

PearlLam Galleries

Shanghai

THE PLANE OF REWRITING

Featuring works by Huang Yuanqing, Ma Kelu, Su Xinping, Tan Ping, Tao Yi, Zhang Jian-Jun, Zhou Yangming, and Zhu Jinshi

Exhibition Dates 12 March–10 May, 2017 Monday–Sunday, 10:30am–7pm

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

Shanghai—Pearl Lam Galleries is delighted to present *The Plane of Rewriting*, an exhibition that explores the gestures of rewriting as a transformative process of self-renewal, where new traces are created on top of past debris. The exhibition brings together eight Chinese artists whose works illuminate the idea of writing, rewriting, and erasing as a thread of metaphorical actions connected to a personalised scenario in art creation. In the action of rewriting, the audience encounters the artists' deep contemplation, reflection, and transformation that informs their everyday existence in the world without presupposing any teleological goals.

As a long-term and continual process, rewriting is an individual's response to the urgency of time as well as a world of materiality. The urgency of time reflects the limited span of a person's corporeal existence, while rewriting provides artists with a way to converse with this limitation. Every moment that is experienced in the process of rewriting is intangible, self-reflexive, and provocative. With that being said, the rewriting of an individual returns to collective moments of ambiguity and pivotal decisions. *The Plane of Rewriting* gathers artists who can be seen as bearers of the plane of momentum, who reassemble those scattered but decisive moments of time. The power that converges becomes a plane of stability in the face of limitation and uncertainty, sustaining a sense of order that stands out from purposelessness and ultimate chaos.

When Huang Yuanqing (b. 1963) paints, it is never about painting, but is always about writing. With Chinese calligraphy deeply embedded in the artist's practice, Huang navigates the lines on his canvas as if he were writing Chinese hieroglyphs. A twist, turn, mark, or finish is inspired by a literati expression, in which painting and writing have the same origin, leading viewers to ponder whether the unrecognisable scribbles and graffiti are a word or an image. As completion seems unattainable for Huang, he returns to his old paintings to retouch or erase them; by "rewriting" over traces of the past, the artist is able to sustain a state of self-renewal and constant reformation.

Looking at Ma Kelu's (b. 1954) landscape paintings from the past to the present, we notice a progression in his artistic trajectory. As a member of the No Name Society in the 1970s, Ma was one of the few pioneering Chinese artists to paint using an impressionist style. The depiction of light and colour was most prominent in his 1970s landscape series; however, from 1998 to 2000, Ma painted another landscape series named *Williamsburg* in Brooklyn, which was more rational and objective compared to his earlier expressive brushwork. The artist took a new turn in 2006 when he recreated the *Williamsburg* series on a larger scale, which is seen as a revisit to the district in which he once lived. The area has been transformed from a district of abandoned warehouses and factories to an avant-garde and fashionable paradise full of galleries, cafés, and studios in more recent years. By repainting a neighbourhood that has since evolved beyond recognition, Ma expresses a sense of nostalgia towards the desolated home in his memory.

In ancient Chinese philosophy, landscape paintings were seen as a way to see the world through the mind rather than the eyes. Su Xinping (b. 1960) creates this "landscape of the mind" in a grey overtone that is neither representational nor allegorical, but an image or a shadow that exists in his memory. Su's art elucidates the complicated relationship of a personal history with a public one, a history that he struggles to cope with, namely the urban landscape of a quickly developing China, which contains hidden wounds, fragmented moments, and latent environmental issues. By creating a landscape of personal memory within the framework of a historical progression, we see an individual's endeavour to rewrite his own history.

How should a viewer perceive a painting when it is neither solely narrative nor just abstract, but is rather “abstract narrative”? When a circle appears in Tan Ping’s (b. 1960) painting, it is no longer a shape, but a reminder of a shocking experience the artist had when looking at cancer cells in a tumour taken away from his father’s body in a hospital, which he later appropriated as a personal mark in his artwork. Taking human cells as his inspiration, Tan focuses on the free states of “spreading” and “proliferating”, which are similar to writing unconsciously, while at the same time consciously converting these actions into structured images.

Calculation and precision are words that may come to mind when looking at Tao Yi’s (b. 1978) paintings. As a successor of Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, Tao favours the absolute order of geometry, a truth that sustains itself in the uncertain and chaotic universe. However, by adding a few black wiggly lines on top of a perfectly structured geometrical composition, the artist seems to be hinting at the “imperfection” of the world, as perfection does not truly exist. The stability of the pictorial plane in Tao’s paintings achieves a kind of sublimity in terms of visual aestheticism.

The ephemerality of time highlights the poignant nature of life. Material objects fade and humans die, but culture remains. In Zhang Jian-Jun’s (b. 1955) performance, he “rewrites” *Qian Zi Wen*, an ancient Chinese poem and symbol of Chinese culture. The gesture of writing transforms from a private practice to a public performance, as the poem is rewritten using a modern style of calligraphy and contemporary punctuation symbols that did not exist in the original ancient text. Zhang’s performance installation hints at the transience of time in the face of a changing culture and globalised world.

At first glance, Zhou Yangming’s (b. 1971) paintings consisting of a multitude of hand-drawn lines that can be described as the result of homogeneous repetition, but heterogeneous reformation is what truly captures the spirit of his art. Although his lines pile on top of each other in a similar manner, it is with acute observation that viewers are able to distil the emotion, physicality, and mood that looms behind each individual line. The meditative austerity of repeating the same action (drawing lines) over and over is a record of the artist’s daily life, and thus becomes a collection of memories manifested in neatly arranged lines.

The relationship between painting and installation becomes more intimate and interwoven in Zhu Jinshi’s (b. 1954) work as he appropriates certain qualities of painting into that of a “painting-installation”. Instead of painting on a canvas’ surface, a thick mass of colourful paints is squeezed, or perhaps hidden, between two canvases, causing the audience to ask: is this a painting or an installation? Zhu’s transformative use of painting materials (paint and canvas) in his installation underscores an artistic exploration of the boundaries between of different art forms.

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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