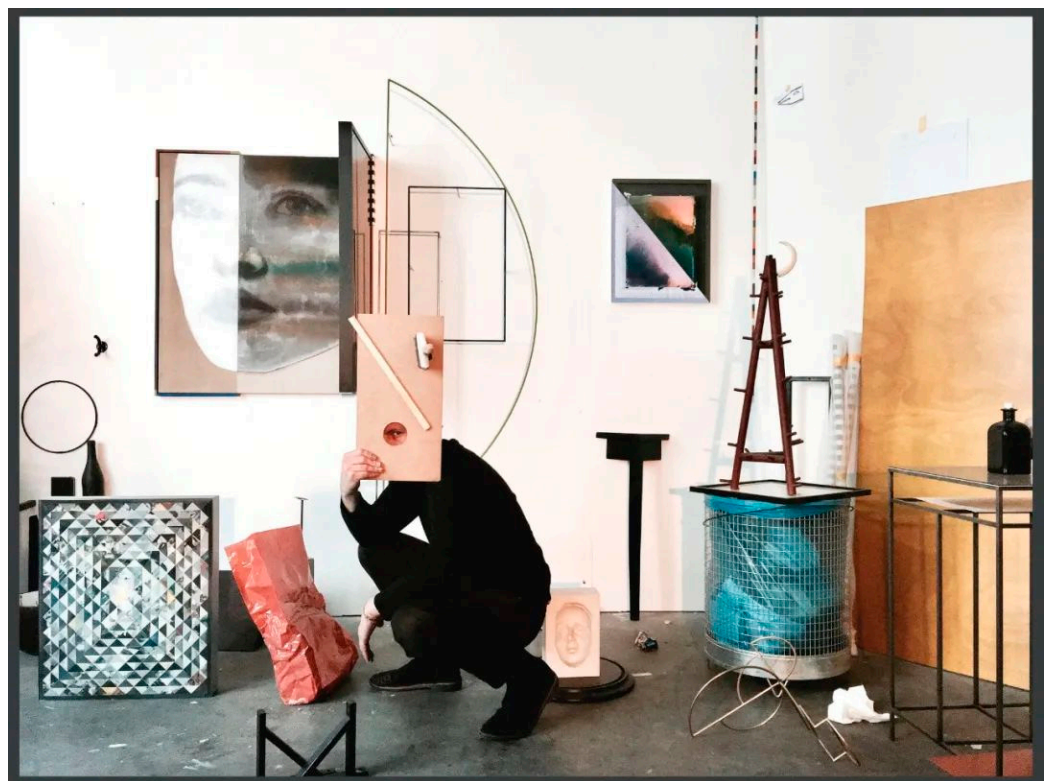


ARTNET NEWS

How can he form his own universe under the eternal movement of time?

By Yiren Shen, March 1, 2022

Matthias Bitzer, now living in Berlin, knew from an early age that he would become an artist. While moving firmly along the path of art, Bitzer has continued to explore his inner self, incorporating his exploration of memory and reality, his perception of time and space, and the construction of history and identity into his work in a layered fashion.



Matthias Bitzer at his studio

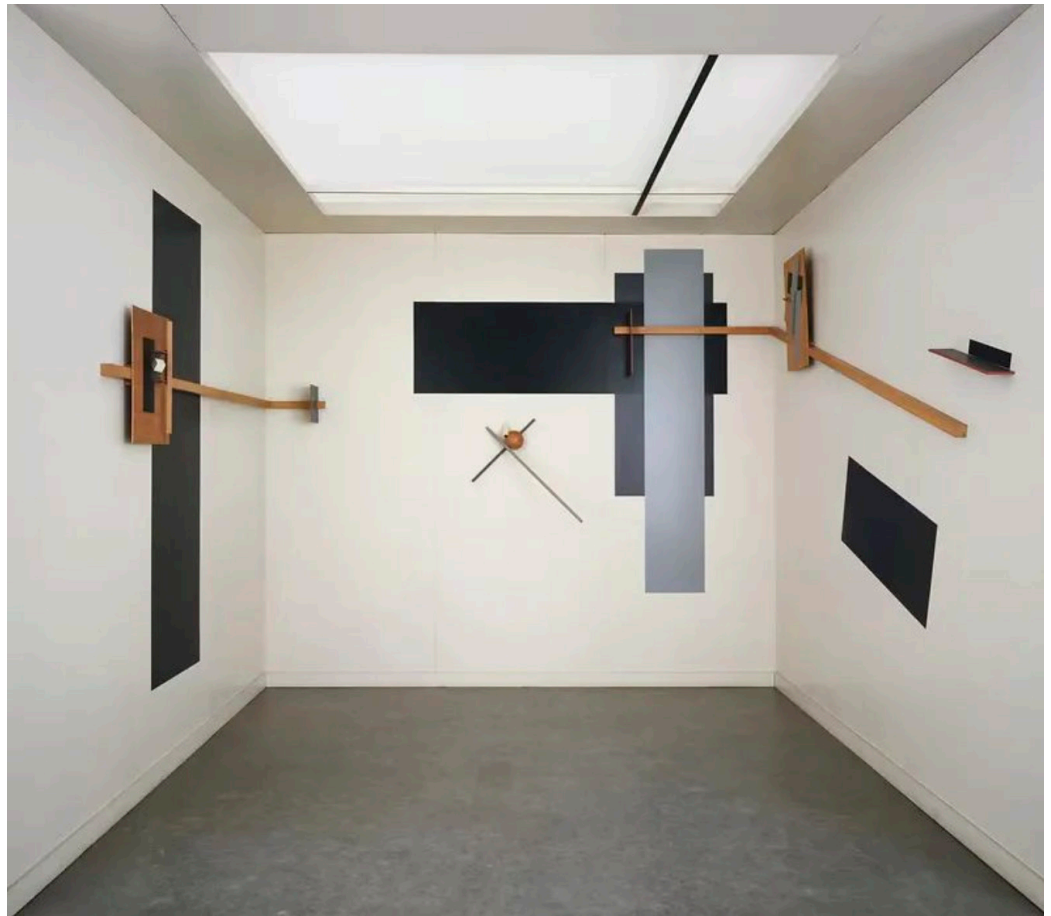
© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

From his initial medium of painting to his later holistic art - constructing an experiential field of sculpture, painting and installation in the gallery - Bitzer was influenced by Russian avant-garde artist and Suprematism advocate El Lissitzky, especially the latter The spatial installation "*Prounenraum*" presented at the 1923 "*The Great Berlin Art Exhibition*" is an example of this (later restored by the Van Abbemuseum in the Netherlands in 1971).

