

ZHANG YUNYAO “NEC SPE, NEC METU”

Perrotin Hong Kong

July 7 – August 19, 2017

Opening Reception: Friday July 7, 6-8 pm

Perrotin Hong Kong, with support from Don Gallery, Shanghai, is pleased to present Chinese contemporary artist Zhang Yunyao's first solo exhibition in Hong Kong entitled “Nec Spe, Nec Metu”, showcasing 13 paintings and drawings created in the past three years by the emerging young artist. The title of the exhibition is derived from the baroque painter Caravaggio's motto in Latin, “Nec Spe, Nec Metu” (“Without Hope, Without Fear”). Taking the theme of hope and fear as a departure point, the exhibition has turned to the vast area it opens up, suggesting the extensiveness of Zhang's art and painting practice.

Today, our life is increasingly digitalized: the Internet dominates our daily lives and has affected the development of visual culture and the practice of art. Digital technology has made it increasingly easier to create, capture, and transmit images, but the time we spend looking at these images is continually shortened. The screen has become a certain reality, while painting seems as though it is at the other end of the universe, another reality. For painting and the painter, such a context not only has a huge impact, but perhaps also leaves room for creativity, providing both challenges and opportunities.

In his studio on the outskirts of Shanghai, Zhang questions and explores the language of painting, influenced by changes in the external environment while maintaining his independence. Zhang has spent the past nine years in the same 200-square-meter studio, during which his artistic practice has grown profoundly. From manuscript to canvas, from wooden board to the creative choice of felt, Zhang continues to develop his work with equanimity; his works are about brushstrokes, rhythm, mood, image, color, etc., all of which are important aspects of painting.

Figures are the highlight of this exhibition. Figures and sculptures from Greek mythology are appropriated and re-woven by Zhang in his creation of images. These sculptures initially seem static and solid, embodying different stories: from wrestling between the Greek mythological heroes Hercules and Diomedes, to the music contest between Apollo and Marsyas, they all find their place in Zhang's works but appear to be very different. Behind the monochrome are undercurrents of disturbance and violence established by the painter. On the surface of these images, viewers may see the story of mythology, philosophy and history. However, narrative is not the core component of the series in question. In fact, although European mythology and its characters are always enchanting motifs for artists, Zhang's purpose is not limited to this. In his recent works, it is the ways of seeing that concern him the most.

In "Study in Figures", Zhang selected the scene of combat between Hercules and Diomedes, and added a new perspective: avoid high resolution, and be deliberately obscure. On a piece of felt, the painter drew with graphite writhing bodies that are hard to identify, intertwined with strength and tension. Scratches and smudges are superimposed on the main figures, making certain implicit emotions that are important to both the painter and viewers even more ambiguous. Similarly, the main figures in "Trace" originate from the Greek bronze sculptures of runners from the 1st century BC. Although Zhang has preserved many details, one cannot assume that his intent is to document, as one soon finds out his imitation of depth of field is like that of a camera. His elaborate handling of scenes and figures as well as the foreground and background in the manner of a draughtsman adds depth in his two-dimensional drawings, which is his unique trait as a painter.

The careful consideration given to ways of seeing is a vital part of Zhang's paintings and drawings in recent years. Every approach in his works is extremely deliberate; even the scattered dots and lines depicted with speed and variation on the works are actually composed before he starts the piece. Zhang always seeks to be accurate and endeavours to unite his heart, hands, and eyes.

Wang Yiquan