



The Butterfly Dreaming of Becoming Zhuangzi No. 1, 2023. Oil stick, charcoal on canvas. 74 13/16 × 118 1/8 inch. Photographer: Roman März. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

XIYAO WANG *DO YOU HEAR THE WATERFALL?*

January 12 — February 17, 2024

Perrotin is proud to announce an exhibition of new works by China-born and Germany-based artist, Xiyao Wang, her first solo show in The United States. Wang is known for her immersive paintings in which gestural lines evoke landscapes, bodies, movements, and thoughts. At Perrotin, she will present ten new canvases which will debut her first paintings made entirely of charcoal, marking a shift in the artist's practice from high energy to reflective compositions. Merging Chinese philosophy, Western art history, and global mass culture, Wang's lyrical minimalist paintings transcend prescribed traditions, creating a sense of boundlessness and freedom.

With swooping lines and a unique perspective, the movement in Wang's paintings creates the illusion of ever-expanding spatial relationships. Drawing on her knowledge of both classical Chinese mountain-and-sea scrolls and the minimalism of Cy Twombly, these artworks appear to grow larger upon each viewing. While this effect is certainly within the tradition of Chinese painting, Wang invents her own interpretation of calligraphic gestures, using paint, charcoal, and oil sticks. Wang's presence is visible in these gestural strokes like a shadow of a dancer moving behind a screen.

This series marks a significant return to Chinese influences for an artist who left her country nine years ago. For example, several works incorporate the well-known parable of Dao Master Zhuangzi creating a visual reflection on the concepts of existence and perspective:

"Once upon a time, I dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly...Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man."

Taking in the significance of this story, Wang painted two large-scale works. In *Zhuangzi Dreaming of Becoming a Butterfly No. 2*, Wang's own calligraphic notation system guides viewers physically from left to right, back and forth to interact from several perspectives. Its partner, *The Butterfly Dreaming of Becoming Zhuangzi No. 1*, embraces color to punctuate the charcoal strokes as if looking at a dream in a parallel universe.

"Am I a Chinese artist who wakes up in Berlin, or am I a Berlin artist, dreaming I am in China?" This is a question that so many of her generation, born in China but educated and living in the West, must ask



Do you hear the waterfall? No. 2, 2023. Oil stick, charcoal on canvas. 78 ¾ × 74 13/16 inch. Photographer: Roman März. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Liang Xiao Yin No. 6, 2023. Charcoal on canvas. 53 1/8 × 49 3/16 inch. Photographer: Roman März. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

themselves. Being in Germany for almost one decade has made Wang keenly homesick for her family and culture. She shifted her interests from kickboxing and techno-music to lessons on the Guqin, the stringed instrument whose distinctive sound is a tool for meditation. A Chinese culture that was everywhere in her childhood, rendering it invisible, came into clear focus only when she was far from home.

Do you hear the waterfall? No. 1, 2023, the painting for which the exhibition is named, hums with the white noise of an out-of-control waterway, using arcs of charcoal lines on primed canvas. Of course, we cannot “hear” but we are moved to listen. Sound, music, and silent meditation are influences on this artist who practices yoga, kickboxing, ballet, and sitting. It is telling that when she was a child, Wang wanted to be a dancer, but her father, himself an artist, informed her that dancers have short careers while artists can work throughout their lives and be remembered even in death. Her gestural lyricism performs as a song against a whispering soundtrack.

It would be too easy to label this work “a bridge between East and West,” as if Wang’s innovations were merely a matter of cut-and-paste. That would ignore the synthesis of transnational influences, particularly global

abstraction, now readily available to artists of this generation. For example, do not assume that Wang studied calligraphy and brush painting at her college in Chongqing; the Sichuan Academy is known for its emphasis on European realism. In Hamburg, Wang rejected Chinese elements and embraced Gunther Forg or Albert Oehlen, their eccentric use of form and line and their roles as artist-as-liberator. From them, Wang absorbed the ways she could slip from the demands of realist painting as well as calligraphy to build a new aesthetic vocabulary.

Whether standing before magnificent Buddhist paintings in the caves of the Silk Road or experiencing the endless rushing of Niagara Falls, it is impossible to escape the awe inspired by these encounters. Generations of artists have tried to capture this sense of wonder, but few with the sophistication, experimentation and license of young Chinese artist Xiyao Wang.

— Barbara Pollack

[More information about the artist >>>](#)