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El Lissitzky, *Prounenraum*, 1971 restored version, 310 x 364 x 364 cm
Photo: Van Abbemuseum

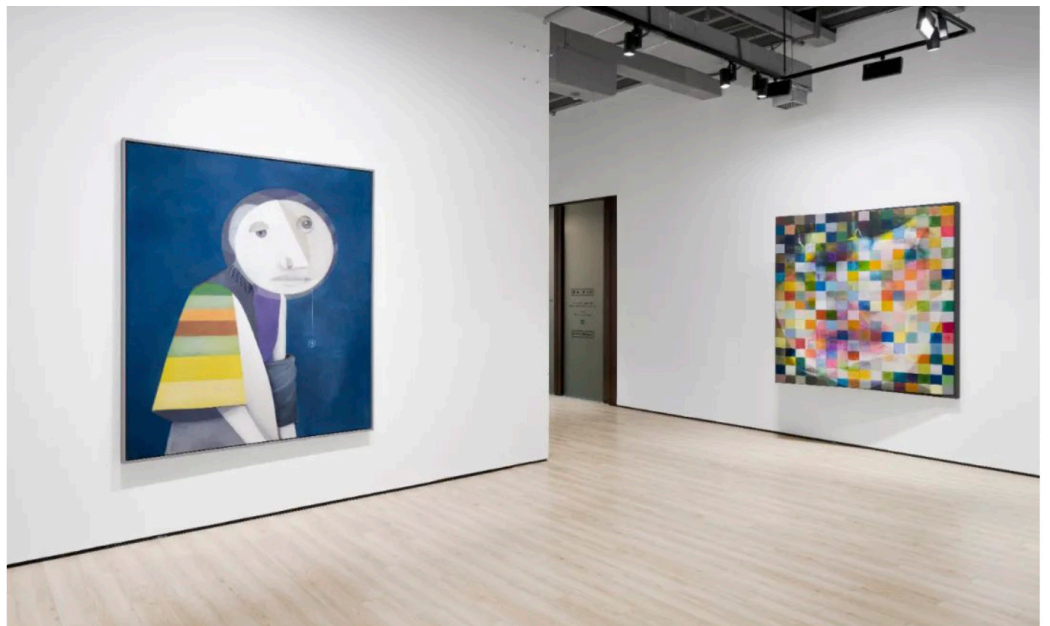
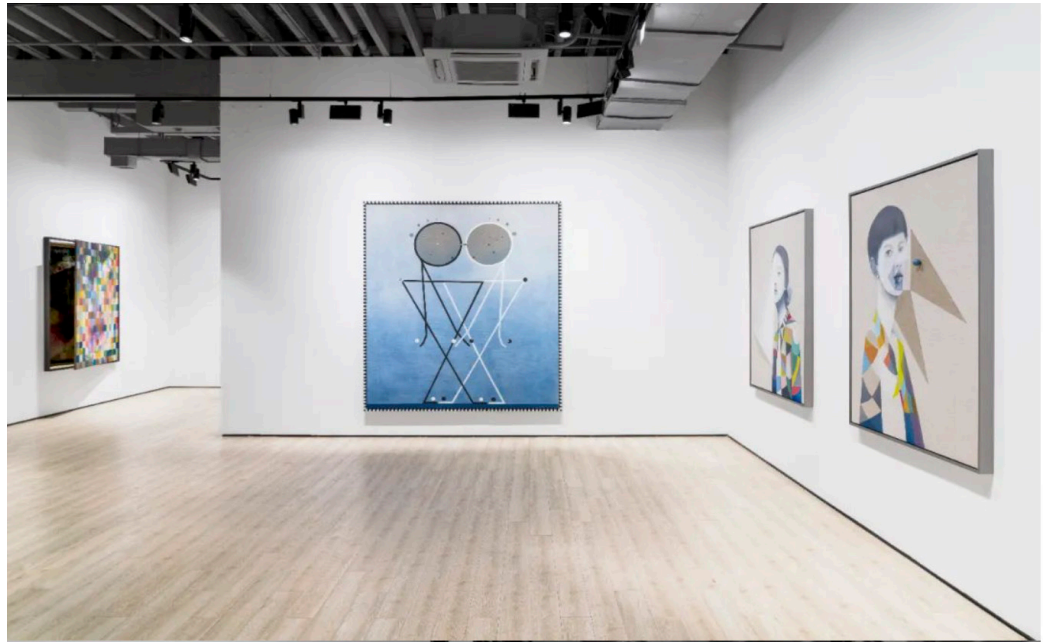
“Proun” pronounced “Pro-oon”, is a Russian acronym for “a project to establish what is new”. The origins of the series can be traced back to 1919. In the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution, there was an urgent need for a new art form to challenge the established rules and authority. Lissitzky used two-dimensional geometric compositions of varying forms and shades to express complex and abstract spatial dimensions through the medium of painting and printmaking. As a transition point from painting to architecture, in the nearly four-meter-square “Pruyn Room,” Lissitzky has made the basic elements of point, line, and surface, which originally existed only in a flat surface, three-dimensional. Black and gray rectangles are painted on the white walls to form separate or interlocking geometric frames, but this rigorous planar composition is disrupted by red spheres and sticks and strips of wood embedded vertically in the walls. The wooden slats and sheets that weave throughout the room connect the different walls and figures, guiding the viewer’s visual trajectory to the ceiling. Through the action of “entering the room,” Lissitzky places the viewer in this artificially created three-dimensional space and makes it part of the rhythm of the work, completing the transition from flat painting to three-dimensional object, which in turn forms the space and integrates into the environment.

