

Song Dong: ROUND

July 14 – August 18, 2023
540 West 25th Street
New York



Song Dong, *Zou Ma Deng (Spinning Lanterns)* (detail), 2022-2023 © Song Dong, courtesy Pace Gallery

New York – Pace is pleased to present Song Dong's latest series of works at its 540 West 25th Street gallery in New York from July 14 to August 18, marking the artist's first overseas solo exhibition since the COVID-19 pandemic. Titled *Song Dong: ROUND*, this exhibition will focus on Song's practice over the past three years, placing ancient Chinese philosophy in a contemporary context and offering new understandings of ideas that figure prominently in his work.

Song, who is one of the most important figures of the Conceptual art movement in China, blurs the boundaries between art and life in his interdisciplinary practice spanning painting, sculpture, performance, installation, and film. Song specializes in borrowing familiar, everyday objects and images as part of his artistic explorations. His open and highly speculative approach to art making lends his work a distinctive lightness that has earned him international attention and acclaim.

In his upcoming exhibition with Pace in New York, the artist uses the shape of the circle, which has rich meaning in traditional Chinese philosophy, as a central visual element. The new series *Da Cheng Ruo Que*, which translates to "the highest perfection is like imperfection," takes its title from ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu's seminal text *Tao Te Ching*. In these works, small-scale window frames are assembled into sculptures that forge nearly perfect circles, while still retaining zigzag notches at their edges.

Song began the *Da Cheng Ruo Que* series in 2020, when, stranded in his studio due to the pandemic lockdown, he decided to make a gift for his daughter. The artist gathered the materials left over from the production of his previous series *Usefulness of Uselessness*, which was made from discarded construction waste produced during China's urban renewal process. The artist's decision to reuse the leftovers of these discarded materials echoes the installation he created with his mother, *Waste Not*, which is his most internationally recognized work—it was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2009 and has since traveled to institutions in several other countries, including the Barbican Centre in London.

Using his mother's values and philosophies surrounding the preservation of seemingly useless objects to create a special work for his daughter, the artist continued to explore and experiment during the long hours of lockdown. Inevitably, he incorporated his experiences and feelings from the past three years into his process so that the work gradually took on its own form, expanding from a single piece into a new and complete series.

In Pace's gallery space, this series of circular sculptures of various sizes will be scattered on the walls like clusters of stars in the universe or cells in a microscopic view. The windows in these sculptures do not provide access to the outside world, but rather reflect the scenes before them, leaving illusionistic impressions on their colorful stained-glass surfaces. The title of the work alludes to Eastern philosophical speculation: what people perceive as perfection may be imperfect, while this seemingly deficient state can lead to more possibilities and a greater sense of completeness, which is the message the artist decided to share with his daughter.

Continuing its focus on the circle, the exhibition will also feature the light installation series *Zou Ma Deng* (Spinning Lanterns) and the sculptural work *Thousand Hands*, both of which were created in the past year. The artist created his first iteration of *Zou Ma Deng* during a four-month residency in London in 2000, using traditional moving-image techniques to represent his relationship with the environment and his imprint on urban spaces. In this latest work, Song's bodily presence is erased, leaving the viewer with only the world around the artist as seen and documented from his own perspective over the last three years.

While *Thousand Hands* is forged from a discarded object, it is intended to be placed behind a statue of the Buddha Guanyin, whose thousand hands form a disc in a radial pattern of eyes, symbolizing the gods' care for the mortal world. In stark contrast to the purity of a perfectly crafted industrial product, this piece contains many black lines that were created during the firing process and are meant to be removed by the glaze factory. These randomly generated black textures shimmer with a mysterious aura that attracted the artist and, in some ways, coincided with his thinking on *Da Cheng Ruo Que*. Laying the vertical panel flat, the artist allows the eyes of the Bodhisattva, which originally overlooked the world, to become the object of the viewer's gaze. At the same time, this work invites viewers to look at each other in a new way, evoking a contemplative experience and new realization.

Song Dong's (b. 1966, Beijing) conceptual practice emerged from the avant-garde and experimental arts community in China, engaging with various forms of media including installation, performance, video, painting, and sculpture. His performances in the mid- and late 1990s positioned him as a major figure in the burgeoning contemporary art scene in Beijing, which often serves as the setting for his reflections. Song is one of the founding members of *Polit-Sheer-Form Office* (2005–), a multi-disciplinary art group centered on collective ideals and practices as a means of commentary on the political, spiritual, and cultural aspects of life in China.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

Today, Pace has eight locations worldwide, including a European foothold in London and Geneva, and two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace's long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace's engagement with Silicon Valley's technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as an office and viewing room in Beijing.



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Press Inquiries

Claire Hurley
Associate Director of Public Relations
churley@pacegallery.com
+1 703 901 1960

Emily Kopp
Public Relations Associate
ekopp@pacegallery.com
+1 516 426 4146

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