

# KÖNIG GALERIE

## XIYAO WANG | ON THE WAY TO PENGLAI ISLAND



KÖNIG GALERIE | 10 MARCH – 16 APRIL 2023

KÖNIG GALERIE is pleased to present the first exhibition, ON THE WAY TO PENGLAI ISLAND, of the Chinese-born, Berlin-based painter, Xiyao Wang, in the Nave of St. Agnes in Berlin. For this unique occasion, the artist has created a new group of large, abstract works that pictorialize an imagined journey to a mythical place, Penglai Island: a recurrent motif in Chinese literature for hundreds of years. The status of this island sanctuary is one dedicated to immortality, which is reached after a long, arduous passage across a body of water. Xiyao uses the idea of transit and a destination without concrete form or end, as a starting point for the ten tableaux that hang in the central nave of St. Agnes, each participating in the visual communication of this mythical journey.

Xiyao's own trajectory as a painter mirrors the passage engendered by the works in ON THE WAY TO PENGLAI ISLAND, having been originally trained in various classical techniques — figurative oil painting, watercolours, pencil and charcoal drawings and sketches — before embarking for further study in Germany. Each of the paintings in the show gives material evidence of a formal vocabulary that develops from primary charcoal passages into colourful oil stick marks, which are layered on top of the blinding white backdrops and shaded black arabesques. The process of applying charcoal and paint is itself an act for Xiyao, and while the results reflect the spontaneity and immediacy of her movements — the expressive architecture is never planned ahead of time — they are not purely unmediated, either. Each painting emerges out of an intense interplay between the closeness to the work's surface and the view from afar, as if hovering above a landscape viewed in flight. Together, the individual canvases spell out a sentence related to the show's theme — "On the way to Penglai Island/the boat will be at sea for days and months/no one knows when we will arrive" — which brings to linguistic form something inherent in the movement within and between the paintings themselves.

The largest of these is the four-part "On the way to Penglai Island", which measures almost 3×7 metres and sits at the furthest wall of the nave. The work offers a visual anchor to the other paintings around it and trains the eye for the kind of intensity that is recorded across its white backdrop. Up close, Xiyao's intricate network of oil stick marks take on an almost haptic quality, revealing one of the massive painting's many identities as a site of accumulation, no mere image. From a distance, the lyrical dance of Xiyao's composition takes shape, returning the gaze to traces of the artist's body. Xiyao is an avid dancer, having studied different styles from a young age, and since arriving in Germany, she continues formal ballet while also practicing Tango and kickboxing, activities that inform her practice in every way and which are very much a part of the larger system of her paintings. These external engagements offer a fitting metaphor for the journeys that they are in service of, where Xiyao does not so much depict a passage as enact one through rhythm and scenography, returning viewers again and again to the tension between the vehemence of the artist's marks on the surface of her paintings and the expansiveness of their final arrangement as imagined pictorial worlds, destinies awaiting fulfilment.

Xiyao's arrival in Berlin is a welcome site, and her artistic position is one of the newest in the gallery's program. Without constraining her paintings to tradition or heritage, Xiyao nevertheless occupies a unique place between the genealogy of the German neo-expressionism of her teachers and newer approaches to the painted medium that intersect with performance within and beyond the canvas. The paintings that comprise ON THE WAY TO PENGLAI ISLAND are among the largest the artist has made to date, and the exhibition, the most extensive, and chart a bright path for her strategies of holding the smallness of touch and gesture together with the grandeur of scale. In essence, Xiyao's paintings produce nothing short of a world, a self-disclosing system, in which even the tiniest moments are given equal

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### EXHIBITIONS

EVGEN ČOPI GORIŠEK  
Match Point  
KÖNIG GALERIE  
24.02 – 18.03.2023

ANOUK LAMM ANOUK  
Different Visions of Temples  
KÖNIG SEOUL  
25.02 – 09.04.2023

ALICE FRAMIS  
Leave Here Your Fears  
KÖNIG GALERIE  
24.03 – 22.04.2023

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Tue – Sat 11 AM – 6 PM  
Sun 12 PM – 6 PM (16.04.2023)

share in the greater whole. Nothing in Xiyao's paintings is ever hidden, no trace covered over in service of a larger good. Penglai Island is an idea, a mythic place that has been transferred into a visual form without ever becoming fixed.

Xiyao Wang (b. 1992 in Chongqing, China) received a BA from Sichuan Fine Art Institute in China in 2014, and a BA and MFA from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg (2018, 2020). Her work has been featured in important international venues, including the Aurora Museum, Shanghai (2022); Jiu Shi Art Museum, Shanghai (2022); Baumwollspinnerei, Leipzig (2020); Cité internationale des arts, Paris (2018); Sprink, Dusseldorf (2018); and Chongqing Contemporary Art Center (2015), among many others. In 2017, she was nominated for the Schües Art Award and Hiscox Art Award. In 2018, Wang was the recipient of a Karl H. Ditze Foundation and DAAD PROMOS scholarship, where she studied in the MFA program at the State University of New York at Purchase. Xiyao Wang lives and works in Berlin.

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