated to Chen Zhen, entitled *Un Village sans frontières*. The three founders of Galleria Continua met Chen Zhen for the first time in 1999, on the occasion of his participation in the Venice Biennale; with the artist they established a relationship destined to mark in an indelible way the path and the history of the gallery. It was thanks to him that the founding partners, in 2005, decided to open the first branch abroad (in Beijing) thus beginning a journey, aimed at embracing the world, which continues to this day.

Twenty-five years after his premature passing, Chen Zhen remains a protagonist of our time, an artist who made his work an example of pluralism in art. This exhibition aims to be a homage to his work which, since the end of the 1980s, has substantially contributed to the overcoming of the boundaries between Eastern and Western thought, influencing an entire generation of artists.

Initially interested in painting, in 1989 Chen Zhen began to work on installations: he reassembled everyday objects creating works in which Chinese tradition is mixed with consumer society in a synthesis that today is prophetic. He defined "trans-experience" as the soul of his work: a union of "residence" (adapting to

places), "resonance" (dialogue with the other) and "resistance" (to new cultural influences). In a conversation with his alter ego, Zhu Xian, he explains that trans-experience is not a conceptual theory but an experiential method that connects what precedes to what follows, adapting to change, accumulating experiences and activating at any moment. This concept is linked to central themes: immersion of the self in life, identification with others, exchanges and conflicts between people, society, nature, science and technology. What interests him most are these "networks of relationships."

Chen Zhen's entire production is marked by his personal story, linked to an autoimmune disease diagnosed at only twenty-five years old. Deeply affected by the news, he spent three months in Tibet living together with monks a simple lifestyle detached from the material dimension. This experience, which influenced his perception of the value of time, placed at the center of his research the investigation of the different approaches of Eastern and Western medicine. The renewed sensitivity of Chen Zhen toward the human body and the will to make his work a therapeutic and purifying act emerges in several works centered on physical elements, including the internal organs.

Zen Garden – one of the works that Chen Zhen created in 2000 for his first solo exhibition in the spaces of Galleria Continua in San Gimignano – is part of a cycle of works centered on the representation of the human body and its internal organs as a space of transformation. In this work the artist, through the internal landscape of the body, overlaps two elements, the connective nature

of Qi and the incomplete nature of Western medicine, creating a ground of dialogue between body and spirit. A polygonal wooden fence houses inside it plants, sand, gravel, and large white and luminescent cocoons with sinuous lines traversed by menacing surgical instruments, scalpels, scissors and retractors. Zen Garden is a complex work that invites reflection on the body, on transformation, on the relationship between individual and environment, and on the search for inner balance through the fusion of different elements. Through the small wooden door we can glimpse the idea of a micro-macro Zen temple, which Chen Zhen dreamed of building on the Tuscan hills.

Fu Dao / Fu Dao is a work created in 1995, inspired by an episode experienced in Shanghai. Entering a restaurant, Chen Zhen noticed a Chinese character meaning "good fortune" hung upside down. The owner explained to him that the word "upside down" is pronounced the same as "arrival," thus transforming the image into a message that announces the arrival of fortune. In Chinese, the pronunciation "Fu" can mean both "happiness" and "Buddha," while "Dao" means both "upside down" and "arrival." The expression *Fu Dao / Fu Dao* can therefore be interpreted simultaneously as "Buddha upside down" and "arrival of happiness." Chen Zhen then asked himself: does the upside-down Buddha perhaps symbolize the arrival of happiness? This simple gesture thus becomes the starting point for a broader reflection: the tension between tradition and modernity, between spirituality and materialism, between East and West. In this work, the inverted character "happiness" is not only a symbol of luck, but reflects the complexity of the relationships between beliefs, wealth and cultural identity in the contemporary world.

Chen Zhen has always had great trust in man and in future generations. In the work that gives the exhibition its title, *Un Village sans frontières* (2000), the artist uses candles to build a "universal village" composed of the symbolic number of 99 children's chairs collected from all over the world. "The fact of using candles (in China the candle is a symbol of a man's life) has a special meaning: to build a village without borders, that it is up to us to begin - declared Chen Zhen - but our hope is always directed to future generations."

About the artist:

Chen Zhen (Shanghai 1955 - Paris 2000), trained during the Cultural Revolution, lived between Shanghai, New York and Paris, where he settled from 1986. After a beginning in painting, he dedicated himself to installations, assembling common objects such as beds, chairs and tables, taken from oblivion and transformed into new

symbolic forms. His research, rooted in Taoism and Buddhism and open to Western scientific thought, addresses political and social themes with a language capable of uniting aesthetics and spirituality.

Among his solo exhibitions we recall: Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan (2020); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2015); Musée Guimet, Paris (2010); MART, Rovereto (2008); Kunsthalle Wien (2007); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2003-04); MoMA PS1, New York (2003); Serpentine Gallery, London (2001). His works have been included in group exhibitions at institutions such as the Guggenheim in New York (2017-18), the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2000-01) and in several Biennials, including Venice (1999, 2007, 2009), Lyon (1997) and Gwangju (1997).

About the gallery:

Founded in 1990 in San Gimignano, Italy, GALLERIA CONTINUA has expanded its locations to Beijing, Les Moulins, Havana, São Paulo, Rome, and Paris. GALLERIA CONTINUA represents the desire for continuity between eras and the ambition to write a contemporary story. In thirty-five years of activity, thanks to its commitment to revitalizing and breathing new life into forgotten and unconventional spaces, the gallery has developed a strong and unique identity. Located within a former 1950s cinema-theater, GALLERIA CONTINUA San Gimignano has hosted numerous exhibitions over the years, offering artists the opportunity to create memorable site-specific installations and tailor-made exhibition projects for these distinctive and character rich spaces.

GALLERIA CONTINUA / San Gimignano

Via del Castello 11, 53037 San Gimignano (SI)
+39 0577 943134 | sangimignano@galleriacontinua.com
www.galleriacontinua.com
From Monday to Sunday: 10 AM-1 PM | 2 PM-7 PM;
Starting from 03.11, from Monday to Sunday:
10 AM-1 PM | 2 PM-6 PM

For further information about the exhibition and photographic material:
Silvia Pichini, Communications Manager
press@galleriacontinua.com
cell. +39 347 45 36 136