

Yue Minjun: Eudaimonia

2022.12.15-2023.2.15

Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing 2nd Space

Tang Contemporary Art is pleased to announce "Eudaimonia", a solo exhibition organized by renowned Chinese artist Yue Minjun, starting on December 15, 2022, at Beijing 2nd Space. Beginning with his iconic "Laughter" series, this exhibition will display his illustrious masterpieces over the years, including the "Classic Recreation", "Scene", and "Labyrinth" series, as well as the new "Flower" series created in the past two years. This exhibition is also the next collaboration between the artist and Tang Contemporary Art after his solo exhibition "Smile at the Flower Sermon" in Tang Contemporary Art, Hong Kong.

Yue Minjun confirmed his irreplaceable position in Chinese contemporary art with his unique character and style at the beginning of the 1990s. The "self-image" of exaggerated smile and body language mocks and ironizes the cultural reality, and in a way, suggests the universality of social reality and daily life. Therefore, he has been considered one of the representatives of cynical realism by critics. It can be evidently seen that he has always pursued breakthroughs in his recent creations. The changes suggest that he has never stopped being vigilant and thinking about himself and his creation though he has inscribed his name upon the pages of history.

Eudaimonia, the theme of this exhibition, has always been pursued by human beings for a long time. It is sought after and permanent in human history. The prophet Epicurus discovered the skewed motion of the atom from Democritus' natural philosophy, which made self-consciousness and freedom of will possible to achieve happiness and pleasure. His happiness is a joy of inner freedom and tranquility. The atomic obliquity argues for freedom of will, creating true happiness in the inner dimension that is free from external restraints. His theory of static pleasure states that pleasure and happiness are no pain in the body (aponia) and no disturbance in the soul (ataraxia). Aponia refers to the balance of labor and leisure, while ataraxia is the state of no fear of death, natural disasters, or social disharmony. The laughing self-image and blossoming flowers in Yue's works point toward the state of happiness as mentioned above, and both of them become self-decompression and comfort. The Stoics of the Hellenistic period pointed out that to be happy and free, we need to understand that some things are within our control and others are not. Only this course of action can make inner peace and outer efficiency possible. It reminds humans of the old wisdom of having an inner principle dealing with the unpredictable changes in the outside world rather than something that cannot be mastered by human power.

The exhibition starts with his classic "Laughter" series. The artist has built a surrealist image landscape through diverse narratives of reality. The men with closed eyes and wide grins are the artist's "self-image". Entering the exhibition hall are Definitely and Flavours, two of his newest creations in 2022, where he juxtaposes multiple self-images, making it hard to recognize his real self. These recurring otherness stress self, yet are on the scene as a whole. At the same time, the artist places his painting in an open and peaceful field rather than using the complicated illustration background and sharp color contrast in his early creations. The roguish smile seems to have been softened and released under this atmosphere. It can be said that Yue has presented his understanding of happiness in his new works with a more introverted method than before.

The second part includes his "Classic Recreation", "Scene", and "Labyrinth" series in different styles. His dialogue with tradition and retrospection in the classic western paintings activate the inherent classical values and self-gaze. Among them is the first-time exhibited Picasso and I, his latest large-scale creation from 2022, which is based on the appropriation of Picasso's famous painting Guernica. This creates a weird atmosphere by combining his recognizable smiling face with the broken figures of Guernica. It seems to be not only a huge farce by associating the scene of war with the laughing faces but also a hyper-temporal dimension full of contradictions, confusion, and absurd uneasiness. The laughter breaks fear: happiness is so untraceable in front of suffering; nothing can heal it but only smiles because a smile confuses an approaching frown.

Eudaimonia is the pursuit of mentality, nature, and life. Yue attempts to emphasize the importance of the feeling of life through pictorial narratives, which is also the starting point of the last part of the exhibition, the "Flower" series. It was born from his experience living in Dali, Yunnan, in 2020. The city of flowers gave him a new inspiration; the blooming flowers replaced the smiling faces in his paintings. The flower goes beyond the laughter and derives a richer rational meaning, presenting a tense and harmonious relationship between word and object. As a work, a flower brings the beauty of sensory and phenomenon, which means no turmoil in the heart; as an image, it connects with all the elements of the painting with a brand new structure and form of meaning, which is happiness in a subjective state. When going from image to iconography, the flower presentation seems complicated yet clear. Is it a symbol of beauty or a whitewash of falsehood? The flower represents not only a provocative attitude but also a fierce growth when the expressions of characters are hidden behind them. Their postures and shapes merge with the painting field in gaze. Therefore, the flower grows out of the smiling face, becoming the variation and the perfection of the smile. A smile blooms a flower. Everything comes back to their unsurpassable nature. What an extremely splendid scene! Everything returns to a simple life. It seems like they have found a way toward happiness. Consequently, Happiness is not by chance, but by choice.

About Artist

Yue Minjun, b. 1962, Daqing, Heilongjiang Province, China.

Yue Minjun is one of the leading figures of Chinese contemporary art and internationally renowned artist. He currently lives and works in Beijing, China. Yue Minjun had been creating this exaggerated "Self-image" since the beginning of the 1990s. And in recent years, this image has been used in the field of sculpture and printmaking. Sometimes "it" appears independently, or collectively. "It" closes its eyes and laughs grinningly; with dramatic gestures and confidence.

He became the cover story of Time magazine in 2007, and nominated as one of the "Person of the Year 2007 - People Who Mattered", on the list of the five award winners, there were Putin, Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton etc., Yue Minjun was the only Chinese, and only artist who had been nominated, Time described Yue Minjun as: "If you think China has a close relationship with the current and future status of the world, then this is the man to paint China".

On the other hand, Yue Minjun's artworks have been collected by domestic and foreign art institutions, galleries and museums. For example, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Denver Art Museum, The Culture Centre of Francois Mitterrand, Busan Museum of Art, Guangdong Museum of Art, Shenzhen Art Museum and other important institutions have all brought Yue's works into their permanent collections.

Since participated in the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, Yue had been invited as one of the regular contemporary Chinese artists in every Venice Biennale, which demonstrates his profound artistic contribution, and his distinctive artistic characteristics have established the non-negligible importance in contemporary Chinese art and the world stage.