

Xia Yu: *Here and Now*

Press Release

Artist: Xia Yu

Curator: Yu Fei

Opening: 2021.7.10 16:00

Exhibition Dates: 2021.7.10-2021.8.29

Venue: Hive Center for Contemporary Art

Address: E06, 798 Art District, Chaoyang District, Beijing, China

Hive Center for Contemporary art is honored to announce Xia Yu's latest solo exhibition, "Here and Now," at gallery A from July 10 to August 29, 2021. This exhibition is curated by Yu Fei. Presenting his most recent tempera works, "Here and Now" is Xia's fifth solo exhibition at Hive after "New Youth: Works by Xia Yu (2014)," "Xia Yu: Narrative (2015)," "Xia Yu: Orchard (2017)," and "Xia Yu: Subjunctive Mood (2019)."

Every nation, every land, and every human has to confront a different past and present. Xia Yu's formative years happen to have coincided with the social changes that have taken place since the 1980s. In the face of accelerated development that has yet fully reconciled cultural traditions and contemporary lifestyle, Xia expresses himself in the most realistic manner through his works. Unlike classical European paintings striving for realism and the most delicate details, the artist pursues a reality that is purposefully blurred, a kind of interval sight where poetry and frustration coexist. Consequently, he adopts an extraordinarily tender and gentle approach to real-life scenarios and scenes, humans and objects, bringing the peculiar, translucent texture of tempera technique into full play.

Xia Yu never paint lives and sentiments beyond his personal experience. The characters in his work render a worldly quality since the very beginning of his practice, and gradually evolve with the pace of time. Like shifting from a warm photograph to a realistic film set, the size of his paintings expands along with the figures in them, ultimately to life-size. The love of parents, affection of siblings, intimacy of relationships, and sorrow of youths from reminiscences have gradually morphed into a catalog of present tense urban lifestyle during his recent years of practice. The vibrant and familiar quotidian scenes provide more than *déjà-vu*, whether it is a cozy scene of living alone with pets, a trip with friends or lovers, a moment of spacing out during commute, or the distress and exhaustion of encountering stressful tasks. In the paintings, all of the characters expect us to confront our other selves, the most mediocre majority who endure ordinary everyday life among great joy and utter disappointment.

Restrained emotions of the figures have been something Xia Yu always attempts to contour in his paintings. For him, moderation and introspection are national characteristics that cannot be easily obliterated. It has been proclaimed as the self-refinement of contemporary adults not to reveal or manifest their affections or anguish, especially since individuals assume their respective roles in society and relationships after separating from their families of origin. Therefore, the faces of the figures in Xia's work do not unveil any explicit expression but calmness and self-preservation. However, their sentiments are not undetectable, as their hands, functioning as the second profile of a person, are given more subtle and dynamic interpretations by the artist. Hands even serve as the principal role in Xia Yu's smaller-scaled works. The hands he has repeatedly painted for ten years have transcended the imagery motif of art history and become physical evidence of self-examination with introspection.

What Xia Yu portrays is merely a glance of contemporary urban life, not comprehensive but representational enough. The figures in his work are perpetually roaming between their residence and work, city and nature, and seamlessly shifting among chores and tasks, daydream and recreation, switching between various identities and roles in the interval of one living space after another. There seem to be diverse choices offered to the contemporary lifestyle, but it appears that it is no longer possible to own a place of refuge or a spiritual escape like ancient literati. Life has never been so vibrant and limited, common and exhausting. The new era urges every individual to be trained as a master of time management and become a philosopher of life under the framework of consumerism with the slogan of "Work hard, play hard." Xia Yu's paintings precisely expose the defects of a typical life, confronting the dull moments that continually appear, which can be lovely in their unpretentious truthfulness.