

PearlLam Galleries

Shanghai

Decorative Art = Design? Design = Art?

Exhibition dates 15 March–21 May, 2023, Monday–Sunday, 10:30am–7pm

Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, 203, 2/F, 117 Xianggang Road, Shanghai, China 200002

Shanghai—A “new unity, between art and technology” emphasised in the Bauhaus Manifesto has directly nurtured and laid the foundation for the modernist design movement with functionalism as the cornerstone. Looking back at history, the new art movement and decorative design movement outside of this context are in opposition to the excessively cold style of industrialisation. Since the 1980s, the reflection on the international unified style of homogenisation has led to the rise of a series of contemporary design movements such as postmodernism.

Since 1993, Pearl Lam has held a series of exhibitions in Hong Kong dedicated to promoting design as an art form. The highly acclaimed touring exhibition *Awakening: La France Mandarine—The French Influence on Chinese Art* showed for the first time the importance of contemporary decorative art and its design concept in China. In keeping with the gallery’s “design is art” philosophy, *Decorative Art = Design? Design = Art?* raises questions about the hierarchical concept of art forms from the Western perspective and advocates following the Chinese literati tradition, where decorative art, design and fine art are on an equal footing. This show calls for the support of traditional handicrafts through a more diverse and open attitude while integrating the possibilities brought by new materials and technology. Rather than strictly adhering to “form follows function”, the concept and narrative of the work is key.

This exhibition aims to blur the differences and boundaries between craftsmen, designers, and artists. By skilfully arranging design and art works, different kinds of works exist independently yet echo off of each other at the same time. This exhibition features decorative art pieces by André Dubreuil and XYZ Design; conceptual design works by A.A. MURAKAMI (aka Studio Swine), Xue Tao, and Danful Yang; and selected artworks by artists Philip Colbert, Ni Zhiqi, Zhang Tianju, and Zhao Yiqian.

A leading figure in contemporary decorative art and design, French decorative artist André Dubreuil’s works are infused with fantasy and classical style characteristics through his unique way of working with various materials. His *Sleeves Vase* has a simple cylindrical form, but the design is elevated with a gentle, elegant ribbon detail. It is full of rhythmic music, revealing an implicit and poetic natural dynamic beauty.

XYZ Design is a design team led by Pearl Lam, who firmly believes that art, as an inclusive rather than exclusive medium, should give artists the freedom to experiment with new ways of expression as well as new media and new technologies. Inspired by cubism in the history of Western modern art, *Cube Coffee Table* features interspersed and overlapping stainless-steel cubes as the table base and constructs a futuristic urban landscape image.

A.A. MURAKAMI, the duo from the UK and Japan behind Studio Swine, an art, design, and film collective, is presenting a decorative ring from the *Hair Highway* series, which combines hair and natural resin to create objects inspired by Shanghai Deco. This series is also a modern interpretation of the Silk Road. With China being the world's largest importer of tropical hardwood and exporter of hair, composite materials made of hair and resin can bring sustainable alternatives to the earth's decreasing hardwood resources.

Chinese artist Xue Tao, who was born in Dali, Yunnan province, has developed his own artistic language and is known for his sculptures and installation works created with discarded newspapers. His exhibited works are all made of newspaper and metal wire. Newspapers are a source of information in all aspects of human life and society; it is used for propaganda and a symbol of history. For Xue Tao, using everyday materials preserves history. Perhaps one day someone will try to unlock a mystery from this series of works, which is like discovering a new chapter in the life of the world and opening a treasure that has been forgotten for a long time.

Danful Yang is one of the earliest conceptual designers in Asia. She skillfully combines traditional Chinese handicrafts with Western modern materials and concepts to create dynamic and interesting works. Her *Packing Me Softly* series explores the attitudes between how people view contents and the process of packaging. The packaging box bound with adhesive tape has been manually embroidered and remade by craftsmen with silk thread, infusing care and love into a common object. Compared with functionality, Yang pays more attention to the narrative in her works. She combines objects and materials in a humorous and unexpected way to create unique pieces.

Over the past 40 years of Ni Zhiqi's creative career, he has been constantly exploring the concept of time and space. In his *Vacuum* series, he expresses unspecified traces of feelings by using a combination of paint and handmade collages. From the ancient Guizhou handmade paper found locally to the use of various materials, the artist fills his canvas with bright tones and layers of materials. The concave and convex texture of the surface of the canvas naturally records the edge line from wet to dry, and every texture formed by different temperatures and humidity carefully pulls in the viewer's attention. With the matrix-like presentation method and the artist's unique "Ni tone" colour, the artist constantly magnifies the beauty of the texture made by the multiple levels of creative materials and the details of the edges, showing a plain and unpretentious atmosphere.

Philip Colbert is often referred to as the "godson of Andy Warhol" and has garnered a global following with his iconic lobster persona and hyper-pop aesthetic paintings. In the sculpture *Sitting Sunflowers (Van Gogh Chair)*, he continues to use his iconic lobster persona to convey his interest in contemporary pop culture and its relationship with traditional art history. Colbert's series of furniture works reflects the vague interpretation between the aesthetics and the functionality of the works as well as expresses the collective power of the public's perception of things.

Zhang Tianju's artistic practice mainly focuses on painting. He has a strong interest in traditional Chinese landscape and aims to present classical landscapes with a new contemporary look. The artist begins to create from the most natural and unprocessed state of the canvas. Without following the general steps and conventions of canvas painting, the artist arbitrarily combines water stains with low-contrast colours and inadvertently left lines, superimposing them layer by layer to build an extremely unique painting language. Zhang is mainly exhibiting paintings with blue-purple tones in this show. The artist uses fine but transparent "point" strokes to create a vivid picture, drawing in viewers and immersing them in the scattered springs, rocks, and trees.

Since 2013, Zhao Yiqian's paintings have focused on the visual reproduction of historical memory. In his recent works, an ironic smiley face symbol can always be found amidst religion-related depictions, like a spirit floating inside the painting that shows a hidden reflection of the artist's inversion of beliefs in the consumer era. The *New Idol* sculpture series was cast by traditional sculpture methods, reshaping the craftsmanship in artistic creation with the help of modern technology. It combines a sense of religious

rituals since BC and the cartoon images of the current consumer era, showing viewers the mysterious spiritual power of the monument while also conveying a sense of solemnity and witty fable warning.

About Pearl Lam Galleries

Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. Founded in 2005, the gallery plays a vital role in stimulating international dialogue and cross-cultural exchange between the East and West.

Following a rigorous programme, Pearl Lam Galleries presents museum-quality exhibitions that re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice in Asia. With a thoughtfully balanced roster of Chinese and international artists, the gallery is strategic in its curation, positioning itself as an educator.

The gallery maintains a flagship space in the historic Pedder Building in Hong Kong, whilst the Shanghai gallery is situated in the heritage architecture in the Bund district. With a team of international staff, Pearl Lam Galleries' reach is global, having presentations at major international art fairs including Art Cologne, Art Basel, Frieze Masters, and West Bund Art and Design.

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