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Matthias Bitzer, *you in the space; the space in you*, Almine Rech Shanghai, February 25 - March 31, 2022

© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

Photo: Alessandro Wang

As Kazimir Malevich, Lissitzky's mentor, said, matter does not define reality; true reality is constructed by energy. In this room, the kinetic abstract language and the human body that steps into it interact, thus creating a unique force field that evokes the perception of the individual and the environment.

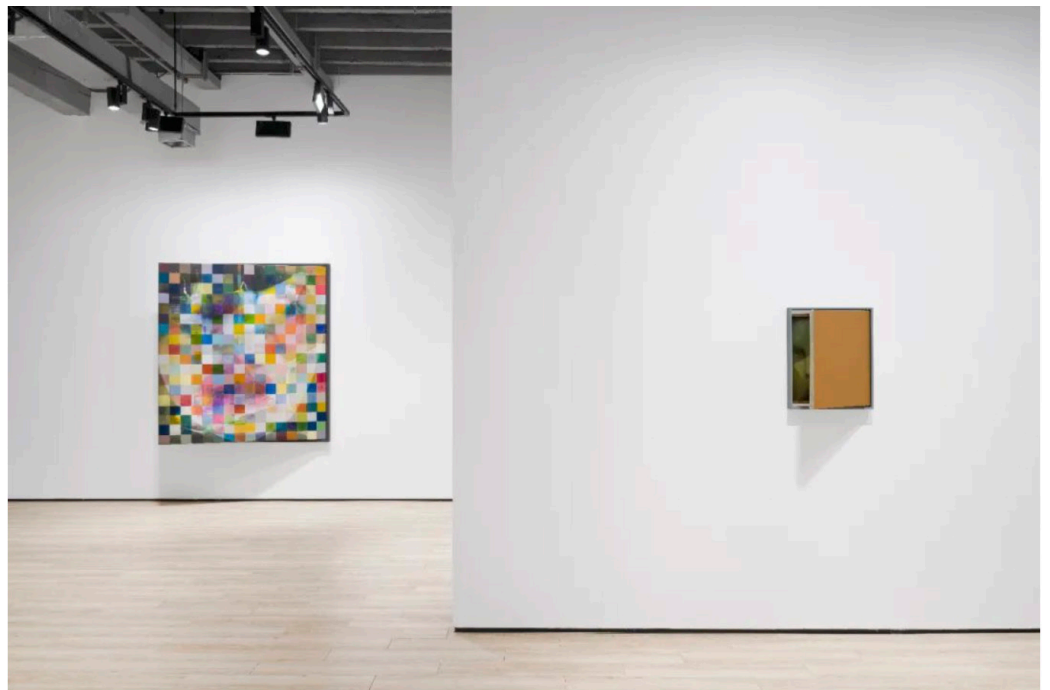
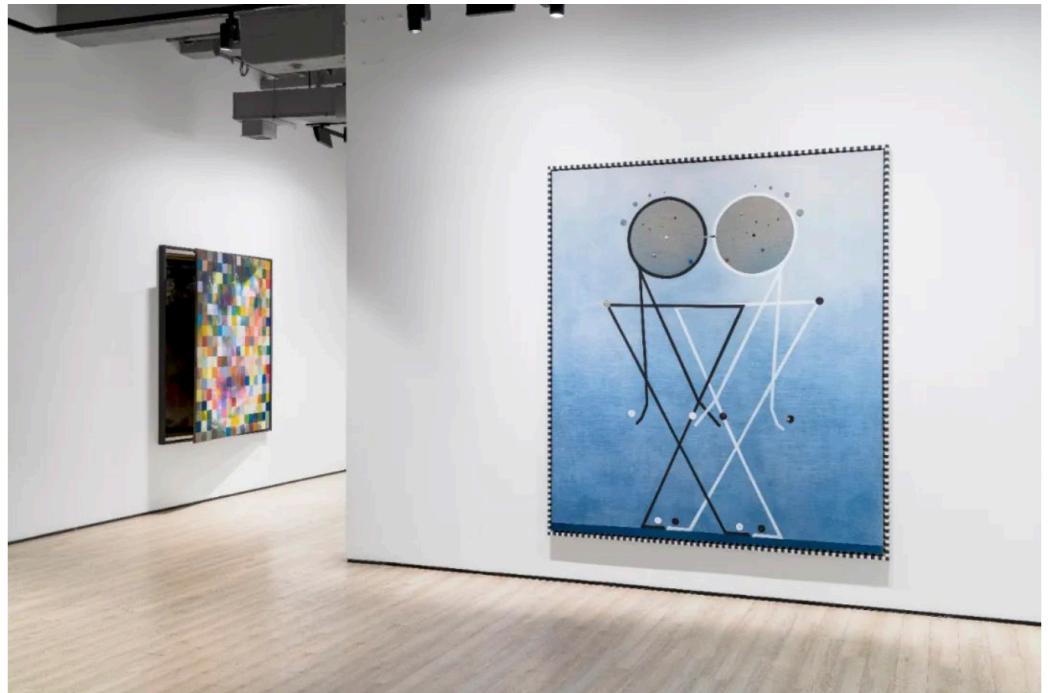
Similarly, for Bitzer, his concern is not with the form of the work or its specific location within the gallery - it is not important whether it is hung on the wall or placed on the floor - but rather with the creation itself and the energy field that is created by the work and the viewer together. The works are like quanta, and the exhibition is more like a spectrum. Each work, as it stands on its own, will complement, confront and even compete with each other, but they are also part of a much larger structure.

