

White Flame

Xue Ruozhe

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MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present Chinese artist Xue Ruozhe's latest project *White Flame* with the gallery in Beijing, opening on August 5th.

Xue Ruozhe's paintings go beyond the conventional portrayal of reality, depicting people and objects from everyday life while continuously exploring the authenticity of images. He places figures in seemingly empty yet constrained backgrounds. The faceless characters in his paintings might appear to limit viewers' interpretations, but through expressive body language and calm tones, viewers are overwhelmed by the artworks' emotions. The tension embedded within paintings extends beyond the canvas, inviting us to step onto a multi-dimensional stage between reality and surrealism.

The works exhibited in *White Flame* start with the materiality of oil painting, presenting the possibilities of white as a basic element in the language of oil painting. White, as a medium, possesses remarkable performances: under different underlying colors, it reveals rich variations. "White to White" depicts the back view of two girls standing in nearly identical postures against a white background. The different thicknesses of white create diverse textures in the composition, imbuing tranquility with a sense of strength. Another group of white-toned works "Off White" awakens viewers' perception of tranquility by capturing partial images of still figures, intending to make viewers resonate with the picture and fall into introspection.

In this exhibition, the flame, as a traditional light source, appears only once in the center of the largest painting, "False Fire." Though not serving as an actual light source, it is a trigger point of emotions within the entire exhibition. It potentially presents the inner eruption but without any concrete manifestations of color or form. The two girls with their backs turned to the audience stand amidst a stage-like backdrop, seemingly ready to step forward. Simultaneously, in "A Little Orange Book," the flame-like bright color block arrests viewers' attention, raising doubts about the authenticity of the depicted scene.

In paintings, white is often used to portray the parts illuminated by light, representing the materialization of light. The white light coming from outside the picture seems like a burning whitish flame, illuminating the forms. As the light reflects and circulates onto the canvas, it transforms into a spiritual and introspective light originating from within the work. As seen in the dark-toned artwork "After Dürer," white light outlines the contours of the black gloves, resembling twinkling flames that light up the image. This not only pays homage to the Renaissance art master, but also deliberately achieves a balance between colors and emotions through subtle brushstrokes.

Xue Ruozhe's paintings are restrained: his use of color is not intense, suggesting more colors through less than half of the color spectrum. Emotions continuously accumulate within restraint and implication. The serene portrayal of body parts in "Untitled," the contrasting tension between the skin texture and background flames in "Torch," as well as the constrained figures and controlled atmosphere in "Sealant", all demonstrate the artist's precise control over colors, stimulating viewers' infinite imagination through composed and concise color tones.

Xue Ruozhe's exploration of the painterly and viewing aspects of images is an ongoing process. He seeks breakthroughs while staying rooted in sincerity and conviction. He encompasses everything in the ever-changing environment. Using painting as a medium, he connects individuals with society, reflecting on the fluctuations of the self and the era, while igniting endless white flames beneath the seemingly calm surface.

Xue Ruozhe was born in Jiangsu Province. After graduated from Oil Painting Department of China Central Academy of Fine Arts, he continued his study in Painting Programme of Royal College of Art, and obtained his master's degree in 2015. He is the award winner of the Neville Burston Prize, Gordon Luton Prize for Fine Art and the Tom Bendheim Prize, also the recipient of China National Scholarship. He was shortlisted for Sovereign Asian Art Prize in 2022. Xue currently lives and works in Beijing and Guangzhou.

Using painting as his main artistic approach, Xue's works explore the re-contextualization and re-enchantment of figurative painting in contemporary setting, in the rift between painting and imagery, painting and its own history. Underneath the restrained pictorial narrative are Xue's hints for what has yet to be presented or is about to happen. Working with a highly restricted methodology, Xue pushes the psychological density of his paintings to the limit, the reality is then distorted by constant subtraction until the paintings reach a state of suspension and stagnation.

In recent years, his works focus on exploring the boundary between the virtual and the real.