

# CHANG LEI

TAINTED BEAUTY



HUA  
GALLERY  
contemporary chinese art

**Chang Lei Exhibition:**

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**H U A**  
G A L L E R Y

contemporary chinese art

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2014 Hua gallery

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## THE WORD HUA MEANS TO PAINT, OR A PAINTING, IN CHINESE.

Hua Gallery specialises in the exciting and sometimes controversial space that is Chinese contemporary art.

As Chinese contemporary art continues to fascinate and intrigue collectors around the world, demand and appetite for fresh and innovative art from this fast-changing region continues to escalate.

Hua Gallery represents and exhibits cutting edge, stimulating works by established contemporary Chinese artists, as well as emerging contemporary Chinese artists who are not as yet internationally recognised.

Hua Gallery adopts a distinctive business strategy by acquiring works from artists before selling them, as well as by exhibiting and selling works by artists on a commissions basis - an approach which demonstrates a passion, dedication and commitment to the artists and also, importantly, provides confidence to art collectors who trust the gallery to help expand their collections.

Hua Gallery's founder and director, Shanyan Koder, has developed strong relationships with her artists, and hopes to build a Chinese contemporary art collection in her gallery that is different and inspirational. Every artist represented by Hua Gallery is chosen for their artistic individuality, the creative symbolism in their work, and the emotional energy their work creates.

Hua Gallery is situated on the Albion Riverside, a prestigious residential block on the Battersea riverside, designed by world-renowned architects Foster and Partners. With close to 2,000 square feet of gallery space, Hua Gallery is London's only Chinese contemporary art gallery with a permanent exhibition space of this size and scale.

# CHANG LEI

## TAINTED BEAUTY

Chang Lei's series of oil paintings, *The Sanguinary Shadows of Chinese Civilization*, depicts traditional Chinese cultural figures, objects and sites, infused with splashes of bright and dark colours. Among the images painted by Chang are the Great Wall, ancient Chinese ceramics, the Terracotta Warriors, Chinese opera figures and deities, and famous historical characters.<sup>1</sup>

The figures emerge from a splatter of darkness and float in an ethereal way within the canvas. The monochrome brushstrokes recall traditional Chinese ink painting although they also reveal a modern abstract touch. While the splashes of black paint are misty and convey a dramatic sense of uncertainty, the figures appearing from obscurity are sophisticated and meticulously depicted. The images are then subtly bespattered with red, alluding to the more sinister undertones of the artist's intent.

Through stark contrasts between sombre background tones and glowing highlights of the subjects Chang Lei's paintings delve into the history of China. The artist attempts to analyse its cultural richness from a critical and thorough perspective. His paintings evoke both positive and negative sides that have marked the course of the centuries, thus aiming to achieve 'the truth'. In this sense Chang is searching for the beauty of truth. His female figures are not only charming icons of the Beijing opera but also allegorise on Keats' romantic ideal of "beauty is truth and truth is beauty."<sup>2</sup>

In light of this, although Chang's paintings are gracefully rendered they also reveal dark sides of mankind, suggesting what is hidden behind the glorious surface of culture. And yet, these cultural creations and figures remain before our eyes. Charming and breathtaking they disclose a tainted beauty, revealing Chang's ability to accomplish the artist's mission once appointed by Dante: to explore both hell and paradise at the same time.<sup>3</sup>

Dagmar Carnevale Lavezzoli

1 More information about the characters is displayed in the *Historical and Cultural References* (next page).

2 John Keats (1795 – 1821) in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, first published in 1819

3 Cheng François, *Cinq Méditations sur la Beauté*, Editions Albin Michel, Paris, 2006

# Historical and Cultural References

FROM CHANG LEI'S SANGUINARY  
SHADOWS OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION:

Many of the figures portrayed in Chang Lei's latest series of oil paintings are taken from stories popular in Beijing -or Peking- Opera. Although some are historical figures, others are taken from fiction, or are figures serving as elements that enhance the richness of the theatrical performance. While conscious of the art form's beauty and significance Chang does not use these figures as a means to venerate it, but rather to point out how these revered figures from China's past could be perceived as a ruse that the country has used on itself. He tactfully illustrates the fact that the country has jumped from one totalitarian regime to the next throughout its rich history and how these regimes have points in common with the one in power today that so many people cry out against.

Through the country's appreciation of this traditional art form, Chang Lei illuminates a problem that runs through the veins of history itself.