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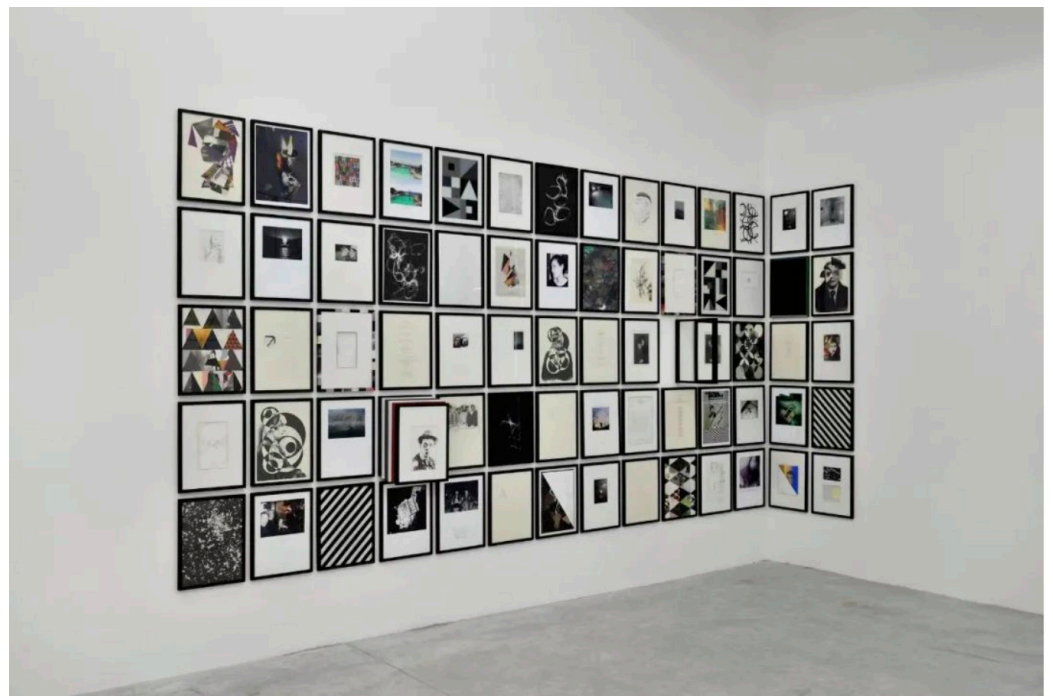
Photo: Alessandro Wang

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This idea is well represented in Bitzer's wall installation *Phosphor Notes*. The artist's process of collecting and organizing these drawings, texts, photographs, and collages is akin to spinning a kaleidoscope of images, deconstructing and reconstructing his ideas to precipitate the final work. At the same time, a similar sense of serendipity and its inevitable outcome also permeates Bitzer's use and integration of different materials. He once discovered an image that emerged from behind the canvas when he was inadvertently working on a portrait. Although the images before and after the canvas are in a synchronized timeline, they show a completely different face, giving rise to the dual perspective of "self" and "other".



Matthias Bitzer, *Phosphor Notes (Anatol Echo)*, 2013, mixed media, 40 x 30 cm (each)
© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

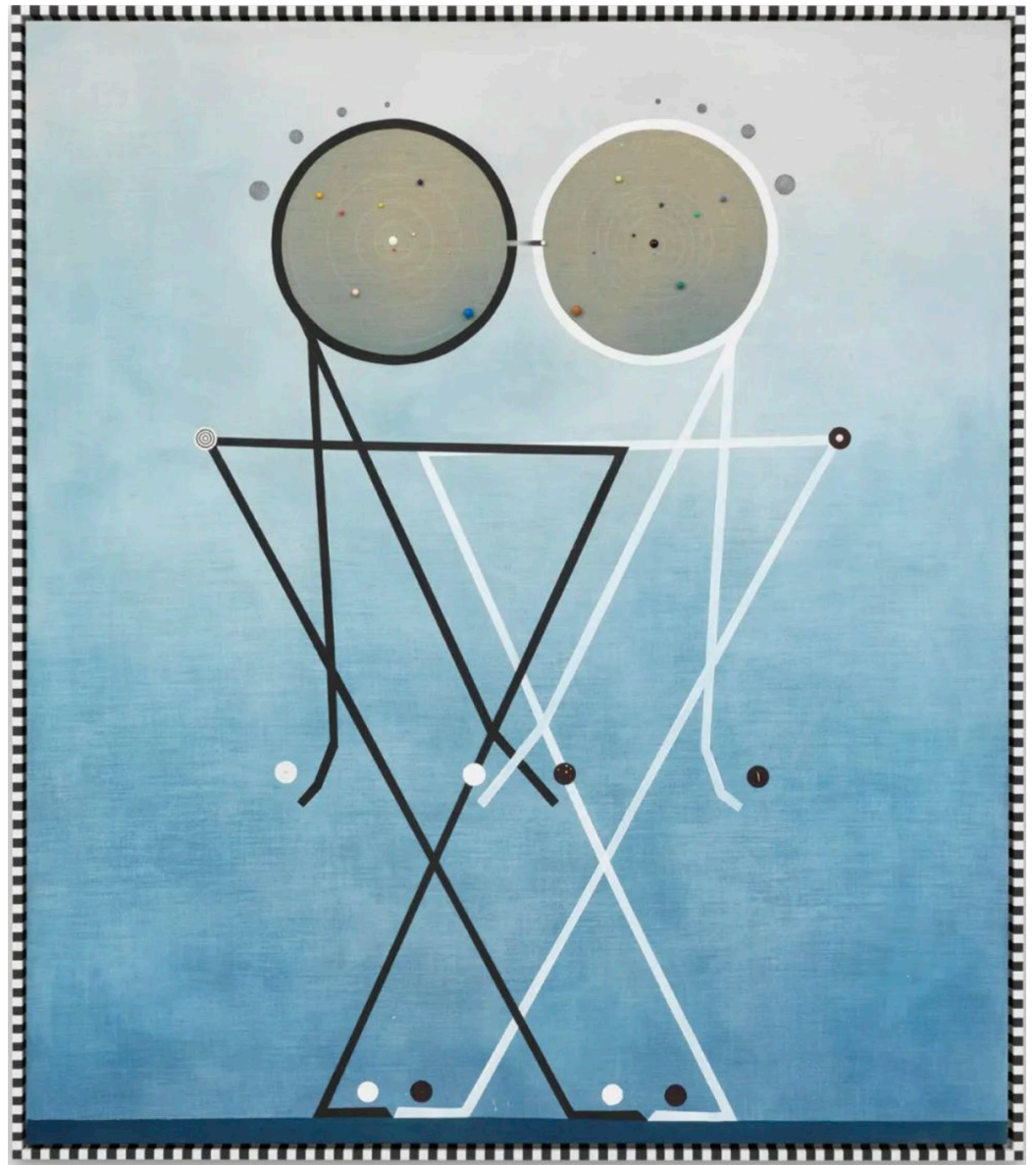
Since then, when he creates portraits, he takes into account the images that may be presented on the back of the canvas and deliberately emphasizes or diminishes those marks. In the process, the paintings break through the limits of flatness and become three-dimensional objects. The constant presence of the mirror element in the work is an omniscient perspective that Bitzer creates for the viewer: by "lifting" the work, the image on the back of the canvas is visible in a custom-framed mirror. In addition, Bitzer often sees the frame as part of the work. Traditionally, the frame represents the boundary that separates the image from the outside space. However, by changing the function of the frame, Bitzer makes it a transition between the work and the outside world, and in doing so declares the invalidity of the boundary, allowing the world to flood into the painting and become difficult to dissociate.

