

## YUN-FEI JI

### Together

Yun-Fei Ji (b. 1963, Beijing) presents *Together*, his fourth solo exhibition at Zeno X Gallery.

Yun-Fei Ji is a storyteller who takes contemporary events and the lives of ordinary people as subjects of his work. He addresses socio-political themes such as migration, labour and climate change and subtly denounces the impact of power structures. In the past, Ji mainly drew and painted using watercolour and ink on handmade rice paper in a visual language closely related to classical Chinese painting. To broaden the scope of his work, he recently started to experiment with oil paint and acrylic on canvas. After all, rather than being restricted to a Chinese reality, the subject matter of his work has global relevance. Both in these new paintings, as in his work on paper, Ji challenges and questions our expectations of what contemporary painting can be.

In the exhibition *Together*, Ji tells the story of a close-knit group of women he got to know when he spent some time in Beijing a few years ago. He observed how the women travelled to the city to take on work exclusively as a group. Their unique togetherness and solidarity, despite their difficult living conditions, fascinated him. The paintings in the exhibition show both the women at work and during everyday activities. He depicts how they behave and live as a group in often temporary spaces: at work in a jeans factory, during their lunch break or on their way to work. Even when they are not depicted, their presence is palpable.

Ji's work belongs to a long tradition of social criticism within art history. He refers to the influence of artists such as Hieronymus Bosch, Francisco Goya or James Ensor, as well as that of Chinese landscape painting, where certain motifs can be read both literally and figuratively. For example, high mountains symbolise rulers, wind can be interpreted as the influence of power on the people, bamboo stands for resilience. The bamboo branches in *Gather under the Bamboo* are characterised by their hard, rigid outer layer, an allusion to the strong nature of the group of women, who are at the center of this exhibition.

The most notable difference from Ji's work on paper is the ubiquity of colour. The soft, saturated colours create an intimate and vibrant atmosphere, evoking a sense of harmony and unity. However, the apparent tranquility is subverted by the multitude of patterns as well as the disorder of all kinds of objects scattered over the surface. The intensity of the image is further heightened by the flat composition and the stacked perspective which puts the viewer, as it were, in the middle of the image. While the colours emphasise the connection between man and his surroundings, the slumbering chaos reminds us that this balance is precarious and constantly under threat.

Yun Fei Ji was born in Beijing. He lives and works in New York. He has had solo exhibitions at Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, The Hilliard Art Museum in Lafayette, Honolulu Art Museum, Cleveland Museum of Art, Wellin Museum of Art, Hamilton College in Clinton, UMCA in Amherst, Krannert Art Museum in Champaign, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, Worcester Art Museum, Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University in Waltham, ICA Philadelphia, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and the Pratt Institute in New York.

Yun-Fei Ji has participated in several international exhibitions such as the Whitney Biennial in New York (2002), Lyon Biennale (2011), Biennale of Sydney (2012) and Shanghai Biennale (2014). His work is in the public collections of MoMA in New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, New Museum in New York, Rose Art Museum in Waltham, Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and many others.