

Xiyao Wang: Liang Xiao Yin

Curator: Larys Frogier

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Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing 1st Space

Tang Contemporary Art is pleased to announce the opening of Xiyao Wang's solo exhibition "Liang Xiao Yin" at Beijing 1st Space on 16 December 2023 at 4pm. Curated by Larys Frogier, former director of the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai, the exhibition will present three periods of the artist's works: from "The Light That Can't Stay No. 2" in 2022, to the continuation of her "Allogné" series in the summer of 2023, and the newest "Liang Xiao Yin" series, which is based on the repertoire of the Chinese guqin.

"Liang Xiao Yin" is currently my favorite piece among the guqin melodies that I can play. Some of the works in the exhibition were also created when I started learning "Liang Xiao Yin." The melody of the piece winds and changes rhythmically, with a sense of distance and fluctuation, lively yet distant. It triggers unique memories and sensations from the fingertips to the entire body; in my creative process, it flows into the canvas along with other life experiences, like meandering rivers converging into the sea.

Xiyao Wang

Born in Chongqing in 1992 and based in Berlin, Xiyao Wang is a graduate of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute (2014) and the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg (2018). For her first solo show at Tang Contemporary Art in Beijing, Xiyao Wang presents a body of work of rare visual power, manifesting the richness and complexity of a unique pictorial act, from which visitors can experience free and open relationships to the sensory, as well as infinite and generous combinations with the living.

The ten paintings presented at Tang Contemporary Art are new works created over the span of a year. They are unique in the way that the artist created the paintings by using only black charcoal strips to create different textures of lines on the white surface of the canvas, sometimes punctuated by multicolored combinations created with oil sticks. Usually used for drawing and sketching on paper, Xiyao Wang makes radically different use of charcoal here. Thrown, rubbed, smoothed, brushed and cracked on the surface of the canvas, charcoal precipitates the line, releasing flows, intensities, volutes, asperities and energies that will give shape to unheard-of vibratory intensities, manifesting themselves inside the canvas but also extending out of it such sonic vibrations or mental ramblings... In fact, the charcoal used here fully participates in the making of the painting...

On the other hand, the power of Xiyao Wang's work lies in the intimate dialogue it maintains between black charcoal and the whiteness of the canvas. In other words, the canvas, in its very materiality, never acts as a simple support for a pictorial composition, nor is it to be viewed as a neutral surface to be covered. Rather, the canvas can be grasped as a living material in its own right, with its own transformative qualities, shifting from surface to depth, from expanse to horizon, from one plane to multiple textures, from raw materiality to imaginary density, as the black charcoal comes to manifest itself within it. In other words, what is important here is not so much the line drawn on the surface of the canvas but the interstices, the in-between of black line and white canvas that give evolving density, finesse, roughness, fluidity and volume. In the exhibition, some works unfold clusters of color made with in oil sticks that contribute to suspend, prolong, punctuate, condense and balance the charcoal lines. These densities of color reinforce such experience of fluidity and mutation, making the flow of energy sometimes compact, sometimes airy and sometimes liquid. It all becomes a question of balance and availability to the creation of multitudes projecting infinite possibilities of growth, extension, stretching and inter-relationship.

As the artist states:

"My understanding of painting is ever-evolving, leading to a continual shift in the images I pursue and the artistic expressions I seek. Amid the cyclical process of addition and subtraction in image-making (currently immersed in a subtractive phase), I gradually discover materials that better suit my artistic language or align with the creative state of that particular phase. Throughout this process, the use and study of lines play a crucial and increasingly important role. I experiment with different materials for drawing lines, exploring the expressive potential of different textures. Simultaneously, I strive to maximize the freedom of lines, using the same material (such as charcoal sticks) to allow lines to traverse space and dance on the canvas through different speeds, rhythms, weights, thicknesses, and turns, breaking and transcending it with accuracy yet without tension, airborne but not frivolous."

Xiyao Wang's work before being reduced to a specific medium or an identified genre such as abstraction, cultivates first and foremost the rare quality of offering and opening us up to a substantial and unique experience of the sensible. That of a permanent becoming that authorizes change and transformation, manifesting itself in the profound attention paid to the slightest rustling of the living in order to generate infinite possibilities of growth, extension, prolongation, suspension and continuation in vital tensions.

It is in these tiny interstices of becoming that the possibilities of a "body", a "landscape", a "natural element" such as water/air/earth... are "drawn." This is provided we come to touch these manifestations of the living, not to enclose them in an identified form, but on the contrary to open them up to pulsating movements that authorize mutation, contradiction, construction and deplacement.