This new exhibition, *you in the space; the space in you*, at Almine Rech Gallery's Shanghai space, is Matthias Bitzer's first solo exhibition in China. The new work with the same title of the exhibition inherits Bitzer's exploration of the connection between the individual and the outside world. He uses lines to create a minimalist composition that connects two self-contained universes, showing the independence they maintain in the process of interaction and the infinite possibilities of contact with each other.

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Matthias Bitzer, *you in the space; the space in you*, 2021, ink, acrylic, pins on canvas, artist frame, 244 x 214 x 7 cm

© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

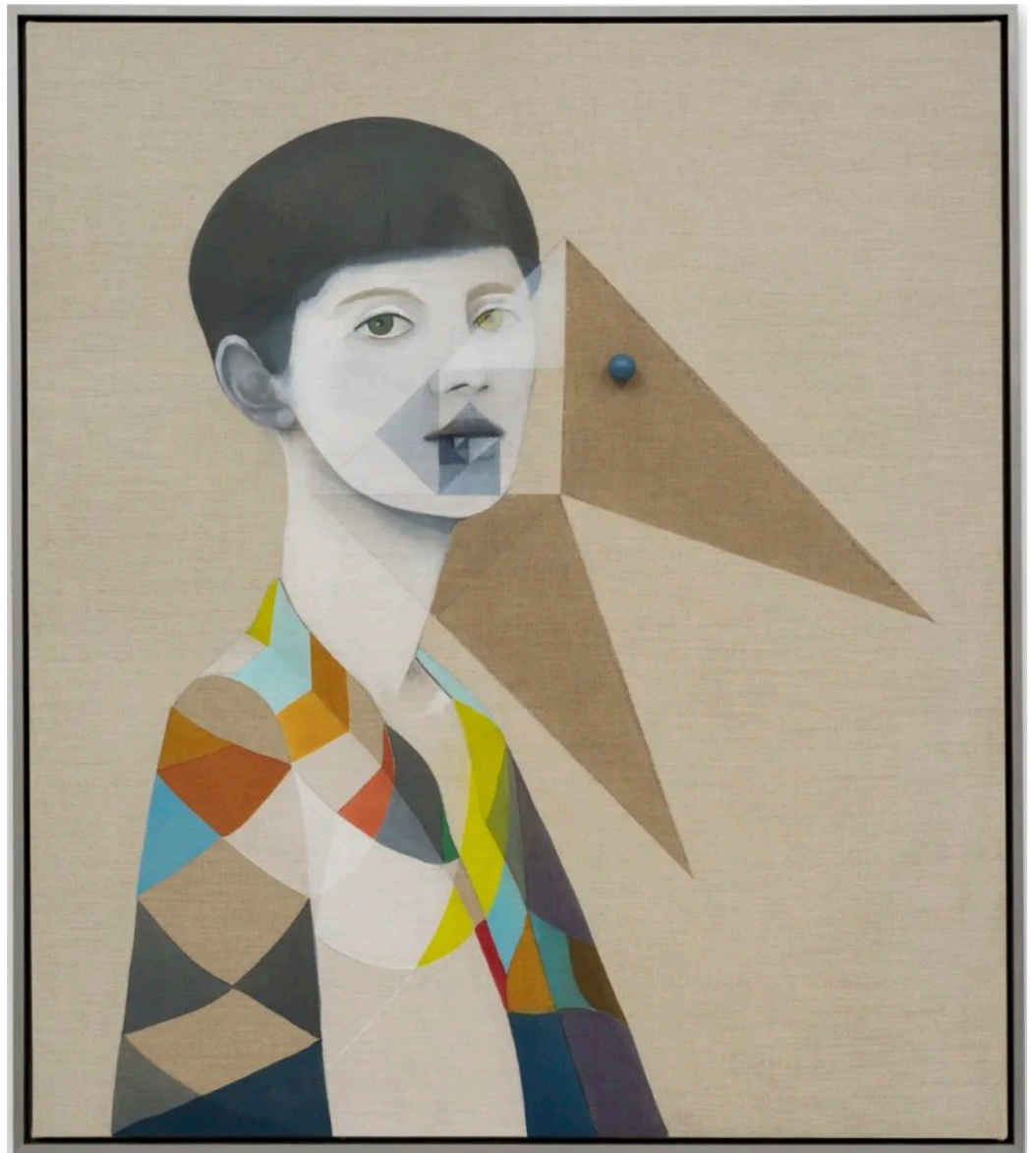
Photo: Nick Ash

The portraits in the exhibition are also a long-standing theme of Bitzer's work. He often reinterprets characters from fiction, mythology or history, moving freely between cubism, with its deconstruction and logic, and pure lyrical abstraction, giving new life to the figures. In the series *"les Parques"* on view, the figures, named after the three goddesses of fate, are dressed in Sonia Delaunay-style geometric costumes, adding color and rhythm to the cool, restrained images. The right amount of geometric extension distracts the viewer's attention from the deep, penetrating gaze of the figures in the painting. In the work entitled *"Treasure"* (*trésor*), a grid of colored squares is pieced together as a thin curtain over a ghostly face. The faintly shimmering images create an intimate space while at the same time constructing a half-obsured barrier. The viewer can lift the painting and grasp the whole picture through the mirror.

