

If You Can See

Curators: Fiona Lu, Han Yali

Artists: Bo Sihan, Chen Qin, Feng Juejia, Shan Yuhan, Su Hang, Sun Yu, Zhu Yizhou

2023.10.7 – 11.18

Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing Headquarters Gallery Space

Tang Contemporary Art is honored to present group exhibition “If You Can See” opening on 7 Oct. 2023 at our Beijing Headquarters Space. The exhibition will last till 18 Nov., and will display paintings from 7 young artists: Bo Sihan, Chen Qin, Feng Juejia, Shan Yuhan, Su Hang, Sun Yu, Zhu Yizhou.

If you can see, look. If you can look, observe.
From the *Book of Exhortations*

This quote was introduced through the title page of Portuguese writer José Saramago’s renowned work *Blindness*, quoted from the *Book of Exhortations*. Saramago borrows from the Old Testament, admonishing mankind not to mistake blindness for reason, superficiality for truth, not to be deceived by flashy appearances, and not to become “blind people who can see, but do not see.” Saramago delivers the meaning of *seeing* and the effort toward kindness after the act of seeing in almost all of his literary works. The seemingly simple word “See” serves as the beginning of visual sensibility, and gradually enters different levels such as observing, viewing, contemplating, gazing—these are constantly occurring life experiences. As a part of the senses, *seeing* includes the beholder, the subject, the action of seeing, the time and space where such an action took place, and the series of impact as a result of seeing. Here, *Looking* is the outcome of *seeing*—the process of the beholder’s sight reaching the intended subject, and also the outcome of interactions between the two.

From these revelatory terms, we return to the nature of seeing, which is certain to be observations from the self of the beholder (without involvement of the other). In absolute terms, every beholder possesses unique characteristics in the form of distinct recognition patterns and knowledge backgrounds. Seeing reflects a distinct world of experiences unique to the self. The transition from “See” to “Look” is a process of *defining* for the *cognitive symbol* of the conscious world. Upon realizing this, *seeing* becomes the bridge between *image* and *meaning*, clarifying the joint progression led by the artist’s personal encounters. Painting is a form of cognitive art, revealing the primary conscious connections between artist’s self and the world. On this premise, we venture together into the spaces of self-experience from seven participating artists. They use looking as the access point of experience, which is then transformed into describable, reproducible matter through inner sedimentary accretion and contemplation. Painting incorporates both the experiential totality of self psychology and the collective sensibility of the times of one’s belonging. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty has said, “He [the painter] is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him or else... the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects; for he never ceases adjusting his clairvoyance to them.”

Zhu Yizhou’s paintings have a quiet and eternal sense of mystery. The gray tone sets off a lonely atmosphere. The mood of tranquility is revealed from the expressions of depicted figures, presenting an independent world. Zhu’s linear narrative is overlaid with calm brushstrokes as sight is immersed in the obscuring background. The juxtaposing of the ordinary and the bizarre pushes for an unusual viewing experience. In a similar vein, the protagonists in Feng Juejia’s paintings are endowed with a sense of eternal sculpture, and the relaxed characters appear aimless and idle. The artist seems to be deliberately creating a vague narrative that separates the ordinary from its usual conventionality. Evidently, Zhu and Feng’s work do not focus on the narrative of painting, but rather responds to the current space-time, materiality and individual experience of thinking through *meticulous observation*. As a female artist, Chen Qin’s works show more exploration of female strength and self-awareness. Her characters enjoy healthy skin tones and vigorous body shapes, strengthening their lively characteristics. As a symbol, the female figures in her works are metaphorical, carrying the artist’s personal consciousness and having attained the transcendental gender. As the sociologist John O’Neill has said: they think about nature and society in terms of their bodies, and they think about their bodies in terms of society. The creation of non-figurative characters represents the artist’s perception of *body*. Sun Yu takes this as the starting point, full of bold and strong language—physical but also social, private yet also revealing. He counteracts the ordinary through his methods of collecting the everyday, in which the superimposed figures, dense contours, distorted bodies, and heavy tones reveal the primitive instincts hidden beneath consciousness. At the same time, the figure’s postures are carefully choreographed to produce tenuous connections with their surrounding space. These seemingly casual processing contain the behavioral structure between the body and its environment, thus generating meaningful symbolic forms. Su Hang’s creations also encompass the exploration of figurative painting. Commencing from his astute observations of mundane objects, he skillfully generates an evocative atmosphere through deformations and exaggerated manipulations. The depicted subjects within his paintings appear to enter a state of profound contemplation, as if they embody the artist’s own spiritual perception. For Su Hang, painting serves as the most direct conduit for comprehending and capturing his own sensibility, imbued fervor and impetus akin to Madame Bovary’s romantic pursuits, permeated by an authentic passion for life.

