

## The Stop

Michael Zheng (San Francisco, California, USA)

**WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE?** Currently based out of San Francisco, artist Michael Zheng grew up in China and studied at Tsinghua University. He was employed as a computer software designer for ten years before he quit this job to attend the San Francisco Art Institute where he studied with Paul Kos, Tony Labat and John Roloff. An artist of critical acclaim, Zheng has exhibited all around the world, and has been featured in many art and sculpture publications.

Zheng's work is noted as being conceptually rooted in situational intervention, conceptual sculpture and performance. Within his works, Zheng provokes the embrace of new perspectives through challenging established positions. Recent works find Zheng embodying the role of the medium its self through which he can enable certain experiences and perspectives to take place.



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**WHAT IDEAS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN THIS SCULPTURE?** Using humour and curiosity, Michael Zheng provokes us to adopt alternative views of our surroundings as we consider our world full of signs and explore the importance these icons hold in our daily lives. Every day we pass by an astonishing array of signs and symbols that tell us what to do, where to go, where we are, and pretty much any other pertinent information.

*The STOP* challenges our understanding of features such as the stop sign by placing the viewer in a situation that interferes with our typical perception of what this object represents. We have come to view the stop sign as an authoritarian figure. Abiding by its demands within the context of our urban framework, we have become unaware of our subjection to the stop sign's governance over our movements. This control exercised by the stop sign is challenged in Zheng's *The STOP*. Within this peculiar setting, the viewer observes that something is awry with the placement of these stop signs. What was once a stern notice to halt movement is now an open invitation to explore this object's meaning. Just as easily as we have unwittingly submitted to the stop sign, we instantaneously forget its demands. The sign's



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power becomes subverted as our perceptions of it change, allowing us to attach new meaning and value to its presence. The back of the signs bear a bright pink tint, further removing the sign of its intended meaning, allowing us to, on our own accord, explore new meanings and purposes for these figures. As suggested by Zheng himself “the new association could be so benign and warm that the cluster of *The STOP* signs might become a site to stop for gathering and leisure activities, becoming ‘*THE STOP*’.



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**HOW DOES THIS WORK CONNECT WITH THIS ARTIST’S OTHER WORKS?** One important notion that is important throughout all of Zheng’s works is the participation of viewers and the personal experience that the art elicits. Just as *The STOP* engages the public through providing a source of intervention within a social context, many of Zheng’s other projects are designed to provoke in similar ways. Zheng’s works are provocative and encourage us to interpret our surroundings differently, challenging our perceptions of the world around us and how we interpret this information. These projects take place in many forums ranging from public spaces to private galleries. Many of his works operate like *The Stop* by providing a passive opportunity for reflection, allowing the viewer to have power in the reading of an object, yet this is not always the case. Michael Zheng has often engaged in projects in which he performs the role of the medium and enables, through his facilitation, social interactions to occur. An example of such a project is his *Artist For Hire* series in which he allows individuals to “hire” him for any given purpose for 24 hours, all in order to ensure that through the employers authorship, a personal and meaningful art experience is able to occur.

**TO LEARN MORE:**  
[www.michaelzheng.org](http://www.michaelzheng.org)



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**HOW WAS THIS SCULPTURE MADE?** The *STOP* was installed using the same technique as all city signs. Ten steel poles were erected in a linear order before octagonal aluminum signs bearing the red and white stop motif were attached. The only deviations from a regular sign installation being the proximity to each other, location within the park and the bright pink paint on the backs of the signs.

The standard construction and aesthetic of the signs is integral as to ensure that the signs bear the authentic characteristics of a regular city stop sign, keeping in tact the sign’s austere familiarity.

**WHO PUT THIS SCULPTURE ON DISPLAY IN VANCOUVER?** This sculpture is part of Vancouver Biennale 2009-2011 Exhibition. The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that celebrates art in public space. Each exhibition transforms the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, work, play and transit. The Biennale features internationally renowned and emerging Contemporary artists that represent a diversity of cultural perspectives and artistic disciplines including sculpture, new media, performance works and film. The objective is to use great art as a catalyst to transformative learning and social action.

The Vancouver Biennale also creates supporting public programs, events and publications including the award-winning BIG IDEAS Education program, the International Artist Residency Program inspired by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream", the CineFest LIVE documentary film festival and the Tour de Biennale and BIKennale arts & culture cycling events.

**TO LEARN MORE** you can search the terms **BIENNALE**, **PUBLIC ART** or **OUTDOOR SCULPTURE PARKS** on-line. Also Visit the Vancouver Biennale website at [www.vancouverbiennale.com](http://www.vancouverbiennale.com)

**IMAGE CREDITS:**

- 1 Artist portrait; Dan Fairchild
- 2 *Stop*; Dan Fairchild
- 3 *Stop*; Dan Fairchild
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Author: Scott Orjala  
Designer: Julie Rudd