

PRESS RELEASE

YAN PEI-MING AGAINST THE LIGHT

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MIRABELLPLATZ 2, 5020 SALZBURG



Yan Pei-Ming's new series of works explore the complexities of current global developments and their multilayered impact, on a societal as well as a personal and emotional level. While in recent years Yan Pei-Ming's practice has been characterised by his engagement with the works and legacies of other painters, including Gustave Courbet, this exhibition marks the artist's return to the self. Created during the last few months, the self-portraits and still-lives of this exhibition are pervaded by feelings of constriction and solitude experienced during the artist's confinement. In these diverse paintings, Yan Pei-Ming examines the unprecedented inner conflicts of the present moment in an intimate and piercingly direct way.

Deeply rooted in the tradition of European painting, Yan Pei-Ming's works are interrelated by their shared preoccupation with the passing of time. The key themes of his paintings have long concerned history or the history of art and classical pictorial themes remain prevalent in this new series. Yan Pei-Ming's still-lives depicting skulls are reminiscent of vanitas paintings of the seventeenth century, but also of modernist artists like Paul Cezanne. The works evoke established iconographic connotations such as the transience and fragility of life, while also embodying a universal and very contemporary quality – a duality characteristic of the artist. Painted in a period of physical isolation, during which each day resembled the next, the passage of time gained a new

dimension for the artist, prompting him to re-examine this classic theme for the first time in three decades. His subjects tread a line between traditional forms of representation and contemporary cultural relevance, inviting interpretation from a classical perspective as well as from the present moment.

Yan Pei-Ming's self-portraits document a certain turning point in the artist's work. He has recently returned to this genre of painting, which was significant during the first stages of his artistic development, after avoiding it for over 30 years.

I did my first self-portrait at the age of thirteen. As I had no model, I painted myself with the help of a mirror, without bothering anyone. [...] When I arrived in Europe, I made a trip to Amsterdam and saw Rembrandt's self-portraits. Since then, I haven't taken up the subject again. When you look at his self-portraits, you can see the passage of time. It's so extraordinary, it disturbed me. I said to myself: I'm going to think about it and I've been thinking about it for ten years. – Yan Pei-Ming

The portraits show the artist from different angles, becoming a sustained reflection on his own image during the recent period of isolation. These works document his emotions at specific moments, like snapshots of his mental state, captured at different times of day and under different lighting conditions. In *Self-portrait with Mask* Yan Pei-Ming's inquisitive and direct gaze, emphasised by the concealment of his lower face, captivates the viewer in a haunting way. The portrait visualises a key cultural moment – the ubiquity of the mask – while capturing emotions that are paradoxically as universal as they are isolated.

A very personal exhibition with a focus on self-portraits, which opens at the Musée Unterlinden, Colmar in 2021, will serve to further cement this inward turn in Yan Pei-Ming's practice. Further exhibitions will take place at the Palais des Papes and the Collection Lambert, Avignon in 2021, as well as the Schlossmuseum, Linz in 2022.

Most recently, the artist's work was shown in 2019 at the Musée Courbet, Ornans; the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon; the Petit Palais – Musée des Beaux-Arts de la ville de Paris; and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, in which the artist paid homage to Gustave Courbet through the lens of his own biography.

Image: Yan Pei-Ming, *Self-portrait with Mask*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 4 panels, each 200 x 100 x 6,5 cm (78,74 x 39,37 x 2,56 in) © Yan Pei-Ming / Bildrecht, Wien 2020. Foto: Clérin-Morin.

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