**Xiang Yu 项羽 (232 —202 BCE)** Historical military general from the late Qin dynasty (221 BCE—206 BCE) and most famous for his acts during the Battle of Gaixia (202 BCE). He and his men fought until the very end and only he himself was left alive. As being so wounded, Xiang Yu then committed suicide by slitting his throat with his sword. He is a principal character in the famous opera Ba Wang Bie Ji (Farwell My Concubine). He is probably the most well known tragic hero in Chinese history.

**Yuji 虞姬 (? —202 BCE, aka Consort Yu)** The young wife of Xiang Yu and principal character from opera Ba Wang Bie Ji (Farwell My Concubine). She is said to have killed herself out of guilt, believing herself to be the reason for her husband's failed military campaign. She is seen as weak and as having led her husband to his ruin. She is, arguably, one of many examples from Chinese cultural history defaming and degrading women as less-worthy members of society.

**Guan Yunchang 关云长 (? —220 CE, aka Guan Gong, meaning Lord Guan)** A general serving under the warlord Liu Bei (161—223 CE) in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25—220 CE) and a principle figure from the historical novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms and related operas. Guan is historically revered as an epitome of loyalty and righteousness. Guan was captured by Cao Cao's forces in 200 CE, and although Cao treated Guan respectfully and asked the emperor to appoint him as a Lieutenant-General, Guan still left Cao Cao and went back to his original lord, Liu Bei.

**Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220 CE)** A warlord and one of the central figures of the Three Kingdoms period. He is often portrayed as a cruel and merciless tyrant, however Cao Cao has also been praised as a brilliant ruler and military genius that treated his subordinates well and valued and respected their individual talents. He appreciated Guan Yunchang's loyalty and military talent, and so did not force Guan to serve him when he was captured. Instead, he released Guan when he insisted upon returning to his former lord and showed respect to him for being loyal.

**The Monkey King (Sun Wukong 孙悟空)** A main character in the 16th century Chinese novel Journey to the West and key figure of opera Nao Tian Gong (Havoc in Heaven). He is known for being naughty and having incredible supernatural powers. In the novel, he is a monkey born from a stone. In one incarnation of the story, he imprisoned under a mountain by the Buddha as punishment for rebelling against heaven. Later in the tale, he accompanies Xuanzang 玄奘 (an historical monk who is here used fictionally), on a journey to retrieve Buddhist sutras from India. Wukong also can be found in many other later stories and adoptions throughout Asia.

**The Clown (Chou 丑, literally meaning 'ugly')** A dramatic figure, used for plot enhancement. Chou characters are generally presented as affable and mirthful, if not somewhat foolish. Chou characters wear special face paint with a small patch of white chalk around the nose, which can represent either a mean and secretive nature or a quick wit. In general, the Chou roles do not focus on singing, but the dialogue is clear and fluent. Female Chou figures are called Caidan.

**Dan 旦** Representative of other female characters needed for plot development. There are four types of Dan characters: Zhengdan 正旦 (or Qingyi 青衣), refers to young or middle-aged women with gentle and refined dispositions; Huadan 花旦, is a role for a spirited maiden, a young woman with a straightforward personality, or a woman of dubious character; Wudan 武旦, refers to female characters skilled in the martial arts; and Laodan 老旦, usually representing aged women.

**Sheng 生** - Another representative type of character, used to contribute to a story. The four types of Sheng include Lao Sheng 老生 (or characters with whiskers), referring to middle-aged or older male roles; Hong Sheng 红生, Lao Sheng with red faces; Xiao Sheng 小生, young and beardless men, with a handsome appearance; and Wu Sheng 武生, characters skilled in the martial arts.

