

CULTURE

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Issue **136**

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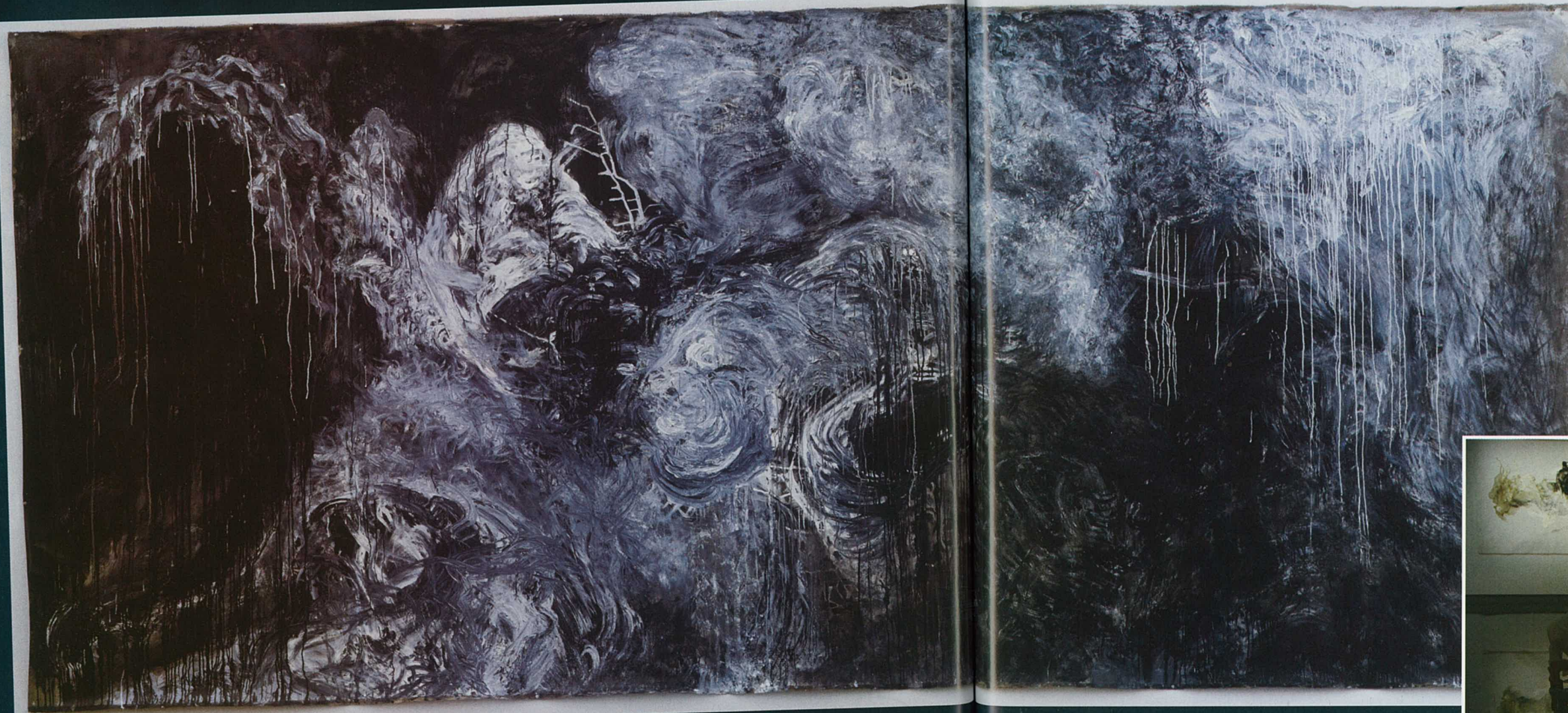


Shen Wei Dance Strokes

An award-winning painter and choreographer opens his first major solo exhibition in Hong Kong

Text Maggie Ng / Photos courtesy of Asia Society Hong Kong Centre

Wei is internationally known for his East-meets-West aesthetic in both his visual art and dance.



Untitled No. 3, 2013
Oil and acrylic on linen canvas
Collection of the artist

April-May 2016

Shen Wei is an interdisciplinary artist with a rich and colourful background in dance and visual art. His flowing, expressive and expansive works, which combine choreography with Chinese ink painting, have graced the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, as well as international performances that have won him accolades from around the globe. As the founder and artistic director of his own international dance company, he is also responsible for creating his own individually defined form of movement-based performance, known as Natural Body Development.