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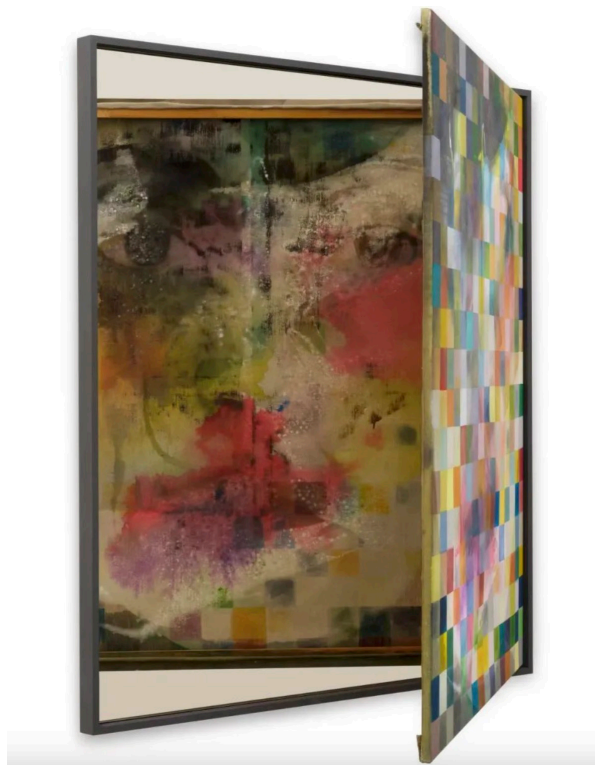
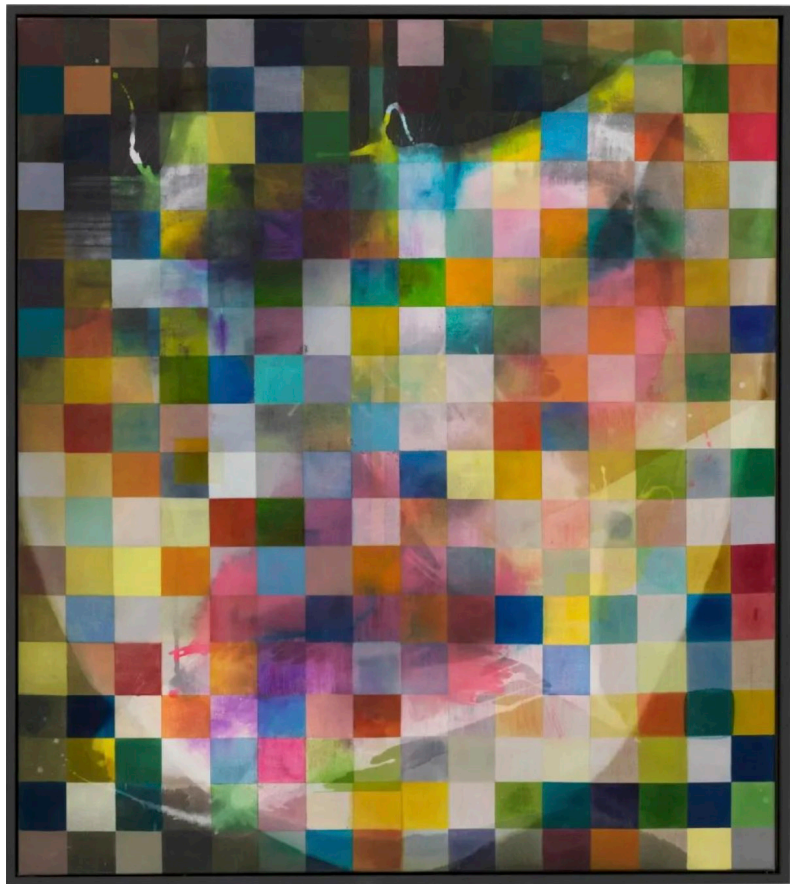
Matthias Bitzer, *Morta (les Parques)*, 2021, acrylic, ink, pins on canvas, 165 x 145 x 7 cm
© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech
Photo: Nick Ash

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Matthias Bitzer, *trésor*, 2021, ink, acrylic on canvas, mirror, artist frame, 185 x 165 x 7 cm
© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech
Photo: Nick Ash

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The visual field Bitzer pursues is full, complete and unique, just like the hundred or so personalities created by his beloved Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa. The thread that connects these "identities" is the message conveyed by the images - familiarity and strangeness, intimacy and alienation, and the juxtaposition of symbolism and anonymity. For Bitzer, bravely following opposing impulses and embracing contradictions is a form of artistic liberation. Even if they are completely opposite extremes, one can always create bonds that can serve to bond and lubricate. It is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson, who lived in rural Massachusetts - although she looked out through the one window in her room to the garden every day, she was able to see new things from the seemingly static landscape. After all, under the perpetual motion of time, the world is built by countless individuals as far as the eye can see, changing rapidly in its flatness.



Matthias Bitzer, *Allegorie de l'absence*, 2021, ink, acrylic, graphite, pins on canvas, artist frame, 205 x 165 x 6 cm

© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

Photo: Nick Ash

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Q: What does creating mean to you?

A: An immersion that is infused with my feelings in the moment, allowing me to express myself fearlessly and respond to the world.

Q: Can you talk to us about your creative logic and evolution?

A: Before I could understand "what makes me me", I had to take a long look at myself.

Life was once in chaos, but now it has become orderly.



