

Esther Schipper

Tao Hui

We, Entertainment

December 15, 2023 – January 27, 2024



Image © the artist

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce **We, Entertainment**, Tao Hui's first solo exhibition with the gallery. On view will be two video installations, a sculpture, and paintings.

Tao Hui is best known for his immersive video and film works that play on the storytelling tropes of cinema and television, as well as the narrative formats of social media channels. Spanning a variety of media, **We, Entertainment** is divided into four distinct sections that together represent both a personal psychological journey and an examination of the broad societal implications of identity as it relates to gender, class, ethnicity, and cultural biases (fuelled, for example, by dichotomies of urban/rural, North/ South). As Tao's work makes clear, media emerges as a powerful force in this dynamic of contested identities, both as a destabilizing and normative influence, but also with liberating and even restorative potential.

We, Entertainment begins with **The Fall (Green)**, which finds a powerful poetic image for a world in crisis: the tail of a giant python protrudes from the floor among the animal's fleshy, bloodied fragments. Based in part on childhood folktales (a continuing source of inspiration for the artist who grew up in a rural area of China known for its imaginative storytelling) and on his memories of the 1990s TV series **New Legend of Madam White Snake** where the motif is associated with revealing one's true nature, **The Fall (Green)** represents contemporary life and the anxious emotional response one might experience in uncertain times.

The Night of Peacemaking portrays the way contemporary culture has turned traumatic experiences into entertainment. Taking the format of a TV talk show, the emotional life of a family is depicted in poignant and at times heated exchanges, especially between mother and daughter. The work includes an environment that simulates the set of such a TV program, blurring the line between studio and exhibition space and thereby aligning spectators with the audience of a talk show. Tao shifts the focus away from its narrative content to use the format as a kind of medium. The structure of the dispute but also its technical representation take on

broader significance: Thus the three different cameras, for example, come to symbolize different perspectives in a political power struggle.

Another video, **Hardworking**, has us encounter the host of a streaming infomercial, intent on selling TV sets while acknowledging both her own loneliness, and her exploitation of her audience's similar search for connection. At the same time, she also muses about the nature of reality in an age of digital screens. Her exhortations—both those to purchase the screens and those to reflect—are accompanied by her effortless movement between levels of reality: seen entering and exiting the screens she is trying to sell, the video elides all such boundaries.

The fourth section of **We, Entertainment**, turns to the still image. A series of paintings executed on opalescent paper covered with a thin layer of slices of shell represents personal experiences veiled in modified traditional imagery, some associated with Buddhist motifs. One image of intertwined, weeping snakes refers to an endless knot, a symbol of the Eight Treasures of Buddhism, while another juxtaposes the Sanskrit word for "moment," KSANA, with the image of a decaying human form. Equally important, however, is the material: A conch shell, considered a magical vessel, symbolizes the spread of the Buddha's teachings and the awakening of his subjects from the slumber of ignorance. On the floor, a large mandala of multicolored glitter also draws on the symbolic and ritual power of its medium, the Tibetan Buddhist practice of creating an image from pigment or colored sand. Yet there is a comic quality to the image of a chubby baby grabbing and punching a (smiling?) python. A symbol of impermanence, the mandala, like all such ephemeral sand mandalas, will be destroyed, its glittering plurality swept away, symbolizing the Buddhist belief in the impermanence of all material life.

Tao Hui was born in 1987 in Yunyang, Chongqing, China. He received his BFA from Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in 2010. He currently lives and works in Beijing. In 2015, Tao Hui was awarded The Grand Prize at the 19th Contemporary Art Festival Sesc_ Videobrasil: Southern Panoramas, São Paulo, and the Art Sanya & Huayu Youth Award, Sanya, China. In 2017, Tao Hui was awarded the HUGO BOSS ASIA ART: Award for Emerging Asian Artists. In 2019, Tao Hui was shortlisted for the inaugural Sigg Prize by M+ Museum, Hong Kong.

Among the artist's institutional solo exhibitions are: **Searing Pain**, Aranya Art Center, Qinhuangdao (2022); **Not at all**, OCAT Xi'an, Xi'an (2017); **New Directions: Tao Hui**, UCCA, Beijing (2015), as well as the group exhibitions and projects: **NGV Triennial**, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2023); **Cosmos Cinema**, 14th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai (2023); **Motion Is Action: 35 Years of Chinese Media Art**, By Art Matters, Hangzhou (2023); **Bordercrossing: Possibilities and Interactions**, YUZ Museum, Shanghai (2023); **Projection**, Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing (2023); **ON | OFF 2021: Carousel of Progress**, He Art Museum, Shunde (2022); **The Elephant Escaped**, Macalline Art Center, Beijing (2022); **Refrigerator Illusion**, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju (2021).

His work is represented in the collections of: Kadist Foundation, San Francisco; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art – MMCA, Seoul; K11 Foundation, Hong Kong; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; Sunpride Foundation, Hong Kong; New Century Art Foundation, Beijing; China Red Star Foundation, Beijing, and De Ying Foundation, Shanghai.

For press inquiries please contact David Ulrichs. Tel: +49 (0) 176 50 33 01 35 or david@davidulrichs.com

ESTHER SCHIPPER GMBH
POTSDAMER STRASSE 81E
D-10785 BERLIN
TEL: +49 (0)30 374433133
OFFICE@ESTHERSCHIPPER.COM
WWW.ESTHERSCHIPPER.COM