YUJI  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



XIANG YU  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS





CLOWN  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



CAO CAO  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



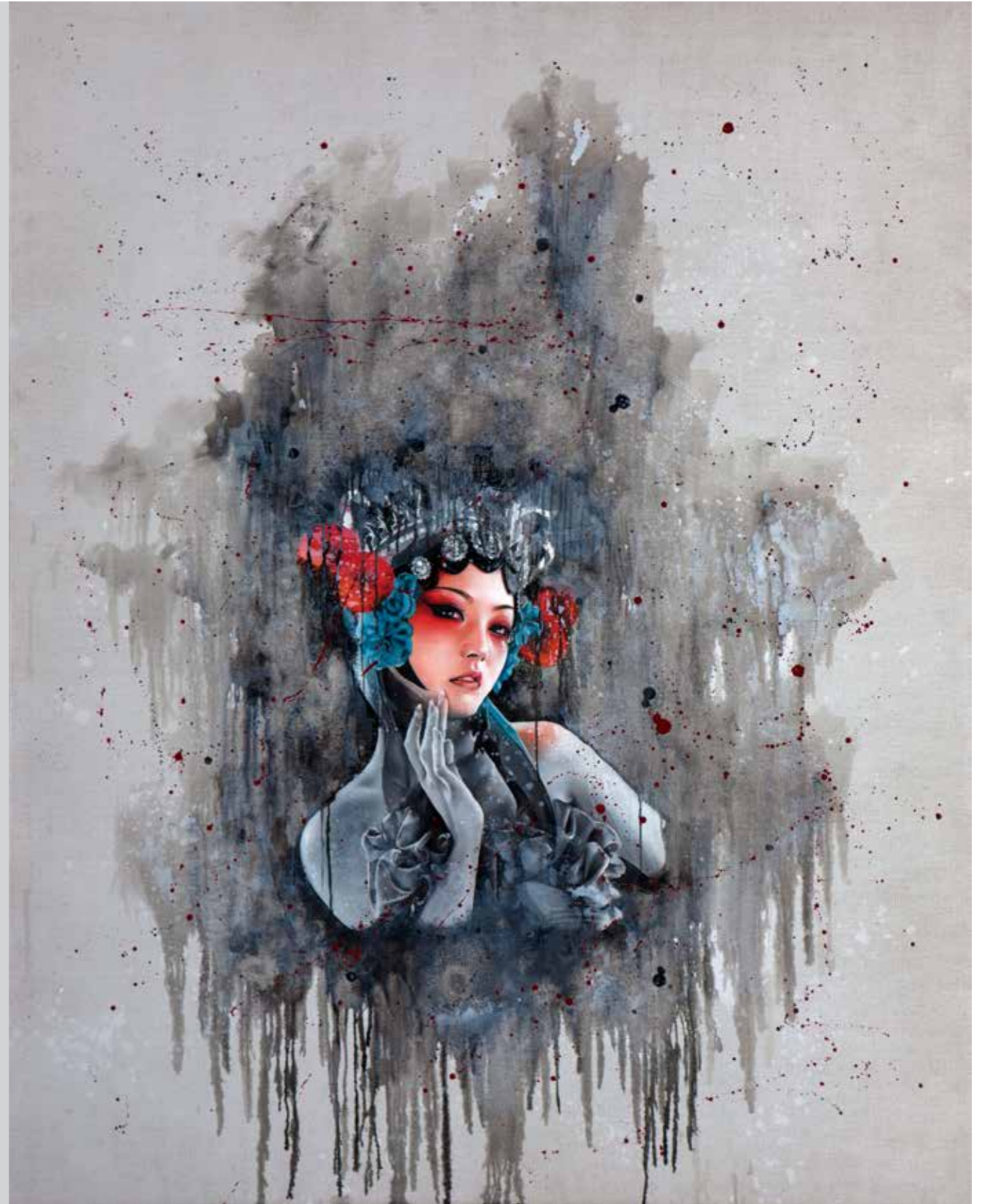
MONKEY KING  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



GUAN YUNCHANG  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.3  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



TERRACOTTA WARRIORS  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.6  
2013  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.7  
2013  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS





BLACK CLOTH NO.10  
2013  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.14  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.18  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



