ALMINE RECH

Ji Xin
Moonlight · Butterfly

Jan 7 — Feb 4, 2023 | Paris, Turenne (Front Space)

Almine Rech is pleased to present Xin Ji's first solo show with the gallery, on view from January 7 to February 4, 2023.
Is I another?

With his large portraits of evanescent women, depicted in graceful, timeless and undulating states between Baudelairean spleen and a somewhat more eastern meditative feel, Ji Xin creates paintings unlike any other artist of his generation. The formats here are imposing, although the artist has on occasion produced even larger canvases confronting the viewer with almost life-size models, endowed with deformed limbs à la Ingres and, in some, enlarged eyes à la Modigliani. His elegant models appear in equally elegant Art Deco interiors; they are essentially feminine, confronting their moods with actual or imaginary reflections. The pared down colours play with each other in a pastel or ochre palette of solid surfaces. These pieces may feature a form of peaceful, serene mystery, but do not deliberately seek to reference art history modernism as the first glance may suggest. Not to mention direct references - painters always admire those who have enriched their work - for Ji Xin, they are essentially Italian Renaissance. One will find obvious nods to Sandro Botticelli, Fra Angelico or Leonardo da Vinci, discreet tributes in his own vocabulary of poetic undulations, connections with the floral universe, hieratic faces, and an appreciation/fascination for the female character depicted as a goddess or Madonna. The static and muted rendering in his paintings promotes an inner dialogue, expressed on canvas by a double, like a Narcissus reworking Arthur Rimbaud's well-known aphorism as 'Is I another?'
Ji Xin is also well versed in the classic art of Chinese painting and forms of genre scenes which he updates and refines in reference to "Calendar Paintings" popular in Shanghai to this day, or perhaps 18th century representations of the Qing Dynasty, like those of Leng Mei. He is even more fond of artists who have built bridges between Eastern and Western cultures: Matisse was charmed by Chinese calligraphy, of course, but less know in Europe is Lin Fengmian, one of the first Chinese artists to come to study in Dijon, then Paris, from 1918 to 1925. His genteel figurative style portrayed elegant women indoors, or surrounded by flowers. Or SanYu, who lived in Montparnasse in the 1920s – where he befriended Matisse - represented female bodies and vegetation in ethereal worlds. Ji Xin cultivates the link between both worlds and, without imposing a clearly recognizable temporality, endows his characters with a self-imposed withdrawal and solitude more conducive to meditation than to disillusion. Also crafted from what may surround him in the studio – a piece of furniture, say, or a flower referring to a particular time of the year – his canvases stand out as markedly tranquil. The absence of multiple ornaments helps the beholder to focus gaze and thought on the intimate aspects and to try to comprehend the ambiguous figure of the double. Does it personify the subconscious or a spiritual guide? Or is it perhaps a metaphor for the creative, poetic act and a thought which, while it escapes us, spurns us to surpass ourselves?

— Marie Maertens, writer and critic