

# PearlLam Galleries

Shanghai

## FLÂNEUR: A Solo Exhibition by Ni Zhiqi

Exhibition dates 6 November, 2023—7 January, 2024 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 *Flâneur*, a survey exhibition of different series of abstract and figurative paintings made by Ni Zhiqi during the past fifteen years. Ni is the quintessential flâneur, one who wanders around and takes in one's surroundings, bearing the heart and soul of a modern painter. As a native Shanghainese, he extracts what is seemingly mundane from our daily lives to reflect on the essence of time and memories.

Like many Chinese artists of his generation, Ni's study abroad at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in Belgium during the 1990s proved to be a life-changing experience. As a long-time professor of design at East China Normal University in Shanghai, Ni has influenced a whole generation of students, yet his interdisciplinary career has largely been overlooked by the contemporary art history of Shanghai. Drawing from a wide interest in art history, public art, music, and design, Ni upholds the core belief of Joseph Beuys that everyone is an artist. Ni has also been inspired by Belgian surrealist René Magritte, Cubist Georges Braque, and Piet Mondrian from the De Stijl movement. Furthermore, he has always taken an active interest in fashion design. In close association with the Antwerp Six was Martin Margiela. Margiela's radical use of white and mundane materials as the basis for his couture has posed a significant influence on Ni's aesthetics. Ni utilises basic and found materials for his artworks, while preserving an economy for his visual expression that bears resemblances to the Arte Povera movement of the 1970s.

*Flâneur* captures Ni's attitude towards the practice of art. Ni claims, "Travelling is an indispensable part of my life. What amazes me is that I cannot predict what I am going to encounter when I travel around the world." With reference to an essay titled *The Painter of Modern Life* written by 19<sup>th</sup> century French poet Charles Baudelaire, there is a deep sense of belonging in Ni's oeuvre. Baudelaire states, "To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world." To embrace what is perpetually foreign in fact speaks of the desire of a free spirit individual who is eager to absorb the world around him. Modernity has provided us with a new relationship with time and space; Ni taps into his surroundings like a wishful wanderer, coming to terms with the temporal qualities of lives and emotions with an open format of working. If public space represents something truly heterogenous in nature, then Ni uses writing, photography, collages, sculpture, books, and painting at his disposal to shed light on its existential potential by bringing what is temporal closer to our being.

This exhibition opens with a white robe worn by the artist that is presented in front of a work from his *Vacuum* series as the backdrop. The intention here is to encourage the audience to ponder on the role and figure of an artist. A series of paintings of windows inspired by Ni's travels in Europe are on display at different locations within the gallery to provoke an association of being inside a temporary dwelling.

The *Vacuum* series consists of colour field paintings that investigate composition, lines, edges, hues, and texture in relation to our perception. The *A.M.* series experiments with the use of dyed leather and the plastic quality of painting. An irregular hanging of figurative paintings, portraits, together with selected collage works along the gallery corridor simulates a train compartment or a fluid time travel of sorts. Ni's signature coffee-stained paintings depict a warm yet comfortable field, blurring the distinction between a painting or remnant from the everyday. Inspired by a visit to a fortress situated in Granada, Spain, the *Alhambra* series proposes a visual refuge from the tumultuous histories of a UNESCO world heritage site. Ni combines collage, ancient handmade paper, and paint to cover the canvas. The works depict imaginary tile patterns and evoke a sentiment of infiniteness while recalling memories of the red palace built by the Moors in the Middle Ages.

*Flâneur* aims to bridge the gap between art and life. Ni says, "Art is about the comprehensive experiences of life and feelings. One's life is composed of countless possibilities and casual experiences. If one wants to search for a more pure and authentic aspect of life, one should appreciate life sincerely."

## About Ni Zhiqi

Ni Zhiqi (b. 1957, Shanghai, China) came to prominence with his early expressions and explorations in surrealism as an up-and-coming young artist during the '85 New Wave Movement. In the 1990s, the artist furthered his studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Belgium, where he was awarded the first-class prize in the exhibition by Karel Veslat. He currently lives and works in Shanghai.





## 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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