Shen Wei - Dance Strokes



Untitled No. 9, 2014
Oil and acrylic on linen
Collection of the artist



Untitled No. 31, 2015
Oil and acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist



Shen Wei was born in Hunan, China in 1968, during the Cultural Revolution. He grew up in an artistic household; his father is a Chinese opera director, performer and calligrapher, and his mother is a theatre producer. Both of Wei's brothers are also creative; one is a designer and calligrapher, while the other is a painter. As a child, Wei and his siblings would watch his father's productions and spend time with the actors and musicians. This musical and theatrical background set the stage for his artistic career.

At the age of nine, Wei began his formal education in Chinese Opera at Hunan Arts School. For over six years, he studied the art of voice, dance and theatre performance. In his spare time, he also began to study traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. After his training, he became a member of the Hunan State Xian Opera Company as a lead actor and performer.

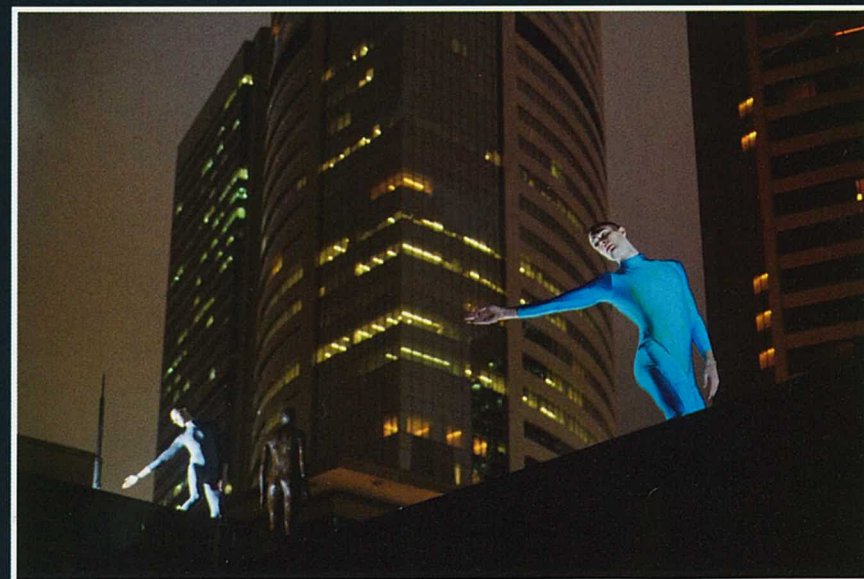
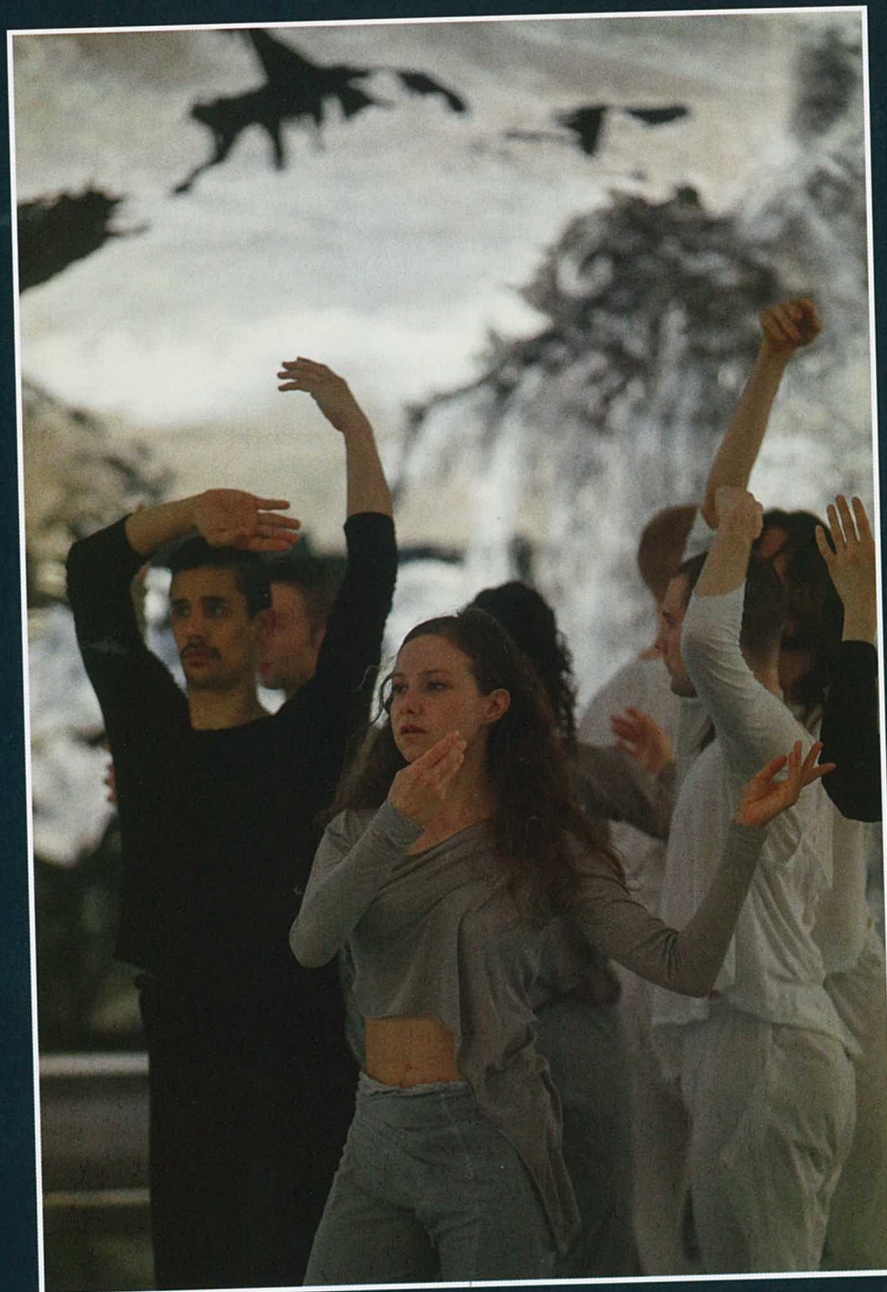
Shen Wei - Dance Strokes