Different from the aforementioned five artists, Bo Sihan and Shan Yuhan’s paintings exhibit a greater level of expressiveness and abstraction. Bo Sihan’s creations serve as an extension of ordinary objects, representing a variation of self-aware experiences. From her perspective, reality is akin to a vivid dream while memory embodies the eternal moment. She delves into the disparity between human beings and the sensory world, actively exploring the boundless potential inherent in undifferentiated matter that permeates our existence. Through her comprehensive approach to painting, she skillfully incorporates materiality into her work, enabling a more authentic existential experience.

The sense of movement in Shan Yuhan’s works is the underlying rationality which he pursues. Flowing oil paint, sharp scratches, and fuzzy edge lines on the image all contribute to creating a dynamic sensation. The untamed brushstrokes open up an intricate spatial relationship between objects and images, immersing the viewer’s gaze into a realm where everything appears to be drawn into a chaotic memory. It allows one to traverse through misplaced pasts, presents, and futures, showcasing the cyclical entanglement of time’s loss. This veiled reflection on

memory constitutes an integral aspect of Shan's artistic creation—it dismantles guarded boundaries between dreams and reality as well as present and past moments while opening up possibilities for contemplating life's mysteries.

From the exhibited works of seven young artists, we are able to gain a comprehensive insight into the genuine experiences and reactions of a generation towards the real world. They depict the reality they perceive with utmost authenticity. Only through this profound perception and worldly experience can we truly comprehend ourselves, and by engaging in further introspective contemplation, we can unveil the most authentic and original essence of our surroundings. The realm of life is not an object for reflection but rather an open environment. As Merleau-Ponty eloquently stated, "I am undeniably interconnected with the world; however, I do not possess it as it remains inexhaustible."

Curator: Han Yali

About Artist

Bo Sihang (b. 1995, Heilongjiang, China) graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts Institute with a bachelor's degree in 2018, and graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts Institute with a master's degree in 2021.

Around 2000, She came to Beijing to study with my parents. She loved painting when she was young and never stopped learning painting. Later, she was admitted to the Central Academy of fine arts, and formally began systematic painting training. This year, she was admitted to the Department of oil painting, Central Academy of fine arts. Her works cover a wide range of artistic creation, from easel painting to comprehensive materials. Her works have been collected by schools and individuals for many times. During the school, She won many awards such as excellent artwork rewards and scholarship. Also, her works have participated in various group exhibitions for many times.

Chen Qin (b. 1990, Fujian, China) graduated from the Public Sculpture major of China Academy of Art in 2015 and won the Public Academy Graduation Gold Award. In the same year, she founded Shijin Art Studio, which is engaged in the design and installation of commercial installations and sculptures. Chen Qin is now a member of the Zhejiang Sculpture Association, working and living in Hangzhou. In 2022, for the sake of child-rearing, she began focusing on oil painting. The present Figures series is the result of the self-consistent product resulting from the space and time confinement of maternity. In the company of the self, Chen Qin discovers the beauty of objects and matters in life. If the Figures series is a reconciliation with her daughter, then the Sewing Still Life series is essentially a dialogue with her mother. In the process of sewing clothes for her daughter, Chen constantly thought of the same scenes of her mother during her own childhood. The positive and negative are akin to the warm and beautiful patterns on the cloth and the cold touch on the sewing tools, both of which can become part of the image.

Feng Juejia (b. 1997, Yunnan, China) lives and works in Beijing. Feng's paintings originate from personal experiences of life. Based on the surrounding scenes and people, Feng creates frozen pictures through light and shadow, trying to give people or scenes in daily life a sense of eternity like sculptures. Feng clarifies the pictures, blurs the narrative and makes everyday objects peculiar. Influenced by the sculpture work of her parents, Feng has been very sensitive to the shape and volume of the sculpture since the day she first picked up a brush. She can express her feelings subtly with figurative painting, and explore the underlying or surging emotions and powers behind the calm appearance of the picture. Feng looks for subtle absurdities in the most familiar and ordinary scenes. Some of her themes come from books she has read as well as metaphors in philosophy. She picks the parts that she powerfully resonates with and integrates them with everyday life.

