

Captain Petzel

Xie Nanxing

fora de casa

25 April – 1 June 2024

Captain Petzel is pleased to announce *fora de casa*, a solo exhibition of paintings by Xie Nanxing (b. 1970, Chongqing) opening as part of Gallery Weekend Berlin 2024.

fora de casa is comprised of eight paintings which represent a complete body of work. The title, an abstraction of the Portuguese “fora de casa”, as in “jogo fora de casa” – the away game – reveals this series’ origins: while visiting Lisbon Xie came across a notebook, the vibrant green pages of which were each marked with the lines of a football pitch. Perhaps a fun gift for the child whose bedroom walls are adorned with posters of footballers, or possibly a serious tool for the tactician for whom each match is an obsession. The markings of the football pitch – rendered most clearly against a comparable green background in *fora de casa #1* – became the basis for this group of paintings, both as a loosely interpreted formal structure for each new work and as a catalyst for their content.

Football is a paradox. So trivial yet so serious. It is not a matter of life and death, the great Liverpool manager Bill Shankly reputedly said: it is much more important than that. Or perhaps it is a simple game. Twenty-two men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, said Gary Lineker, the Germans always win. Painting is also a paradox, at least for Xie Nanxing. It is not the truth, he has said, but neither is it just a game. It is “more like a game that is close to the truth, or rather a truth-mimicking game”. He has expressed a “mistrust” of painting, and yet he has spent the last three decades engaged in a deliberate and meticulous studio painting practice.

Nowhere is Xie’s ambivalent, conflictual attitude towards painting more apparent than in the “canvas print” technique which he has often returned to over the last fifteen years and which he uses in several of these paintings. *fora de casa #8*, for example, is ostensibly the most abstract of the paintings in the exhibition – we see a central green circle, perhaps a centre circle, overlaid with faintly stippled polychromatic marks. As we continue to look, traces of figures begin to emerge to the left of the canvas, while to the right we see a harder-edged form and a rich patch of green reminiscent of the first painting in this series. These marks are in fact the literal traces of another painting which was made on an unstretched canvas that had been laid over the top of the surface we now see, such that some of the paint seeped through. That painting was then removed, never to be shown, and we are left with its “shadows” – evidence of painting having taken place.

And yet in this same series Xie Nanxing also embraces sheer painterly bravura, albeit interrupted by football scorecards, while in overtly citing Goya’s *The Sleep Of Reason Produces Monsters* (and not for the first time) Xie embraces his work’s place in a longer tradition of painting. Some paintings suggest abstraction, but others are uncharacteristically direct in their figuration. A football match can be tense and tactical, but it can also be an explosion of excitement. Catenaccio or heavy metal football. “Xie Nanxing’s paintings cannot be cast in the camps of either aestheticized objecthood or conceptual dematerialization”, the curator and art historian Ruth Noack has acutely observed, “they hover firmly in between”.