Matthias Bitzer, *Sequences from a Volatile Now*, Almine Rech London, April 17 - May 19, 2018

©Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

Photo: Peter Mallet

Q: Many of your inspirations come from literature, what are some qualities in literature that have had a long term impact on you? Can you share with us what you've been reading lately?

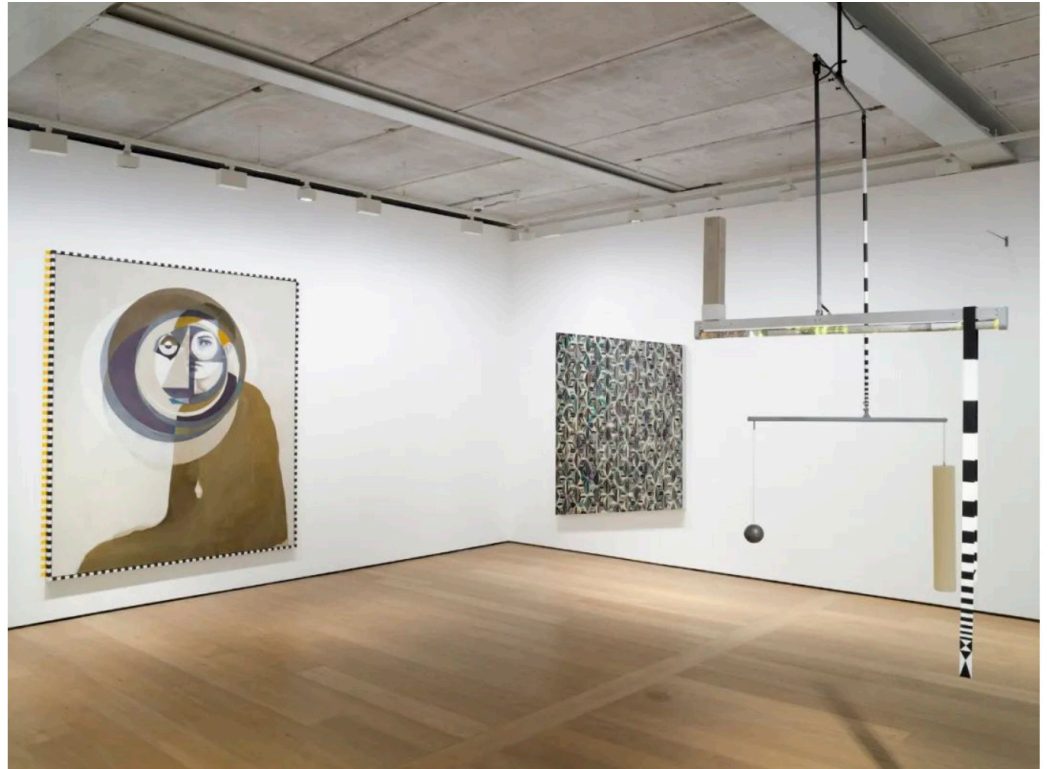
A: My artistic work is closely related to literature, especially poetry. To me, a good poem contains an "ineffable field," as when looking in a particular direction, the focus becomes blurred again every time it becomes clearer. It is this moment that I seek in my work.

Currently on my studio table is *The Dawn of Everything* by Graber and Winegrow. The pillow book is Peter Ackroyd's biography of William Blake.

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Matthias Bitzer, *Sequences from a Volatile Now*, Almine Rech London, April 17 - May 19, 2018

©Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

Photo: Peter Mallet

Q: "*you in the space; the space in you*" is the title of this exhibition and also the title of one of the exhibited works. What is the story behind this title?

A: The original intention of this work is to resonate with people and encourage viewers to think about what kind of world we live in, how individuals are connected to the environment they live in, and how this interconnected network builds reality.

Q: In your artistic creations, you often use contemporary narratives to interpret characters that exist in history, literature and mythology. For example, the three goddesses of fate shown in this exhibition. What do you think is the connection between these ancient Greek mythological figures and the current society?

A: I always come back to the theme of "*les parques*". These three goddesses represent the inextricable link between past, present and future, and pose the ultimate question: Can we decide our own fate? Or are we just part of some crazy conductor's grand blueprint?

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Matthias Bitzer, *root/ruin/rhapsody*, Almine Rech Brussels, September 11 - October 3, 2015

©Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

Photo: Seven Laurent

Q: There are many portrait elements in your work, what is it about portraits that attracts you?

A: A good portrait will gaze at you.

