

PearlLam Galleries

Hong Kong

HEART OF THE MATTER: A Solo Exhibition by Chen Yufan

Exhibition dates 30 June–3 September, 2023 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm

Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Hong Kong—Pearl Lam Galleries is pleased to present *Heart of the Matter*, a solo exhibition by Shanghai-based artist Chen Yufan. On view are different series of two- and three-dimensional objects together with a selection of installation works. Chen explores the subject of regional geography and examines how it can shape our perception. *Heart of the Matter* invites viewers to pay attention to the nature of our consciousness and, in particular, our association with a physical object to reveal kinship among individuals, communities, and society as a whole.

The artist is known for *Mulan River Project* (2011), a collaboration with his brother Chen Yujun, which delves into the migratory patterns of people and goods of the Mulan River located in their hometown, Putian in Fujian Province. This signature project has paved the way for Chen's investigation on the fluidity of our self-identity. At a time when we can no longer differentiate between art, cultural commodities, and objects of appropriation, Chen has become sceptical of the use of art to initiate any positive changes in society. Conversely, his counter strategy is to turn inward. Using the neo-Confucius principle of metaphysics 《格物致知》 as a guide, Chen provokes new meanings of objecthood from a socioeconomic standpoint.

Bombarded by disparate histories, incessant urban development, and often conflicting demands of our surroundings, human existence appears to have become increasingly uncertain. How best should art be utilised as a tool for practising self-discipline to recover a fragmented self? Chen states, "Space is no longer a flat image. It is a tangible and psychological presence that can be experienced. While the dimensions of physical space cannot be altered, we can transform our mental and spiritual spaces through art."

Chen's works offer a glimpse into the transformative potential of art with the aim of evoking new thoughts and emotions. His two-dimensional hybrid paintings and installations are formally linked to convey an adaptable quality and are open to different interpretations with their material means. The movement of colours, dots, and lines duly transforms our reading of both space and time.

The placement of artworks in this exhibition conveys a narrative, from first presenting the unity of an object to shedding light on Chen's use of material to reflect on social order. The next section then focuses on our collective ambivalence with remnants and the derivative nature of art in an era of dematerialisation. *Heart of the Matter* concludes with an intervention that provides the audience with multiple endings, knowingly offering people the possibility of embarking on a new existential journey, seeking a containment for spiritual mourning, or accepting the predicament of life becoming increasingly derivative.

For *Into One*, Chen used an electric soldering iron to inscribe minute dots onto a sheet of paper as a practice of daily ritual. This meditative work expresses his psychological detachment towards past family memories and childhood imagination. One can see a cube at the centre of this drawing, possibly suggesting a private interior that severs all ties with society. Using the technique of rammed earth to combine demolished wall fragments from his over 300-year-old ancestral house with soil, straw, reed, and acrylic paint, *Cube of Space-Time* is a spirited yet generic vessel. Our longing for permanence and material culture is met with an infatuation with its fleeting quality. *Ideal Country* is a specimen drawing that illustrates a frog in detail; this imagery is juxtaposed with its faint profile in front of an imaginary emblem on the right side of the drawing.

Rods of Civilisation is composed of multiple free-standing wooden rods that are made from scraps and offcuts of redwood gathered from Putian. Putian is one of the main distribution woodworking centres in the Asia Pacific region. The use of wood fragments with different colours simulates the integration of different communities into a homogenous whole. *Throw in the Air—Scale of Freedom II* represents the imbalanced rights of women from a global perspective. The flow and direction of paint on the painted surface connote a constant state of flux and instability. *Slice of Civilisation* deconstructs the notion of conformity by slicing wooden sceptres into equal parts and displaying them in a grid format on a flat surface. *Uncertain Landscape—Spring* experiments with the layering of paint until the original contour of the landscape image disappears. In the *Derivative* series, Chen integrates various mediums onto a simple, austere, and monochromatic surface, which he then rearranges in a playful manner. Through this process, he transforms the surface into a proportioned and serial grid that blurs the boundary between painting and sculpture. With stylistic reference to a reliquary that includes wooden elements and neon light, *Morgue* suggests a temporary place for honouring the deceased. For *1,2,1,1,3...*, an automatic typewriter is placed in the middle of two large arch-shaped white paintings. The pairing of white light encourages audiences to enter a pristine and unknown space whereby the script for recording our experiences that lie beyond is to be written.

About Chen Yufan

Chen Yufan was born in Putian, Fujian Province in 1973. He completed his bachelor's degree at the College of Fine Arts at Fujian Normal University in 1997 and graduated with a master's degree from the Integrated Art Department at China Academy of Art in 2007. Chen now lives and works in Shanghai, China.

Chen Yufan takes his inspiration from Daoism and Zen Buddhism. His minimalist abstract paintings hover between visual art and literature—or at least the appearance of literature. He turns Daoist and Zen Buddhist philosophies into a personal interpretation and meditation through a repetitive process of employing dots, regular lines, and pure colours. Chen's work revolves around the optical structure and the force of intent; his unique artistic expression is grounded in both the assembly and scatter of objects and space. Through surfaces composed of dots and lines as well as spaces constructed by surfaces and objects, a trace of time is unleashed when these elements overlay upon one another. The dialogue between the artist and his mediums becomes a significant subject, resembling that of an internal meditation; when seen from a contemporary art perspective, Chen's work is a form of performance art rooted in concepts.

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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