

# Pearl Lam Galleries

Shanghai

## INEXPLICABLE

Featuring works by Cai Zebin, Dai Chenlian, Ju Anqi, Liang Ban, Liu Mengxing, Pan Jianfeng, Shi Yiran, Song Chen, Tang Bohua, Tao Yi, Wang Ji, Wu Di, Xia Qingyong, Xu Dawei, Xu Xinwu, Yan Heng, Zheng Lu, and Tant Zhong

Exhibition Dates 17 June–27 August, 2017 Monday–Sunday, 10:30am–7pm

Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, 181 Middle Jiangxi Road, G/F, Shanghai, China 200002

Shanghai—*Inexplicable* is a group exhibition of 18 Chinese young artists, revolving around their imaginative and incredible creations. With a booming and fast-moving pop culture in China, young artists are constantly exposed to all kinds of inspiration, ranging from social media, fiction and movies, magazines, and daily life in a globalized context. This exhibition explores Chinese traditions and modernization, fantasy and science fiction, as well as literary narrative and social realism. The title *Inexplicable* refers to an experience that is indescribable and inconceivable to the beholder. The show aims to introduce audiences to multi-faceted styles of art forms that are made by millennials, whose works mirror the society in which they dwell.

A sense of dark humour is embedded in the style of Cai Zebin's (b. 1988), Liang Ban's (b. 1985), Liu Mengxing's (b. 1990), and Pan Jianfeng's (b. 1973) works. By reversing the roles of humans and objects, or otherwise mocking the emotional reactions of human beings being objectified, the artwork forces the audience to re-evaluate its day-to-day life in society. Whether it is the shaking butt of a human sculpture trying to untie itself from the wall, or the suffocating piece of human "meat" packaged in a plastic bag, the audience cannot help but admire the artists' fantastical representation of a consumeristic world, in which misplacement becomes a motif to satirize a miserable existence. Instead of using a satirical tone, Liu Mengxing applies a playful manner in her collages to re-present trivial objects that are often forgotten in their existence.

In Ju Anqi's (b. 1975), Tao Yi's (b. 1978), and Wang Ji's (b. 1988) paintings, they use abstraction to refer to something symbolic in our culture, as the idea of abstraction is to distill the essence of an object. For example, Ju Anqi's grass painting references calligraphy, where the "grass script" is a style of writing from ancient China; grass perseveres and is strong, as it is never defeated by a difficult environment. Tao Yi uses the shape of a diamond to address how diamonds symbolize the sun and light in early human civilization. However, the artist chooses to emphasize the decorative purpose of the diamond shape in his paintings, rather than its historical source, and thus transforms it into an architectural ornament. In Wang Ji's splendidly colourful paintings, she explores the boundary between an imaginative and real space. Viewing her works is like falling into a rabbit hole and wandering in a wonderland that prompts audiences to question what they see.

Literature and film have always provided a rich source of inspiration for young artists, who are interested in reinterpreting a classical novel/film in a modern setting that connects with contemporary audiences. In Dai Chenlian's (b. 1982) shadow play animation, he restages a classical Chinese ghost story from the Tang Dynasty. Works from Shi Yiran's (b. 1983) *Peacock Town* series are a synthesis of her research on rural communities and her childhood memories. The artist restructures these montages into fictional scenes to reveal the development of contemporary societies in China.

Born and raised in an era bombarded with images from various regions and periods, both Wu Di (b. 1979) and Yan Heng (b. 1982) perceive and reinterpret pictures by complicating the surfaces with mixed media. To Wu, collaging photography and prints, classical motifs, and pop culture on paintings not only creates novel meanings to existing visual representations, but also places the power of

narration in the hands of audiences. Yan's figurative canvases appropriate scenes from familiar fictional works or current events, and reconstructs the plane with installation pieces, ultimately elucidating alternative perspectives while taking into account the impact of technology.

While many young artists rely on new media in their ventures, some reconsider the roots of their traditions to originate artistic languages that are constrained by neither time nor culture. Inspired by a statement from *Zhuangzi*, an ancient anthology that exemplifies Daoist teachings, Tang Bohua (b. 1986) has created a hand-drawn animation that ponders on human nature in probing the unknown universe even when enclosed by self-limitation. Tang paints each frame on plasterboard, as craftsmen did a millennium ago, connecting Chinese traditions to the present.

The nod towards a medium that carries Chinese sentiments is also apparent in Xia Qingyong's (b. 1988) abstract landscapes delineated with Xuan paper fibres. To represent lively imagery of rivers and mountains with a seemingly fragile material, Xia reinforces the Chinese philosophy of conquering the unyielding by yielding. Also drawing on seemingly opposing elements from nature, Zheng Lu (b. 1978) threads Chinese calligraphy into a frozen moment of splashing water in his stainless steel sculpture. By transforming text into a three-dimensional figure, Zheng juxtaposes the abstraction of history with a solid material from modern times, evoking the Daoist teaching of "action without action".

The mysterious relationship between humankind and nature has always been a fascinating theme in art that many painters cannot resist revisiting. The powerful connection between humans and nature illustrates the reverence artists possess toward something inconceivable and untouchable. It is with this concept that we delve into Xu Dawei's (b. 1980) and Xu Xinwu's (b. 1984) work, both of whom explore the fantastical realm of energy field within the universe, kindling an intimate conversation between past and present, real and surreal, human and object. Although we do not see a human figure in the magnificent composition, the suggestion of a human perspective is projected from the artist's point of view, which is an immersive sensation where the viewer and the artist, together, are drawn into the fantastical space.

The two installation artists Song Chen (b. 1979) and Tant Zhong (b. 1990) created site-specific works, using the unique characteristics of their favoured materials as an extension of the exhibition space. Song Chen is known for "molding" sculptures and creating installations using the most organic element of this planet—earth. Like the goddess *Nūwa* who created human beings on Earth, Song Chen is also the goddess of creation who breathed life into the forest covered with earth. Tant Zhong has an acute observation of the subtle relationship between different materials, which she cleverly utilizes to produce works that seem to stand magically on their own without substantial interference from the human hand. Zhong even describes the "elasticity" and "natural force" of materials themselves, and perhaps even sees herself as merely an assistant to the materials.

## About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China.

Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects, and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, Pearl Lam Galleries is dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

The four branches of Pearl Lam Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore represent an increasingly influential roster of contemporary artists. Chinese artists Zhu Jinshi and Su Xiaobai, who synthesise Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries has also introduced leading international artists, such as Jenny Holzer, Leonardo Drew, Carlos Rolón/Dzine and Yinka Shonibare MBE, to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region, collaborating to produce thought-provoking, culturally relevant work.

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