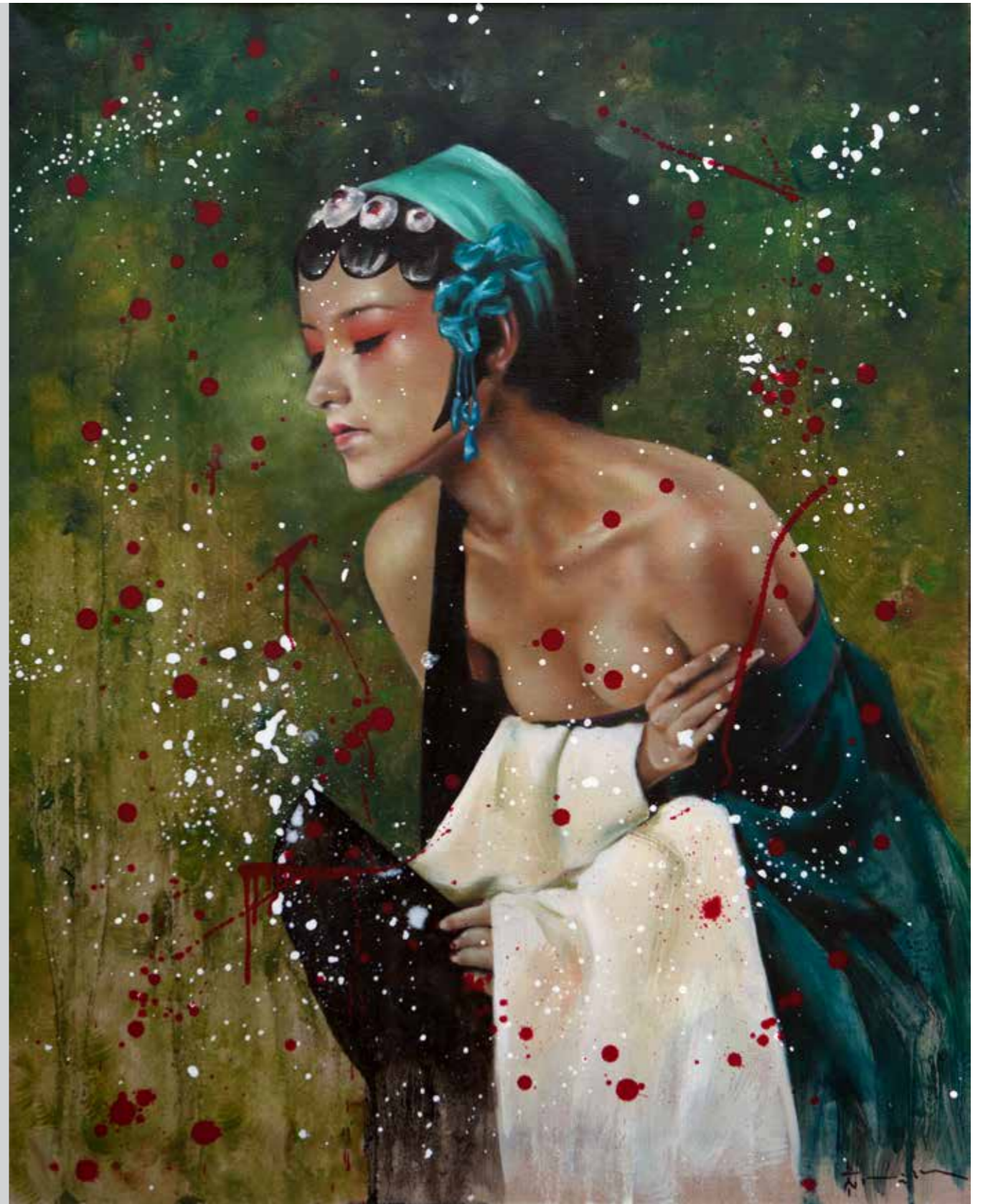
BLACK CLOTH NO.15  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



MONKEY KING NO.2  
2014  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.14  
2013  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.17  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