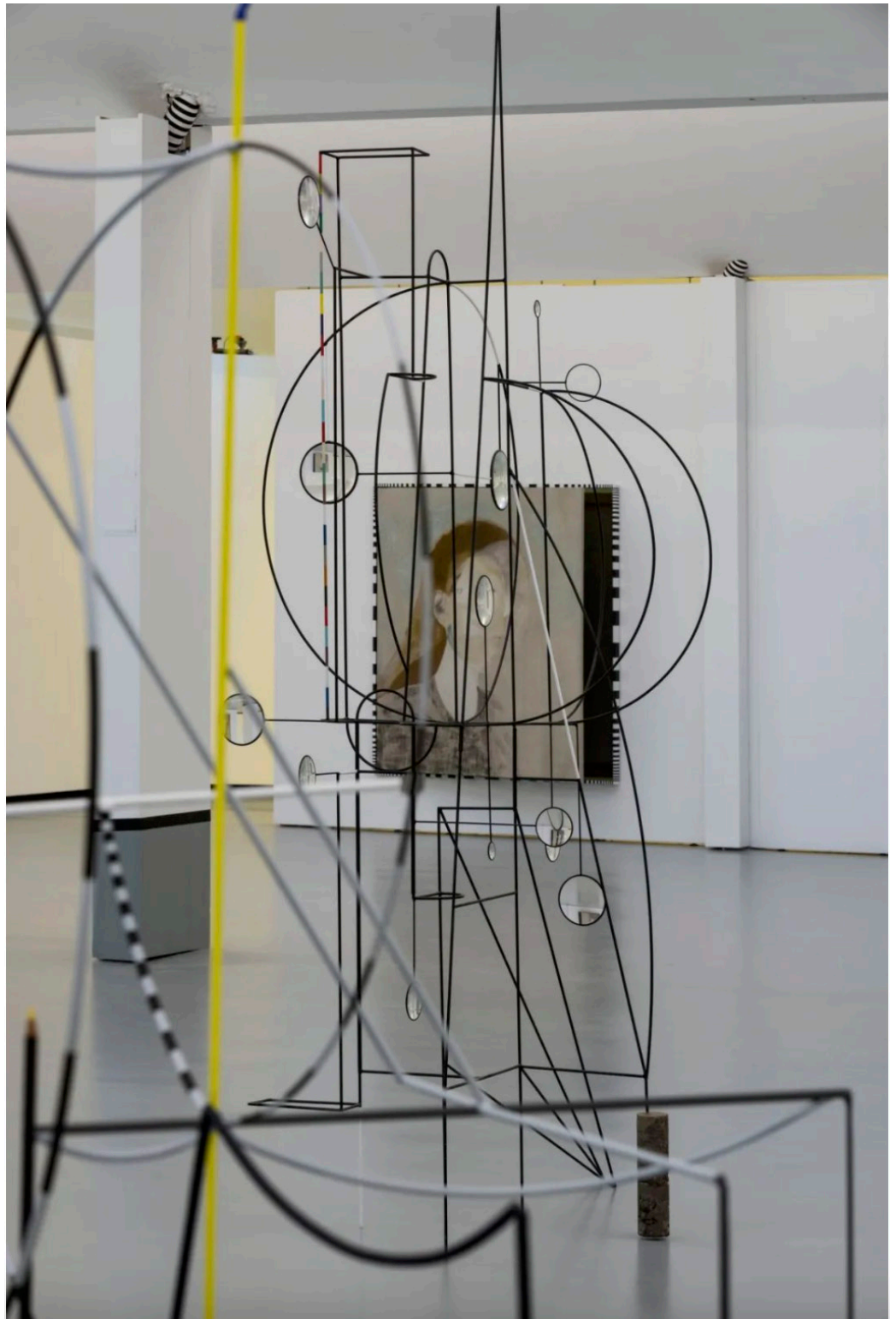
Q: How do you understand the universe?

A: Mysterious and strange.

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Matthias Bitzer, Kunsthalle Göppingen, 2021-2022
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Q: How do you understand time?

A: I think time is constructed by consciousness. Everyone's perception of time is different. People often use the terms "long" and "short" to describe time, which reflects a linearity. I prefer to think of it as something that exists around us. I've read that before timepieces were invented, people in certain places would use incense to create a temporary place - the time the scent stayed corresponds to the time the place existed, and I like that.



Matthias Bitzer, *you in the space; the space in you*, Almine Rech Shanghai, February 25 - March 31, 2022

© Matthias Bitzer, Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

Photo: Alessandro Wang

Q: Do you have any thoughts about your first solo exhibition in China? What are your next plans?

A: I'm especially excited! I would love to fly to China to present my work to you in person. But due to current travel restrictions, unfortunately I won't be able to make it.

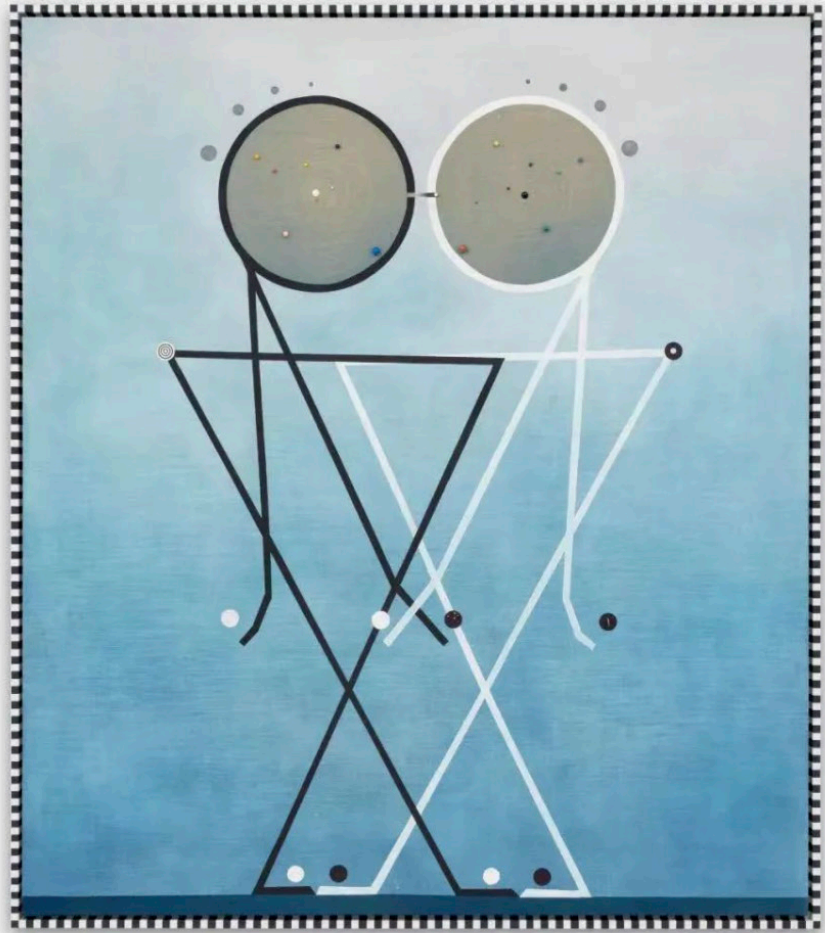
The next plan is to China :)

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you in the space; the space in you, 2021. ink, acrylic, pins on canvas, artist frame. 244 x 214 x 7 cm; 96 1/4 x 84 1/4 x 2 3/4 in

Matthias Bitzer
马蒂亚斯·比泽尔

2.25 – 3.31, 2022

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**you in the space;
the space in you**
你于空间; 空间于你

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