At first glance, our eyes may be seduced by an elegant composition of paint strokes and lines. However, the art of Xiyao Wang has nothing to do with a delicate or ornamental series of abstract paintings. Indeed, it is our full physical space and mental imagination that are caught into a holistic experience of unexpected combinations made of stretches and ruptures, tiny lines mutated in moving volumes, energy surges combined with pause and silence, pulse of forces and energies combined with traces of disappearance.

For this, there is no need here to represent limited figurative elements, thus the abstraction. However, in the same time, the abstraction in Xiyao Wang is never trapping the viewer into an expected and formatted visual language, because her art is engaging us into the embracement of subtle but powerful experiences of evolving change, variation and mutation.

This means that the power of Xiyao paintings is not much concern in deposing and composing perfect abstract elements on the surface of a canvas, but it is fundamentally about the capacity to embrace gaps and junctions, the in-between visible and invisible components that might make happens infinite possibilities of inter-relations.

From Daoism to the semiology of painting, Xiyao Wang's oeuvre belongs to major artistic oeuvres in the modern and contemporary arts (Matisse, Cy Twombly, Robert Ryman, Julie Mehretu...). These art practices share a precious common path: as flow is always changing, the most important is not to know, to see and to identify what could be this or that figure (or person), but it is to experience the distance, the (re)conciliation, the friction, the juxtaposition, the detachment, the (re)connection that will always evolve and unfold in unexpected paths, through different forms of language.

Painting as a practice of life.

Text by Larys Frogier

About Artist

Xiyao Wang, born in Chongqing in 1992, lives and works in Berlin. She received a BA from Sichuan Fine Art Institute in China in 2014, and a BA and MFA from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg (2018, 2020).

The Berlin-based Chinese artist creates large-scale, immersive paintings in which gestural lines evoke echoes of landscapes, bodies, movements, thoughts. In the process, she develops a kind of hybrid abstract painting that combines various influences and inspirations: Taoism and post-structuralism, ancient Chinese pictorial traditions, bodywork, dance, martial arts, and the canon of Western art history. Xiyao Wang's paintings explore inner visions, bodily perceptions, sensations, feelings, interrogating her East-West biography.

Her solo exhibitions include: Perrotin Gallery, Seoul (2023); Massimo de Carlo, London (2023); König Gallery, Berlin (2023); Perrotin Gallery, Paris (2022); Arndt Collection, Melbourne (2022); Gerber Stauffer Fine Arts, Zurich (2021); A Thousand Plateaus Gallery, Chengdu (2021); Soy Capitán Gallery, Berlin (2019). Her work has been featured in important international venues, including the Shepparton Art Museum, Australia (2023); Pingshan Art Museum, Shenzhen (2023); Art Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing (2023); Aurora Museum, Shanghai (2022); Jiu Shi Art Museum, Shanghai (2022); Baumwollspinnerei, Leipzig (2020); Cité internationale des arts, Paris (2018); Sprink, Dusseldorf (2018); and Chongqing Contemporary Art Center (2015), among many others.

About Curator

Larys Frogier is the former Director of the Rockbund Art Museum (RAM) in Shanghai. Since 2023, Larys Frogier is the scientific and artistic director for the long term research program "Becoming Worlds" lead by the Culture Europe Agency/Relais Culture Europe (Paris), in the framework of the Horizon Europe Program initiated by the European Commission (Brussels). As a curator, critic and art historian, he is involved in artistic and social challenges in post-global contexts where ongoing social, economical, cultural transformations demand new ways of interrelations, citizenship and reinvented creativity.

He has curated numerous exhibitions and published extensive essays on the works of international artists: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Nan Goldin, Paola Pivi, Ugo Rondinone, Wang Du, Yang Jiechang.

Previously the Director of the contemporary art centre La Criée in Rennes (France), he curated long-term projects (symposiums, residencies, exhibitions, publications), which question the links and ruptures between broadening transcontinental areas. Chair of the HUGO BOSS ASIA ART jury since 2013 at the Rockbund Art Museum, he is conceiving this new award, exhibition and research program as an evolving platform to promote emerging artists and to question Asia as a construction to investigate rather than a monolithic area or fixed identities.

Larys Frogier taught art theory, history of art, and curatorial studies at the University of Rennes, while he was also a researcher at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and at the Archives for Art Criticism.