



## Double the Art

**Spouses and co-teachers at NYU Shanghai, Jian-Jun Zhang (JJ) and Barbara Edelstein discuss life imitating art**

### How did you two meet?

**Barbara:** We came from opposite sides of the world (me from LA and JJ from Shanghai) when we met at a party in 1990 in New York. I was accepted into the PS1 (a studio art program connected with MOMA) and JJ was there on a fellowship through the Asia Culture Council. I had recently done a large installation piece in Snug Harbor, New York—a huge tree, with branches raining water into a pool below.

**JJ:** When I saw that tree, I thought it was gorgeous and kind of familiar to me, being natural and very Zen. It really struck me. When I discovered that Barbara was behind that amazing piece, I realized I found the artist just as attractive as her artwork! We started dating in 1992 and married in 1999.



### How are your approaches to art similar and/or different?

**Barbara:** I never really did Western one-point or three-point perspective. I just didn't get it. I always did it the way I saw perspective. And then when JJ saw my pieces, he told me, "You do Asian perspective." For me it's more about my subject matter, rather than the actual pieces. I do video, drawing, sculpture—a variety of mediums.

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**JJ:** I actually started on a more Western artistic journey. After the Cultural Revolution, I expressed more through abstract works. Later on (1979) I became interested in Zen and Daoism, and learned a completely different way of working. I started looking at Chinese traditional culture and began to integrate Chinese philosophy into my artwork, over a period of years.

### What is it like teaching art together?

**Barbara:** We have two classes designed to teach Chinese ink art, with calligraphy in the first half and later offer a combination of ink with video, performance or something integrated. The students get very creative, and we push them to combine art with their own experience.

**JJ:** By teaching together, we can be multicultural. There's a lot of integration between the two of us. We are very lucky to work in this unique way, doing what we love.

### When did you know you wanted to be an artist?

**Barbara:** Both parents were artists: my mother a painter and performer, my father a graphic designer and photographer. My brother and I always had use of their studios.

**JJ:** When I was 5. My father did calligraphy and he asked me to grind the inkstone (for the calligraphy ink) and he bought me a book to practice. **SE**

### Last Word

**Three things you cannot live without:**

*Love, art, friendship*

**Next dream joint-installation?**

*On the moon.*

**NYC and Shanghai Favorites:**

*Museums, international culture, family, friends and fantastic art assistants*