

# Pearl Lam Galleries

Shanghai

## The Shape of Time

Exhibition dates 9 June–31 August, 2023, Monday–Sunday, 10:30am–7pm

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

Shanghai—Pearl Lam Galleries is pleased to present the group exhibition *The Shape of Time*, featuring works from artists Zhu Jinshi, Ni Zhiqi, Wang Xiaosong, Chen Yufan, Ren Ri and Zhu Peihong. This exhibition explores how time becomes an important factor during an artist's creative process. Although we are unable to observe time directly, it is still possible for us to glimpse "the shape of time" through human activity under different circumstances and moments as well as the different cognitions and interpretations of forms of life. All six exhibiting artists have either lived or studied abroad in the past. Having been exposed to both Eastern and Western influences, they use their own interpretation and a rhetorical means from their life experiences to express "the shape of time" that is formed in their inner worlds, building their own personal narrative styles and artistic languages.

In his 1962 book *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, George Kubler (1912–1996), a professor of art history at Yale University, calls for a reflection on "the shape of time", critiquing the metaphor of the growth, aging, and death of organisms as the regular "biological model" narrative illusion. This exhibition reappropriates *The Shape of Time* as a title, exploring the progressive utopian ideal which has been prevalent in the West since the 1970s to 1980s. The accelerating geopolitical fission and the rapid development of current globalisation have caused a fierce confrontation between multiple historical narratives. As the river of art history keeps surging, it has become clearer to us that "the shape of time" is not limited to a singular viewpoint but contains multiple perspectives depending on different circumstances and moments. Unlike the emphasis on a logical and rational way of thinking in the West, the East places a higher value on feelings and intuition as espoused by traditional Eastern philosophy, leading to a completely different oriental aesthetic.

Zhu Jinshi's art practice over the past 40 years has encompassed both abstract painting and conceptual installation—two practices that parallel each other while sometimes being confrontational. Zhu's unique "impasto painting" uses strong, intense techniques, where he employs palettes, wall trowels, wooden shovels, and fifteen-centimetre brushes to apply heavy colours of paint onto the canvas. He emphasises the sculptural and three-dimensional effect created by his materials. The gaps, fractures, white space, thickness, and paint form a self-contained visual system. In this exhibition, Zhu uses materials such as rice paper and bamboo in his installations. The physical properties and cultural significance of the paper itself dissipate and the soft paper is given architectural volume as it is lightly stacked into a complex and sturdy form. In an open space, the art becomes public instead of private. The work becomes a part of the space, creating a special structural landscape.

In Ni Zhiqi's *Alhambra* series, which combines both collage and paint, the artist has chosen to cover the canvas with a specific handmade paper produced by ancient and secretive Chinese papermaking techniques. The works focus on the Alhambra's tile patterns and evoke a feeling of infiniteness while

recalling memories of the red palace built by the Moors in Spain in the Middle Ages. With the help of Chinese traditional techniques, the artist's gentleness and warmth are slowly revealed. The core concept hidden in the faded colour and rough edges of his works is a philosophical outlook on time and memories from an Asian perspective.

Wang Xiaosong has always worked in the traditional medium of oil on canvas, although through continuous practice, he has broken the visual definition of the inherent rectangular outer frame or other geometric boundaries in traditional painting to create his innovative "multidimensional paintings" concept. "Multidimensional paintings" aim to explore the curves and wrinkles within artistic expression. Wang extends the lines, colours, composition, texture, and other variables in flat painting to a multi-dimensional level. By using a large-scale monochrome paved, concave and convex surface, he strives to explore the relationship between forms and variables in a curved space. His thought-provoking work conveys a life and soul beyond its material form, using curved shapes as a metaphor for the anxiety, spiritual dilemmas, and variability of human nature.

Chen Yufan takes his inspiration from Daoism and Zen Buddhism, as seen in his unique meditative process where he repeatedly arranges dots, 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 dispersion 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 one another. The dialogue between the artist and his mediums becomes a significant subject, resembling that of an internal meditation, and is also a form of performance art rooted in concepts. In this exhibition, Chen's work explores new possibilities in painting, as he goes beyond two-dimensional painting to create three-dimensional works. He has been experimenting with how to form visually integrated and interconnected relations among the forms, contents, and concepts of artworks.

Ren's art is easily recognisable because of a very special medium he uses: beeswax. His understanding of bee psychology and nature helps him in his creative process. His sculptures represent the truth of how humans interact with nature, which involves harmony, destruction, molding, and interference. The results can be unpredictable, sometimes volatile, but sometimes wondrous. Ren's first series, *Yuansu I: Geometric Series* (2008), incorporates several beeswax maps. In *Yuansu II*, the queen was put in the middle of the box, while the other bees started building around her. Every seven days, a reference to the seven days of creation, Ren randomly changed the position of the box by rolling dice to create the shape of the sculpture. As for *Yuansu III*, it is a performance that shows the relationship between humans and bees. Ren Ri presented himself as a surface, pushing bees onto his face and experiencing a great number of stings.

Zhu Peihong focuses on the dots, lines, and colour patches that flash on his canvas in the process of creation as well as the traces left behind due to their convergence and dissolution. The brushstrokes overlap and cover each other, and the paint slowly and repeatedly drips and spreads, solidifies, and stops, until these fragmented traces, reaching an internal order, organically connect with each other and construct the conscious cyberspace perceived by the artist's mind. From Zhu Peihong's point of view, the consciousness of all living things within the universe are linked to form a network of consciousness. When he engages in his creative process, the conscious energies resonate with the colours in the painting and guide the movement from line to line. These lines on the canvas form a pathway that multiplies and goes on different moving trajectories. Sometimes they gather and sometimes they dissipate, which ultimately achieves a kind of inner order, nature and balance.

## 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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