Shan Yuhang (b. 1998, Heilongjiang, China) 2020 graduated with Bachelor's degree from the Third Studio of Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) Oil Painting Department, 2023 graduated with Master's degree from the Third Studio of Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) Oil Painting Department. Shan Yuhang pursues the fundamental rationality from the actions shown within an image. To begin with, his painting—on a surface level—presents a kind of activity or material flowing state from both scenery and physical shapes; in addition, through pictorial expression, he attempts to bring to the viewer a dynamic relationship including both space and time. The painting depicts relations within action, rather than a present moment. In other words, instead of a static presence, different material presentations and different versions of the artist at multiple timestamps all engaged in the creation process. While working, Shan Yuhang attempts to cogitate on ways to express more in-depth understanding of the world. He conveys the inherent nature of his subjects through creative language and content organization. As an outstanding innovator, Shan Yuhang uses artistic means to reshape all forms of real world sensations, bringing them into an aesthetic context with artful expressions.

Su Hang (b. 1996, Changsha, China) now works and lives in Beijing. Su Hang graduated from the Third Studio of the Oil Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. In the same year, he was recommended for postgraduate study under the guidance of Liu Shangying. His research direction is the concept and expression research of contemporary painting. Su Hang graduated with a master's degree in 2022. Su Hang's paintings take his own physical experience as the starting point of creation, explore personal emotional expression and perceptual clues, and attempt to respond to artistic lineage and social evolution using clues gained from his own heterogeneous practice. In a Chinese context, Su mainly focuses on the relationship between art and politics through painting. Su also hopes that different painting methods can be practiced according to various specific awareness on personal issues, rather than deliberately pursuing a certain constant style with recognizable personal symbols.

Sun Yu (b. 1982, Jilin, China) Through years of academic training, Sun Yu has developed a unique approach to creation, allowing him to engage with a blank canvas like no other. Rather than predefining the image at the outset, he begins by freely smearing the canvas until vague forms emerge. This process triggers specific emotions and recalls intricate details from his memories, which he then embodies in his artwork. Thus, his creative process does not stem from a focus on painting per se, but rather from the formation of compositions that organically evolve during the course of creation. When Sun Yu establishes a new foundation for narrative, transcending the confines of conventional frameworks, the "canvas" ceases to be a mere vehicle for painting elements alone. It becomes a boundless expanse that carries the untapped depths of submerged icebergs, the most primal thoughts yearning for expression. Sun Yu seeks to uncover inevitable outcomes through fortuitous exploration.

The titles of his works, in fact, represent the coordinates of these fragmented ice blocks, which resemble core themes of discussions, as Sun Yu engages in a process of self-inquiry and self-response on the canvas, ultimately manifesting in the form of figurative expressionism. For him, painting transcends pure imagination and literal representation, serving as a means of dialogue and communication with oneself to complete the contemplation of life. The dense and clumsy brushwork acts as an insulating layer, enveloping absolute intensity, struggle, and the eventual attainment of balance and resolution, akin to a silent symphony.

Graduated from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Sun Yu has presented in many exhibitions around the world, including: "Dark Cuisine", hiart Space 798, (China, 2023); "Inspiration", Linda Gallery, (China, 2022); "Newly Told Stories", HUA International, (China, 2021) and "Don't Look Back Galerie Paris-Beijing, (Belgium, 2014) etc.

Zhu Yizhou (b. 1989, Wuxi, China) 2013–2016 studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York, majoring in Fine Art, and obtained bachelor degree. 2018–2020 studied at the Department of Oil Painting, Tokyo University of the Arts, and obtained master degree.

Zhu Yizhou's art career is accompanied by the choices and growth that resonate with millennials. She gradually judges the collective orientation from the Eastern and Western cultural values recognized by the outside world, introspecting her own spiritual needs, and eventually uncovers a life state of pure love. Zhu Yizhou is wholly undistracted during creation, as if ignorant of worldly affairs, but it just happens that such mentality creates a spirited, vibrant state. Zhu's work gradually break away from the momentary space and emotion, and finds itself rooted in Eastern divinity and philosophy. Her paintings carry insight from personal perceptions. The scenery, still life and figures in her work have stripped away the tenses and times attached to a particular pattern. The image is repeatedly modified and perfected, adding touches of slightly irritable brushstrokes, presenting a solitary atmosphere of the Oriental style.