

Xu Xiaoguo Recent Work

Curator / Cui Cancan

Opening / 2019.9.7 4 pm

Duration / 2019.9.7 - 10.25

Location / Tang Contemporary Art, 2nd Space, Beijing

Tang Contemporary Art is proud to announce the opening of “Xu Xiaoguo: Recent Work,” a solo exhibition for Xu Xiaoguo in the gallery’s second Beijing space, on September 7, 2019. Curated by Cui Cancan, the show will feature more than twenty works that Xu has created since 2017.

This is the third major exhibition that the artist has held with Tang Contemporary Art, following his eponymous solo show “Xu Xiaoguo” at the gallery’s first Beijing space in December 2015 and “Between the Green: Xu Xiaoguo” at the Hong Kong space in August 2016.

The exhibition fully and clearly presents Xu's different creative stages and exploratory directions, as well as the secret connections between different series. From his initial spatial magic, to structural explorations divorced from reality, to his recent work full of detail and wit, Xu Xiaoguo's work reflects multiple intersections and perceptions in painting and spirit.

Xu Xiaoguo: Recent Work

Cui Cancan

Let us imagine a scene: we enter the forest, seeing the trees and the land. At a glance, everything is clearly visible. However, when we look closely, we begin to engage with the numerous trivial details before our eyes, which constantly magnify the things that we see, almost giving us a panoramic view. But as we carefully recollect and our eyes seek out points of light, the leaves become faint. When we focus on the trunks, we forget about the sky. We are always drawn in by diversion and discovery, unable to take it all in. The forest becomes a few vague shapes and colors, almost as if we can't see anything.

Xu Xiaoguo's recent work is similar. When we stand in front of the painting, we see the lofty tower, solemn as a memorial, and it draws our eyes upward. However, we are very quickly drawn in by the details, and when you follow the light in those details, you always encounter shadows. The next light makes us indecisive, and we walk into a labyrinth of light and color, line and quality. The blocks of color are scattered, and the rhythms of the shapes have their own independent order and rules; they disperse concentrated structures and become themselves. At that moment, that steady tower seems so distant.

Where do these subtle occurrences come from? Are they describing the poetry of the ephemeral world, or are they directly narrating the linguistic order? The paintings simply contain an incessant stream of images, sometimes mixed together and sometimes completely distinct. We cannot find natural logic or observe an overly intense emotional stance. Obviously, these new works have departed from the pure rationality of his previous linguistic research, but they also show no hint of Rothko-esque tragedy. His works glitter with fine, quivering emotion. The atmosphere is always hazy, but his hand gives it extraordinary approval. What is he approving of?

In Xu Xiaoguo's work, the real world is just inspiration; it never determines what happens in the painting. You have to imagine the world as a void, and the painter's hand attempts to paint subjects that don't exist. Shapes simply witness experiences and feelings, foreshadowing the beginning of the next unknown shape. It's a bit like rhythm in music—the moment is always decided by the notes that come before and after it. All highlights begin with structure and have a structure and an echo. Therefore, painting becomes a continuous moment, constantly creating shapes. Only after the first line appears can everything that happens next actually take place. Painting never existed in the real world, and it is given shapes and colors through the painter's hands, thereby becoming a unique presence. In this sense, the painter both creates a painting and gives it a name.

In Xu Xiaoguo's entirely renamed works, vivid or dull colors are just their visual surfaces; only light gives objects color and shape. The air here flickers with an aura; the light that illuminates everything comes from far away, not nearby. This is the reflection of distance. The final effect is very different; every image has its own atmosphere—they have their own lighthouses. In another sense, the slanting lines and curved shapes

are arranged everywhere, and we see the possibility of a horizon line, but this has no association with everyday spaces. The red, blue, and white occasionally form hard-edged shapes, but the details are incomplete. It is difficult for us to find complete forms in Xu's images; there are always quivering, fragmented perceptions that divert our gaze. However, the majority of the images in the paintings have been depicted numerous times, moving from the center to the periphery, confirmed time and again. What is he confirming? We have discovered that Xu does not depict the exteriors of objects; he presents the content reflected by the surface. In reality, light and shadow, form and line are never stated explicitly, and there are very few references in the painting. The shock of continuity allows disconnected moments and emotions to exist in isolation.

When Naples yellow appears in the images, Xu Xiaoguo's eyes slowly record and inspect it, noting down its aura and contours. In the distance, some other types of yellow appear hazier, and sometimes directly recede from our view; however, as the close-up depictions become even more refined, they order the mottled structure, rising or falling in different places. Around it, various shades of yellow intersect or replace one another, or vibrate against one another, and a block of brown flutters, surrounded by yellow. It can never be changed, but it is set off by its surroundings. The relationship between them is more than a connection; they accompany one another, just as shadow accompanies light and voids relax densities.

In other words, in Xu Xiaoguo's recent work, what was originally a rather neutral structural exploration was waiting to be encouraged and filled in by many years of experience. We can divide Xu Xiaoguo's paintings into three stages. From his initial spatial magic, tangled lines, and divided proportions, he attempted to approach a certain overlapping feeling of space in reality. Later, space became the pattern of space, something increasingly two-dimensional. Real existence was removed, and various positive and negative things grew and meshed together, and intense research laid the foundation for the changes to come. Most recently, every detail in his work has been overwhelmed with full emotion and subtle wit. Painting and spirit once again find new life—brushstrokes create shapes and colors activate rationality, controlled by a positive force.

Where are they going? At the end of the exhibition, three blue works occupy the entire space, and they try to extend our vision from the paintings, from the forest, from those places. They may just be details along the way, extending our vision toward the sky, toward the source of the light.

Therefore, the closer we get, the further away the past becomes.

About Artist

Xu Xiaoguo was born in Xi'an, Shanxi Province in 1977. He majored in Oil painting and graduated from the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts in 2000. Currently based in Beijing.

Xu's works take various artistic forms such as painting, pictorials and video. His works cover a wide range of artistic forms such as paintings, photos, images and installations. His works exhibited in many important institutions includes: The Lucerne Museum of Art, Switzerland; Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia; White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney; BWA Art Gallery, Poland; UCCA, Beijing; Today Art museum, Beijing; Museum of CAFA, Beijing; Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei; Macao Museum of Art, Macao; OACT by Xi'an; Zhu Qizhan Art Museum, Shanghai; Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing; Iberia Center, Beijing; White box, Beijing; Osage Gallery, Hong Kong.