

Palace of Extasy

Curator: HE Jing

Duration : 30 October 2019 – 12 January 2020

Address : Qiao Space, 2555-5 Longteng Avenue, Shanghai

Opening : Wednesday, 30 October 2019, 4 - 7 PM

Qiao Space and Don Gallery are proud to present Zhang Yunyao's first solo exhibition since 2017 -- "Palace of Extasy," curated by He Jing.

Over the last two years, Zhang has been developing a clearer and clearer awareness of the interval between concept and image where his work inhabits. On the one hand, this awareness is an outgrowth of a more relevant motif -- one involving the study and repeated description of the human form and its imagery. On the other hand, the artist has become a maestro of the medium of felt, which has been a mainstay of his long-term practice -- an understanding that transcends technique, and includes a methodological and conceptual instinct borne of practice.

Working with felt as a canvas, Zhang is "voluntarily forced" into an irreversible method of painting, which demands rigorous execution and an ironfisted grasp of every detail. Within this process, which Zhang has coined "anti-painting," execution outweighs "lyricism." The artist does not "express" form via line and brushstroke, rather, he "maps out" the image by tracing and filing it in.

To extend the metaphor further, if painting is a process of energy and expression, and each stroke of the brush is a metaphor for passion and pain, then Zhang Yunyao's "painting" is a calm and "painless" pursuit. It is as if the direct stimulation of the body's faculties has been inhibited, lulling the sensory metaphor of painting into a state of dormancy. However "painless" this ambitious "anti-painting" technique may present metaphorically, the way it presents on the canvas is another beast altogether, one which forms a counterpoint.

In the dislocated space between "Painting" with a capital "P" and the specific image, Zhang's work follows its own set of rules, constitute a subtle area of intrigue. The perception of Zhang's work totally betrays the sense of "apathie" and "sense of loss" underlying their conceptual mechanism. On the contrary, the paintings are abnormally functional.

As a painter, Zhang is hypersensitive to the subtle variations of gloss and the psychological effect of such variations, which is why his work often features black with a sheen of silver. Up close, the gloss presents as full, rich granules of pigment, evoking a strong tactile experience. While on the whole, it speaks a textural language of lustre, skin, and flesh.

Contrary to the "insensate" mode of choice the artist uses while painting, the resultant images have been created for the explicit purpose of teasing out a specific sensation and experience with their lustrous siren song of sensation -- a tremor which erupts under the skin, only at close proximity to the

flesh.

On this level, it can be said that Zhang's work is not "anti-painting" at all -- in that it is not antithetical to the emotion of painting. In an instant of reversal, the negation of concept and behavior finds a hierarchy within the work itself, which allows the sensory experience to be maneuvered around and re-released.

Zhang says that the functional experience and the depth of pleasure he demands of his work cannot be attained except on the level of *désœuvrement* (tr: idleness). He must delay and restrain experience while painting in order to elevate the experience of the painting to another echelon of intensity. This zone of suspension and re-entry approaches the "absence of feeling" that Bataille emphasizes in his textual analyses of de Sade -- an attitude of "ruthlessness" and "absence of feeling" through which one proves the existence of the individual by delineating the negative space, an "elevation" experienced via suspension.

This moment approaches the religious experience, marking a supreme experience of the faculties, so intense, that it can only be attained through "disengagement" or "extasy" of the ego. It represents a higher plane of experience for the body and its faculties, a heterogeneous temporality which is eked out.

If it is said that Zhang's paintings take a detour, suspending the sensory metaphor of painting by seeking out a metaphysical experience in the ontological sense, then this act of creation is itself a moment of "extasy" -- one which possesses a reflective structure and takes a roundabout path. Therefore, Zhang's so-called "anti-painting" represents paradoxically, a departure from and a return to painting.

By He Jing

About the Artist

ZHANG Yunyao (b.1985) graduated from the Department of Oil Painting, Academy of Fine Arts at Shanghai Normal University (2007). By incorporating felt as the support for the medium of painting, he attempts to explore the unfixed meaning of emotions and desires. His works have been widely exhibited in different institutions, including chi K11 art museum (Shanghai, 2016), CAFA Art Museum (Beijing, 2015), Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai (Shanghai, 2013), etc. His solo exhibitions include "Skin Gesture Body" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2017), "Nec Spe, Nec Metu" (Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2017), "After Evensong" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2015), "Touch Point" (01100001 Gallery, Beijing, 2013), "Mirage" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2013), "Paradbox" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2011), etc.

About the Curator

HE Jing is an art critic and curator who works and lives between Beijing & Shanghai, and has devoted herself to the writing and curatorial projects of contemporary images in the field of conceptual practices. She worked previously as the deputy editor of LEAP, which is a leading bilingual magazine of

contemporary art and culture in China, and launched LEAP's French Edition as editor-in-chief. She was also appointed as the director of research of Mao Ji-hong Arts Foundation who supports and develops its partnerships with important Chinese and international institutions, such as Centre Pompidou and Fudan University. Currently she works on her PhD research project at the School of Philosophy Fudan University, and holds her post of editor-at-large at LEAP.

After obtaining her bachelor and master degrees from the Academy of Arts & Design of Tsinghua University, HE Jing gained her master degree in Aesthetics and Contemporary Art Curating from University of Sorbonne I in Paris, and worked as a senior researcher at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (ENSAD) in France. She has curated a number of exhibitions, screening projects, seminars and conversation events in the Centre National Editions Art et Image (CNEAI), Jimei x Arles International Photo Festival, Photofairs Sans Francisco (US), Fudan University in Shanghai and OCT Contemporary Art Center in Shenzhen, as well as other art institutions or platforms in China and abroad. As editor-in-chief and a longtime contributor, she conceived a number of features around the Chinese contemporary art and her writings appear in books, exhibition catalogues and prominent art periodicals, such as LEAP, The Art Newspaper China, Flash Art and Artforum etc.