LAO SHENG  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS





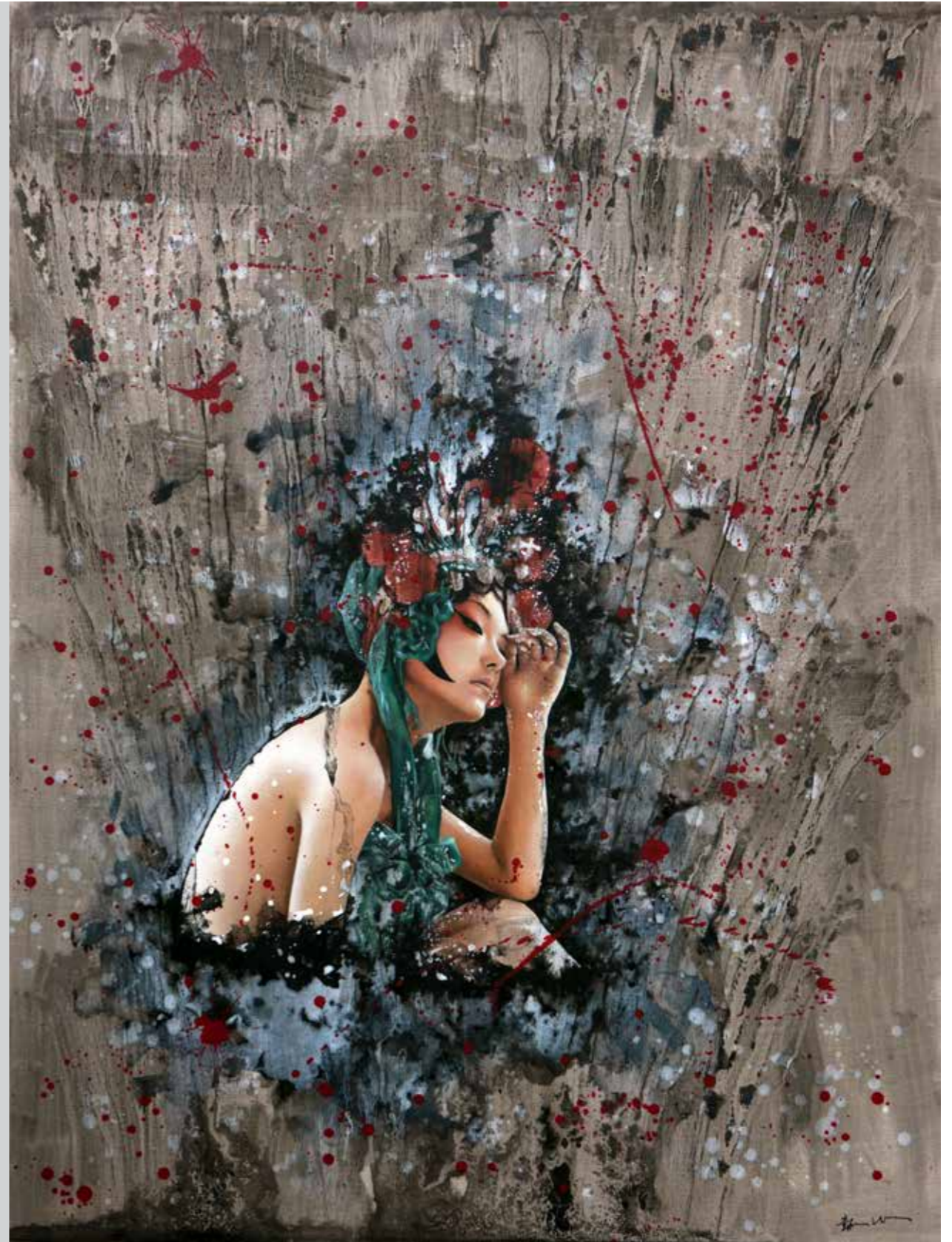
BLACK CLOTH NO.9  
2013  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



