

Yan Pei-Ming

Kung Hei Fat Choi

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There are places that defy any sort of categorization: the makeshift sanctuaries that are home to hundreds, if not thousands of ceramic, glass or clay statues of the Buddha and other protective divinities, are among them. Deposited – never discarded – by their owners changing home or leaving town, the statues sit together in gardens, sometimes by the sea, their godly silhouettes mushrooming across their sanctuary's slopes, gazing into the horizon.

Enchanted by the Buddhas' benevolent, smiling gazes and the sense of suspended reality exuding from these modest havens, their sanctuaries gradually imposed themselves as the inevitable subjects of Yan Pei-Ming's new body of work.

Entitled *Kung Hei Fat Choi* which translates as “a well wish of prosperity”, this exhibition is his second solo in Hong Kong, marking a new chapter in the artist's decades-long collaboration with the gallery.

Best known for his strikingly detailed portraits of iconic figures depicted in combinations of white and grey, red or blue, this is Yan Pei-Ming's most spiritual body of work to date.

As static as statues may be, Yan Pei-Ming brings them to life: rendered in his dynamic brushstrokes, they become animated, living figures caught in moments of joy, or meditative bliss. The *sfumato* effect that envelops their portraits, infusing them with a dream-like quality, is, in reality, a depiction of the smoke from incense sticks lit all around the statues, to honour their spirits. This is Yan Pei-Ming's subtle way of infiltrating the paintings with life.

Articulated as a constellation of individual portraits gravitating around one central, large-scale 2,5 by 4 meters painting, these predominantly cobalt blue works operate a subtle twist on portraiture: usually painting from pre-existing images, Yan Pei-Ming found himself not only portraying sculptures as subjects, but also having to reproduce their painted faces onto his canvas. In a way, each of these paintings holds another painting within it.

Layering his personal history into the works' narrative, Yan Pei-Ming addresses themes of staying and leaving, losing and finding, the afterlife, the individual and the universal: each painting embodies diverging truths. The statues, once cherished by families in their homes, were left behind for unknown reasons, and deposited in public sanctuaries in one final act of reverence. Gazing into the horizon, relentlessly protecting their owners, their power is not diminished, on the contrary, they go from being solitary, domestic spirits to a collective protective force, in open-air sanctuaries, for everyone to discover, or return to.

By painting these smiling, meditative gods against deep blue, smoky backdrops, Yan Pei-Ming extracts them once again from their context, but this time, transposing them into painting, allowing them to travel beyond land and sea, giving them his own version of a new home for eternity.

Yan Pei-Ming

Yan Pei-Ming was born in Shanghai in 1960; he lives and works between Dijon, Paris and Shanghai.

An artist of international fame, born into the Cultural Revolution during the Sixties, Yan Pei-Ming became a propaganda artist under the Maoist regime before emigrating to France in 1981, where he first studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Dijon, then at the Institut des Hautes-Études en Art Plastiques in Paris.

From the beginning of his career Pei-Ming has stood out for his interest in the human figure and portraiture. He began his series of expressionistic and monumental portraits of Mao Zedong in 1987 before moving on to other world-famous figures like the Buddha, the Pope and Bruce Lee, and private themes like the self-portrait and the figure of the father.

Yan Pei-Ming investigates and discovers in the act of painting how the portrait breaks out of its typical straitjacket and is once again revitalized. The artist famously uses a long, mop-sized brush to create his iconic images, working rapidly with wet-into-wet oil paint, using either a combination of white and black, or red and white paint. With each brushstroke, he literally experiences with his own body the components that form the icon and how those components can be reassembled and given a new meaning.

Recent solo exhibitions have been held in prominent institutions such as: Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (2023); Francisco Carolinum, Linz (2023); Musée Unterlinden, Colmar (2021); Petit Palais - Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2019); Musée d'Orsay, Paris (2019); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon, Dijon (2019); Villa Medici, Rome (2016); Belvedere Museum, Vienna (2016); CAC Malaga, Malaga (2015); QMA Gallery, Doha (2012); Foundation Vincent Van Gogh, Arles (2014); Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2009); San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco (2009); Musée

du Louvre, Paris (2009); Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines (2008).

Group exhibitions include: MAXXI Museo Nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma, (2022); Flughafen Tempelhof, Berlin, (2021); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, (2021); Leopold Museum, Wien (2018); National Portrait Gallery, London (2018); The Bangkok Biennale (2018); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2016); MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg (2015); Grand Palais, Paris (2015); Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz (2014); The Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul (2007); The Sevilla Biennale, Sevilla (2006); The Lyon Biennale (1997, 2000); Venice Biennale,