ALMINE RECH

Metaphorical Reality
Cai Zebin, Gao Ludi, Hu Zi, Wang Shang, Zhang Ruyi

Sep 11 — Oct 24, 2020 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to present a group exhibition titled *Metaphorical Reality*, featuring a group of emerging artists from China: Cai Zebin, Gao Ludi, Hu Zi, Wang Shang, and Zhang Ruyi. The exhibition will be on view from September 11 to October 24, 2020.

Metaphor is not only rhetoric but also a mechanism of thought process that helps us to understand abstract concepts. It is reflected in the mundanities of everyday life that have been blended into cultural and social structures. It has been internalized, concealed and embedded in the structure of thinking and governs our everyday life and creation.

The exhibition starts with Zhang Ruyi's new site-specific installations. Her conceptual practice centers on everyday logic, focusing on the undisclosed relationship among ego-consciousness, physical space, and mundane experience. One of Zhang's sculptures in the exhibition, *Matte Substance – 7* (2019), is derived from her continuous exploration of concepts such as "urban architecture construction" and "post-urbanism." Made from ruins of demolished buildings, Zhang's work endues these gray-shaded artificial stones with a sense of history. *Connection – 4* (2017) combines concrete materials with second-hand ready-made plugs. Detached from the original functions of the materials, the assembly transforms electric current - an abstract substance that links to the world of external information - into the existence of still life.

The exploration of geology is mirrored in Wang Shang's works. Within his interdisciplinary practice, he ponders the value of science, technology, and culture through the lens of natural history. Reconstructed in a repetitive pattern similar to the ornament designs on historical building façades, the fragmented jewelry cuts delicately spread out on the canvas in his jewelry painting series, entailing a meticulous and time-consuming painting process. As nature is often idealized through ornament designs on monumental and religious buildings, jewelry, which was a mere mineral in nature, has also been charged with social values. Meanwhile, Wang's sculptures seek the balance between technology and nature by marrying modernist industrial design with a sense of Chinese landscape stones and bonsai.

Gao Ludi's practice examines "images" in the contemporary context, playing with the formation and social significance of images in the process of distribution and sharing. Starting with raw images often found, Gao whimsically appropriates everyday aesthetics, allocating his visual language in a complex historical crosscurrent of painting and photography in the contemporary age. The physicality of the images also envelops them with a kind of fluorescent aura. Simultaneously, in his paintings, geometrical and irregular shapes blur the spatial relationship among images and objects.

Cai Zebin's exquisite control over the spatial distancing is appealing in his paintings. With his extensive knowledge of art and history, his works often incorporate abstract figures in a similar style of classical Naturalism. Unlike his earlier portraits of specific figures, Cai's new works presented in this exhibition embody fictional and fabricated characters, in the continuation of his integration in traditional paintings. In his *Fictional Image - Painter and Muse* (2020), he further strips off specific identities of the figures, stepping away from Naturalist depictions, and presents a contradictory yet playful and magical scene in front of a naturalistic background.

Focusing on portraits of the others for a long time, Hu Zi, this time, projects herself in her gouache portraits of celebrities throughout history, constructing a self-image by fabricating her very unique touch of body boundaries with translucency. Echoing her self-portraits, the unique texture of her works on paper allows the audience to examine celebrities and historical figures in popular culture and art history. Hu Zi's paintings unfold her one-of-a-kind experience and understanding of different cultures and genders.

With different backgrounds and distinctive artistic languages, these artists invite us to explore the metaphors they live in, create and imply, stemming from their own experiences and subjectivities. The artworks showcased in the exhibition explore such mechanisms from various aspects, in the subjects of body, architecture, and landscape. Whether figurative or abstract, narrative or non-narrative, they constitute a complex dialogue and negotiation of form, perception and interpretation.