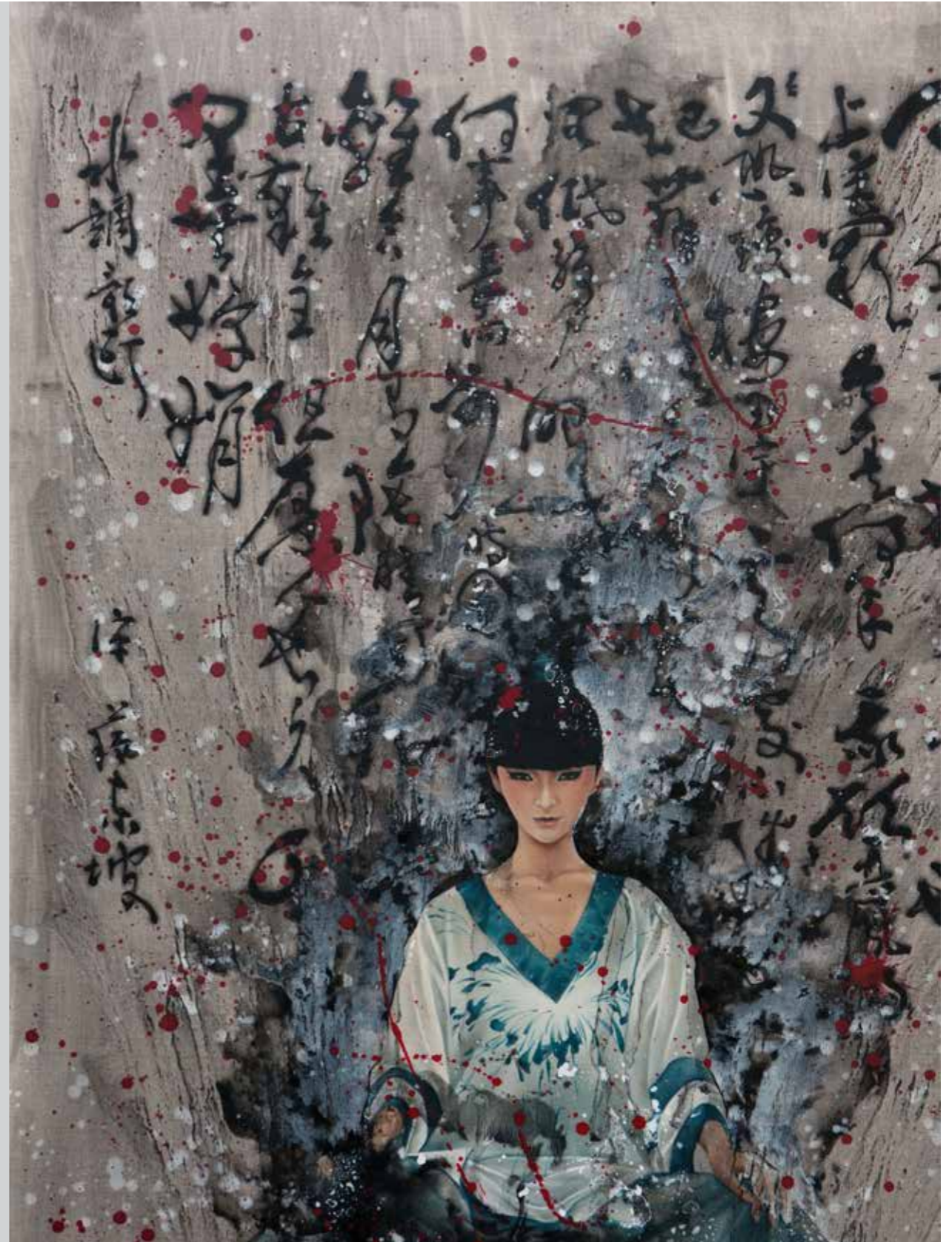
BLACK CLOTH NO.12  
2013  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.20  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.19  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.4  
2013  
100 CM DIAMETER  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.5  
2013  
100 CM DIAMETER  
OIL ON CANVAS



BLACK CLOTH NO.16  
2014  
160 X 120 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS

