ALMINE RECH

Rear Windows

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Rear Windows is an immersive and collaborative project conceived on site by the Chinese artist Li Qing as a specific storyboard, re-contextualizing the Prada Rong Zhai house and its history. Between fiction and reality, the exhibition is an odyssey throughout all the different enclaves and spaces of the house, meandering inside and out. While playing with the absence of presence in an empty house, Li Qing activates a mysterious and vibrant new dynamism to the story and connects with our contemporary existence within the Shanghai of today—a territory filled with urban myths, legends and expectations...

Born in Huzhou in 1981, Li Qing belongs to the latest generation of Chinese artists. Following the explosion of creativity in the late 1970s and early 80s, and the successive movements taking a revolutionary stance in opposition to official art, this "third generation" did not proclaim a breakaway from the previous one, even though they no longer had anything in common. There was simply a transition from one reality to another, from the China of isolation to the China of globalization. In this new context, Li Qing appears like one of the most interesting artist of this generation fully immersed in the world of consumption and its frenzied rhythms. His practice, paintings, installations, sound pieces, videos and photographs focus on mass consumerism and society's hypocritical stances on beauty ideals through various methods. His works explore with a wide range of media the issues faced by humanity in social development and the feeling of anxiety extensively spreading in the time the artist lives in.

In Li Qing's work, the past is used like an open treasure chest to be explored, and history becomes a set of motifs. In this sense, its presence within Rong Zhai house echoes to a wider history of societal changes in the Chinese society during the past centuries and especially the past decades. Indeed, the history of Prada Rong Zhai is a palimpsest of Shanghai's century-old history. In the last decades, the historical 1918 residence has been the private house of a national capitalist, a public property after socialization, before being restored to become a place dedicated to art. Such a place still carries the marks of the layers of different social conditions over times and the spirits of the different people and things it has hosted. That was the perfect place for Li Qing to conceive a journey through the explorations of the contradictions of our contemporary world and how far its continuous mutation within the Chinese society can go. Thus, "*Rear Windows*"—inspired by the eponymous movie—deals with Hitchcockian concept, looking out to the outside world which is changing, evolving sometimes as a way of examining our own lives. The displays in the rooms are conceived as climatic scenes to experience the act of seeing and of being seen or observed. Through some of his emblematic series of works like his *Neighbor's Window* and *Tetris Window* series, Li Qing (in which he borrows the trompe l'oeil technique combining old wooden window frames with the artworks of French and other colonial artists or new architecture behind glass, that become the cultural and artistic landmarks of the Chinese urban space now) proposes references to the city of Shanghai (or even Hangzhou, where the artist lives) that has become an overlapping of different spaces and periods of time, an interlaced layer of old and new buildings and stories of different social groups.

Li Qing has imagined Rong Zhai as a space still used by its residents or their contemporary ghosts. The artist recreates some of the key rooms, like the ballroom, the bedroom, the bathroom, and a karaoke room, where the presence of the former residents is suggested through artistic gestures. This visual play re-occupying the vacant spaces expresses, in a strange and cinematographic atmosphere, the duality of our present lives, divided between authenticity and imitation, reality and reproduction. Within this "personified" context, his *Find the Difference* paintings—convoking the double image and its reproduction—or even the *Neon news* series—which points to a new visual language in the city, and the fake news system as a source of knowledge to be called into question—act like invitations to the viewer to question our relationship to the moving world around us.

As a narrative story conceived through a wide range of Li Qing's past and recent works, the exhibition unfolds as in a movie set of a film whose action is about to come. As though belonging to an imaginary society that lives in its dreams, Li Qing initiates here another form of poetry in the Rong Zhai house but also within his own work, always questioning: how to be closer from the reality of things?