

## WHITE CUBE

Christine Ay Tjoe  
*Spinning in the Desert*  
White Cube Hong Kong  
18 May – 28 August 2021

White Cube Hong Kong is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Christine Ay Tjoe. Produced during the past year, this new series of large-scale paintings are a response to the changes imposed on our lives during the pandemic, and the potential for inward reflection this has offered.

Intuitive, gestural and deeply expressive, Ay Tjoe's working practice requires intense periods of concentration, during which the artist enters an almost trance-like state. Abstract compositions are built up from expressive mark-making, often converging towards a point of energy and a dense, build-up of colour in the centre of the canvas.

Focusing on the idea of 'ingrown' shoots, or growth from within, the paintings form part of a body of work that the artist began in 2020, and centre on the premise of a re-organisation of human needs from an internal perspective. Each is titled after the biological term 'cryptobiosis', which refers to the state of extreme inactivity that an organism enters into in response to adverse environmental conditions, when all measurable metabolic processes stop. 'This is about the specific, rare, and beautiful ability of living things,' she has said. 'Cryptobiosis offers the idea to virtually halt movement and any definite aim ahead; offering possibilities for a longer life and greater hope instead.'

Following on from the 'black' paintings, which charted the potential darkness within the human soul, the paintings in this exhibition evoke a more positive state, using, predominantly, a palette of blue, white and grey with accents of blood red. Ay Tjoe has frequently described her choice of colour as taking-up the role of a set of protagonists within the composition – each holding a certain type of character that adds to a feeling and to the overall subject matter, while marshalling an energy that drives the composition. This understanding of the graphic power of colour relates to the artist's early work, where she focused almost exclusively on printmaking and learnt how the black line can both create and hold white space. 'White sometimes becomes the full stop, the end of black and greys, but it can also be the zero within untold images', she has said. Here, the paintings are centred on the colour blue, at the middle of the colour spectrum, a way for the artist to inscribe a sense of progression of tones, suggesting an onward journey towards an unknown

destination. 'I have been using layers of subtle colours, to express how we can have more depth – and internal colour', she has remarked. 'I use predominantly blue to convey that blue is in the middle of the colour spectrum, [but] there are [also] 'higher' colours on the spectrum that we can reach toward. Blue represents hope'. Primarily made with oil bar, which is then smudged and swiped by the hand, the paintings retain a strong feeling of touch, their multitude of gestures holding an emotive potential and a direct connection to the artist's state of mind. Often beginning without any preparatory drawings, Ay Tjoe draws directly onto the white canvas, an emphatic action, creating abstract images which appear tumultuous; forceful centres of energy that contrast strongly with the paintings' areas of untouched, blank canvas.

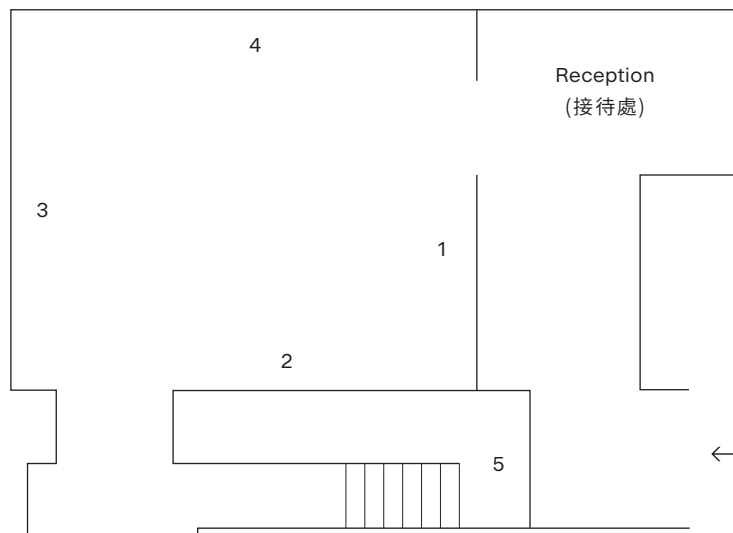
In *Blue Cryptobiosis #04* (2020-21), for example, the composition appears to be formed by a force entering from the left-hand side, as if plant matter, blown by the wind, is moving across the canvas surface. Anatomical, fungoid and egg-shaped forms are evoked, like organs or hearts, wrapped by or tangled in tendrils, textured fur-like matter and emergent growth. *Blue Cryptobiosis #12* (2021), features a nest or cocoon-like shape, an organic enclosure emphasised by its dark, just-visible interior space, while the diptych *Blue Cryptobiosis #10* (2021) features a pair of mirrored forms connecting across the adjoining picture surface, as if a cell in the process of duplication.

Born and raised a Catholic, although rejecting and then re-adopting her faith at different points in her life, Ay Tjoe has taken the title for the exhibition from the biblical story of the Israelites travelling through the desert after being expelled from Egypt; a literary counterpoint to the suffering, pandemic world we currently experience. Exploring how limitations on movement may perhaps engender greater thoughts and actions, her paintings emerge from an investigation of growth, collaboration and communication as opposed to singular direction. 'The painting just flows out. It's like I find a spirit, and the spirit helps me make it', she has remarked.



GROUND FLOOR

- 1 *Blue Cryptobiosis #05*  
2020-2021  
Oil on canvas  
200 × 180 cm | 78¾ × 70⅞ in.
- 2 *Blue Cryptobiosis #12*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
100 × 80 cm | 39⅜ × 31½ in.
- 3 *Blue Cryptobiosis #02*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
230 × 200 cm | 90⅞ × 78¾ in.
- 4 *Blue Cryptobiosis #10*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
Diptych, each: 200 × 170 cm | 78¾ × 66⅝ in.
- 5 *Blue Cryptobiosis #11*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
100 × 80 cm | 39⅜ × 31½ in.



FIRST FLOOR

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| <p>1 <i>Blue Cryptobiosis #06</i><br/>2021<br/>Oil on canvas<br/>200 × 180 cm   78¾ × 70⅞ in.</p> <p>2 <i>Blue Cryptobiosis #04</i><br/>2020-2021<br/>Oil on canvas<br/>230 × 200 cm   90⅞ × 78¾ in.</p> <p>3 <i>Blue Cryptobiosis #03</i><br/>2021<br/>Oil on canvas<br/>230 × 200 cm   90⅞ × 78¾ in.</p> <p>4 <i>Blue Cryptobiosis #09</i><br/>2021<br/>Oil on canvas<br/>200 × 180 cm   78¾ × 70⅞ in.</p> <p>5 <i>Blue Cryptobiosis #08</i><br/>2021<br/>Oil on canvas<br/>200 × 180 cm   78¾ × 70⅞ in.</p> | <p>6 <i>Blue Cryptobiosis #01</i><br/>2020-2021<br/>Oil on canvas<br/>230 × 200 cm   90⅞ × 78¾ in.</p> <p>7 <i>Always Floating In A Constant Distance 11</i><br/>2018<br/>Lithographic crayon on aluminium<br/>57 × 71.2 × 5 cm   22⅞ × 28⅞ × 1⅞ in.</p> <p>8 <i>Always Floating In A Constant Distance 15</i><br/>2018<br/>Lithographic crayon on aluminium<br/>57 × 71.2 × 5 cm   22⅞ × 28⅞ × 1⅞ in.</p> <p>9 <i>Always Floating In A Constant Distance 4</i><br/>2018<br/>Lithographic crayon on aluminium<br/>57 × 71.2 × 5 cm   22⅞ × 28⅞ × 1⅞ in.</p> |
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