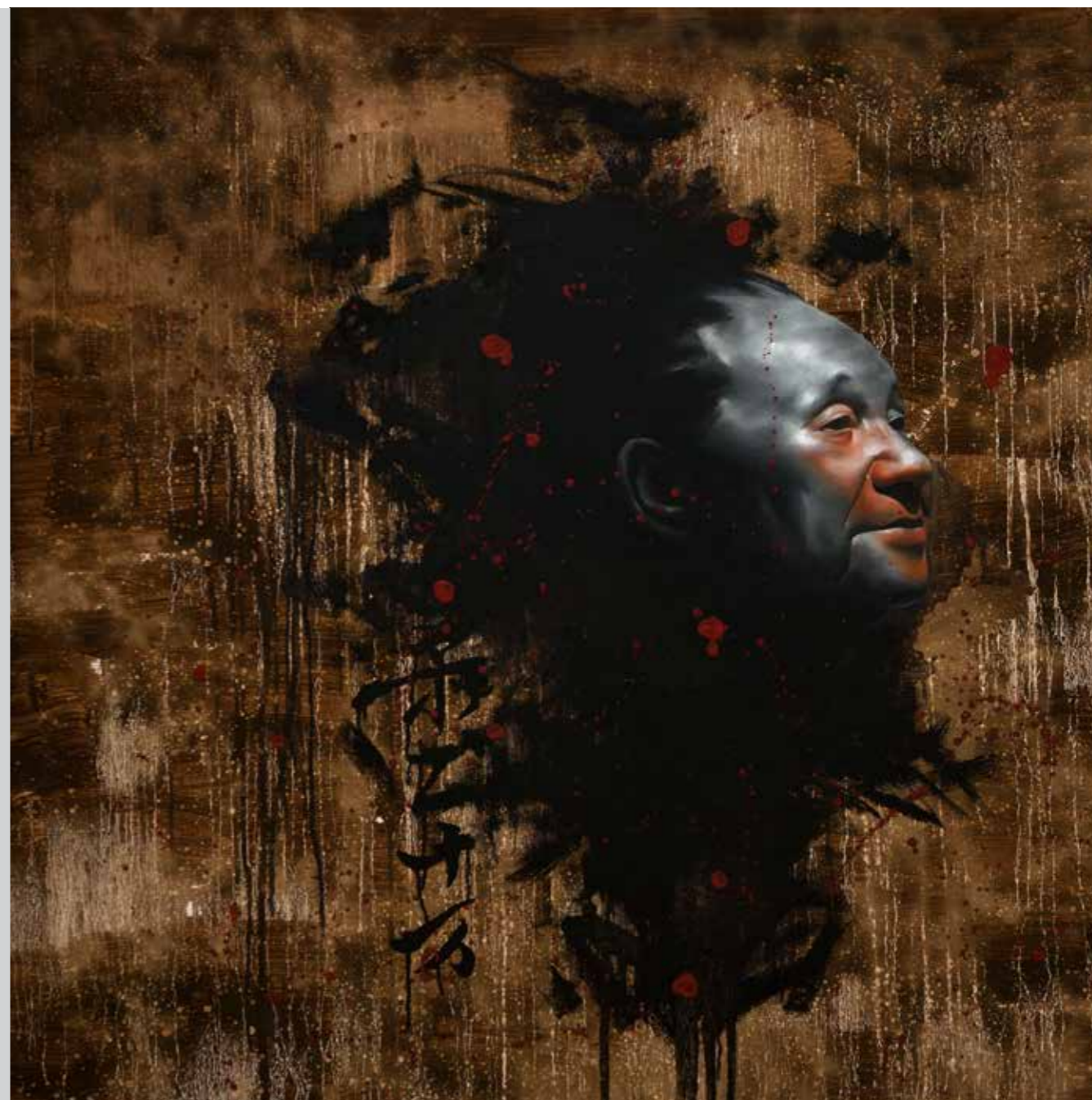


BLACK CLOTH NO.11  
2013  
100 X 80 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS





TENG HSIAO-PING  
2012  
150 X 150 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



ELEPHANT AND ME  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



BROKEN CHINA  
2012  
175 X 140 CM  
OIL ON CANVAS



# BIOGRAPHY

# CHANG LEI



*Chang Lei, photography: Bai Ding*

**Chang Lei was born in 1976 in Jinan, Shandong Province, PRC. He lives and works in Beijing.**

He was previously a member of a rock band and has also created performance art. Currently his focus is on both painting and photography.

## EDUCATION

**1992**  
Xu Beihong Fine Arts High School, Jinan, Shandong Province

**1997**  
Environmental Art Design, Jianshe University, Beijing

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

**2014**  
Tainted Beauty, Hua Gallery, London, UK

Art Paris Art Fair, Grand Palais, Paris, France

ART14 London, Kensington Olympia, London, UK

**2013**  
Like Thunder Out of China, Arsenal Montréal and Arsenal Toronto, Canada

**2012**  
[UN]Forbidden City, Macro Museum, Rome, Italy

Season Opening – China the new Beijing. Galerie Daniel Tanner, Zurich, Switzerland

Hole-Fear. Contemporary Artistic Exhibition, 798 Yizhuo Space, Beijing, China

**2011**  
Vous avez dit Révolution?, Commissaire de l'exposition, Paris, France

**2008**  
Chinese Contemporary Art Document Exhibition Literature, Wall Art Museum, Beijing, China

**2007**  
Breathe - A grand contemporary artistic exhibition, Shandong Museum, Jinan, China

**2005**  
An exhibition of Chinese Art every third year, Nanjing Museum, Nanjing, China

An exhibition of Metaphoric Objects and Mirror Image art, 798 Art Space Beijing, China

**2004**  
The second edition of personal album The Setting Sun

Rock music concert Who is Singing in the Spring, What Bar, Beijing, China.

Poem novel, Mr. The Setting Sun

**2003**  
An exhibition of 1+1 performance art, Jinan Shandong “1+1”Club

The Setting Sun a solo album was released

**2002**  
Performance art show Sacrifice again. JiangShuiquan Park, Jinan, China

Forest, Water, Air- Modern art exhibition, JiangShuiquan Park, Jinan, China

Music performance Havana, Havana bar, Jinan, China

**2001**  
May with Passion - a night of rock and roll, DaShun Square, Jinan, China

Contemporaneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

Inside Out: New Chinese Art, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, NY

# CHANG LEI TAINTED BEAUTY

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