During the 1980s, following China's re-establishment of ties to the West, Wei studied classical oil painting of master painters such as Michelangelo, da Vinci, and Francis Bacon. In 1989, he discovered modern dance, and attended China's first modern dance academy in Guangzhou.

Wei is internationally known for his East-meets-West aesthetic in both his visual art and dance. His work is varied, taking aspects from his family's background of Chinese theatre and his own education in Western visual art disciplines. It was in 1994 that he started his one-man, experimental multimedia show "Small Room", which toured Guangzhou, Beijing and Hong Kong, earning him public recognition. That same year, he was awarded First Prize in Choreography and Performance at the National Modern Dance Competition in China.

Wei received a three-month scholarship from the Nikolais/Louis Dance Lab in New York City in 1995, which took his artistic knowledge further into modern artists such as Mark Rothko. At the

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same time, he explored release techniques in dance, with which he would begin to use as the basis for his own movement technique. The aesthetic of this movement would become known for its enigmatic and dream-like style.

In his recent exhibition, "Shen Wei: Dance Strokes", shown at the Asia Society Hong Kong Centre, this enigmatic and dream-like aesthetic is explored in surreal, abstract images, captured via large-scale paintings in oil and acrylic media. One of these paintings is a new piece, titled simply *Untitled No. 31*. This painting resembles a juxtaposition between nature and the modern city. Instead of using a brush to apply the paint, it is instead painted with the artist's body. Though the main focus was on creating a balance between form, space and texture, Wei concedes that the resemblance to a natural landscape may be influenced by his own love of nature. Another interesting piece, *Untitled No. 8*, took over two months to complete. This particular painting has a sense of depth that utilises the artist's formal training of perspective in western painting, but also has a dramatic and dynamic feeling reminiscent of waterfalls, cliffs and rocks. *Untitled No. 10-3* has a less dynamic feeling, but conveys a sense of stillness as well as depth, resembling an abstracted landscape with trees and water in black, white and grey.

These works represent part of a first for the Asia Society Hong Kong Centre, as it is the first time it has played host to the work of this unique and spirited artist. 