

Tang Contemporary Art presents:

The Body of Cybele : Liu Youran Solo Exhibition

Artist: Liu Youran

Curator: Fiona Lu

Exhibition Dates: 31 August - 14 October 2023

Venue: Tang Contemporary Art Bangkok

Opening Reception: Thursday, 31 August at 4:00 PM

In the representation of goddesses from various ancient civilizations, people naturally and instinctively admired certain qualities associated with femininity. In "The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype," Erich Neumann draws upon the theories of his mentor, Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, to explore the depths of the "collective unconscious" of humanity, uncovering the archetypes that help us understand ourselves. The Great Mother of the Gods, a pivotal figure in the early development of self-awareness; transitioning from chaos to stability, initiated humanity's journey from focusing on themselves to comprehending the world. Some portrayals present her in a squatting stance, emphasizing full hips, while others depict her standing gracefully and slender. She can be the deity of the sky, symbolized by doves; or the queen of hell, symbolized by serpents. This goddess can be found within lofty mountains, lush forests, and vast oceans, seamlessly blending with the natural world; or surrounded by a multitude of animals, overseeing their entire spectrum of life. Like nature brimming with abundant vitality, she is worshipped, mythologized, and sculpted. Irrespective of how much we underscore the "unconscious" nature of symbolism, we cannot deny that symbols—particularly those that are clear and visible—are humanity's attempt to convey their experience of unity with nature through external images. These embodiments stand as the imprints of diverse human cultures.

However, much like all deities in the world, they are also subject to taboos, even both Pandora and Athena; Eve and the Virgin Mary. The source of life and the darkness of the abyss are associated with them, and Cybele, the Great Mother of the Gods, embodies precisely this duality. As the mother goddess of Phrygia, Cybele has always been worshipped with orgiastic rites, which have allowed her to cultivate a unique identity amid controversies. This exhibition takes its inspiration from this background and carries forward Liu Youran's established artistic trajectory. Through the delicate balance of contradictions, she seeks to portray female figures in her artwork as embodying both divinity and immanence, intricately weaving a dual nature between the physical and spiritual.

The debate over the shape of the female body within the context of art history has been a recurrent theme. However, Liu Youran's creative motivation stems from her desire to explore the potential for expressing female identities within the contemporary societal context. Here, she focuses more on the ways women are perceived and portray their real-life situations. Liu Youran inspires from the elements in ukiyo-e classics and the ambiance of traditional depictions of beauty into her artistic space by capturing the shared essence between the female body and the natural world, showcasing a distinctly personalized contemporary Eastern femininity aesthetic. Often, she shapes the figures in her artwork with a resemblance to puppets, revealing a relatively hollow and detached state. Through this nuanced stylistic approach, the scenario of the figures being observed, objectified, and alienated is accentuated within the artwork.

Liu Youran has consistently pursued the creation of visually pure and exquisite artwork. To distinguish herself from the traditional depictions of beauty from a male perspective, she intentionally incorporates elements of contrast within her compositions. In pieces like "Play 1:49 am" and "Model 6:45 pm," she smoothly blends human figures with a profusion of dynamic natural elements and animal imagery. By using subtly varied shades of blue and green, she generates visually compelling scenes bursting with vitality. The captivating power of a creative deity is unveiled within seemingly tranquil scenes but dramatic scenarios. However, this frozen moment resembles a still frame from a performance. The distorted spatial relationships and the sensation of post-production scene construction render the inherent passivity and immanence of these bodies beneath the self-evident divinity. The surrealistic painting language blurs temporal and spatial boundaries, defying the constraints of reality's logic. This adds fascination and an aura of mystery to the composition, while also crafting a more delicately nuanced metaphorical effect.

About the Artist

b. 1996, Hubei

Graduated from China Academy of Fine Arts with bachelor's and master's degrees. Now lives and works in Hangzhou, China.

Liu Youran attempts to explore more possibilities for the expression of women's identity in the context of contemporary society, focusing on the women's viewing methods and realistic situations. Through the surrealist painting language, she presents the conflict between the basic requirements of women trying to establish themselves, the subject, and the requirements from the surrounding in a softer way.

Tang Contemporary Art

Since its founding in Bangkok in 1997, Tang Contemporary Art has opened 7 spaces in Beijing, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Seoul to promote the development of experimental art in different regions. In the past 20 years, Tang Contemporary Art has organized groundbreaking exhibitions in its gallery spaces, and also cooperated with important art institutions in China and abroad to accomplish outstanding art projects. The gallery strives to initiate dialogue between artists, curators, collectors and institutions working both locally and internationally. A roster of groundbreaking exhibitions has earned Tang Contemporary Art internationally renowned recognition, establishing its status as a pioneer of the contemporary art scene in Asia.

As one of China's most influential contemporary art platforms, Tang Contemporary Art maintains a high standard of exhibition programming. Tang Contemporary Art represents or collaborates with leading figures in international contemporary art, including Ai Weiwei, Huang Yongping, Shen Yuan, Zhu Jinshi, Chen Danqing, Liu Qinghe, Liu Xiaodong, Chen Shaoxiong, Wang Yuping, Shen Ling, Shen Liang, Wu Yi, Xia Xiaowan, He Duoling, Mao Xuhui, Wang Huangsheng, Yang Jiechang, Tan Ping, Wang Du, Yan Lei, Yue Minjun, Wang Jianwei, Yangjiang Group, Zheng Guogu, Lin Yilin, Sun Yuan&Peng Yu, Qin Ga, Wang Qingsong, Yin Zhaoyang, Feng Yan, Guo Wei, Chen Wenbo, Ling Jian, Qin Qi, Yang Yong, Peng Wei, He An, Zhao Zhao, Xu Qu, Chen Yujun, Chen Yufan, Xue Feng, Cai Lei, Li Qing, Wang Sishun, Xu Xiaoguo, Li Wei, Liu Yujia, Wu Wei, Yang Bodu, You Yong, Li Erpeng, Jade Ching-yuk Ng, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Adel Abdessamed, Niki de Saint Phalle, AES+F, Michael Zelehosk, Jonas Burgert, Christian Lemmerz, Michael Kvium, Sakarin Krue-On, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Natee Utarit, Kitti Narod, Gongkan, Entang Wiharso, Heri Dono, Nam June Paik, Park Seungmo, Jae Yong Kim, Diren Lee, Dinh Q. Lê, Rodel Tapaya, Jigger Cruz, Ayka Go, Raffy Napay, H.H.Lim, Etsu Egami, etc.

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