

# Tseng Chien-Ying

## Regarding the Mediocrity of Others

Mar 20 — May 30, 2025 | Longlati Foundation, Shanghai, China

Longlati Foundation is pleased to announce the solo exhibition 'Regarding the Mediocrity of Others' by Tseng Chien-Ying (b.1987), which will open on March 19, 2025. The exhibition features 16 recent works by the artist, which combines the brushwork and gouache medium. The works explore the dual dimensions of physical desire and psychological longing through delicate strokes and metaphorical imagery and employ visual narratives to sketch the spiritual contours of the collective unconscious.

The title of the exhibition is drawn from *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) by Susan Sontag (U.S.). “PHOTOGRAPHS OBJECTIFY: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed. And photographs are species of alchemy, for all that they are prized as a transparent account of reality<sup>1</sup>” (Sontag, 2003). She warns that when suffering is reduced to consumable images, viewing may foster indifference rather than compassion, and questions whether such viewing acts can truly drive change. In this theoretical context, Tseng raises a thought: If artistic practice focuses on daily actions, can it also evoke alternative reveries inspired by the “onlooker” that the subject of the image brings about?

In settings of group entertainment, smoking has become an implicit medium to establish connections and seek a sense of belonging. The moment of lighting a cigarette, the gaze met in the smoke, and the silent communication between inhales and exhales most vividly reflect the psychological needs and social interactions of urban dwellers. In *Threesome* (2022), Tseng portrays the act of lighting a cigarette as both an individual’s conscious pursuit of social belonging as well as a group’s unconscious response to identity recognition. Smoking as a social act may not necessarily aim to forge deep connections. Rather, it’s like *Spectrum* (2024), where mirrored, almost performative gestures serve as a mean to observe others’ presence and affirm one’s own position within social space. Similarly, when adornment is no longer merely an accessory on the body’s surface but instead pierces the skin, jewelry and ornaments transcend mere decoration. In the *Bystander* (2024) series, the Moriage technique is leveraged. Meanwhile, the layered application of paint and metal foil lends a strong sense of dimensionality to the embellishments, giving inlay a renewed visual language. The so-called “glorious pain” has become a symbol of identity for urban subculture youth: the moment of piercing breaks the boundaries of the body, and adornments serve as guiding needles through which they forge communal bonds via the sensation of pain. When the cold rigidity of metal is contrasted with the softness of the body, they strive for individuality yet rely on collective recognition, crave extravagant expression, and meanwhile use it to maintain emotional connections.

Since 2010, Tseng has been developing the *Thousand Hands Project*. Here, the will of the hand is extended more broadly. The phrase picking flowers and touching grass originally referred to fingertips lightly brushing against petals and leaves. However, in an urban context, it has transformed into a metaphor for desire. In two diptych series of *Give or Take* (2024) and *Stampede* (2024), Tseng seamlessly integrated the *Baimiao* linear technique of traditional Chinese Painting with the *Concave-convex* shading method found in Buddhist Art. This fusion not only subtly dissolves the visual hierarchy of weight and prominence, but also lends the compositions a greater sense of fluidity and openness. Hand is probing, plucking, and grasping while hesitating and releasing. Feet are wandering, treading, and seeking while also missing and losing their way. After prolonged immersion in the neon glow and fleeting romances of the city, hands and feet become tools driven by desire and guide the act of looking through touch and transgression. Drawing inspiration from Japanese *Bijin-ga*, *Blush* (2022) and *Sunset Soda* (2024) directly confront how feminine softness resists the traditional imagery of beauty. The drooping eyelids, evoking exhaustion, and the subtly downturned lips, suggesting aging, transform the ethereal aura of *Bijin-ga* into a distinctly feminine, negative aesthetic. Although the commodified ideal of beauty still anticipates the “female gaze,” Tseng has already exposed the power dynamics between seeing and being seen. This compels viewers to recognize their own act of looking. In this interplay of “watching” and “being watched,” the viewer waver, which mirrors the psychological tension of the onlooker caught between engagement and detachment, and ultimately points to the multifaceted contradictions of identity.

In the exhibition, “Happiness” is no longer simply regarded as a positive notion. Instead, we attempt to strip it of its inherent emotional connotations and render it in a more neutral and subdued semantic form. The space transforms “Regarding” into deep participation, in which “mediocrity” is no longer a fixed outcome, but a fluid experience shaped between insiders and outsiders.

1. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 81.