ALMINE RECH

Spring

Apr 17 — Jun 6, 2020 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai welcomes the new spring season, and the hope it represents, with a thematic group show of abstract and figurative paintings, opening on April 17, 2020, by appointment only. Aptly titled *Spring,* the exhibition will feature a diverse group of artists—spanning a variety of movements, generations, and geographies—that together embody the broad scope of the gallery's programme: John M Armleder, Todd Bienvenu, Matthias Bitzer, Brian Calvin, Sylvie Fleury, Gregor Hildebrandt, Li Qing, Turi Simeti, Vivian Springford, Xu Qu and Zhang Wei.

Spring will be presented in two distinct sections—one exhibition space will feature abstract works that explode with expressiveness, while a second room will present a group of figurative works that address the subject of self-representation. The intention is to create a dialogue between abstraction and figuration through these two constellations of works in *Spring*, exploring their relationship across generations of contemporary painting, as well as underlying themes central to both. For example, self-portraiture reveals itself as a core thread through works exploring interior reflection and the chromatic resurfacing of memories.

Among the paintings on display is a work by Swiss artist John M Armleder. Throughout his career, Armleder created a polymorphic body of work encompassing performance, drawings, sculptures and paintings. *Panjandrum* (2018) belongs to the artist's acclaimed series of Puddle Paintings. The painting is composed with experimental materials such as glitter and lacquer that are splashed on a canvas surface to bring out gestural elements.

The same room will feature a new work by Chinese artist Xu Qu, a former student of Armleder in Germany. Xu Qu's work is in line with his solo show *Currency Wars*, which was held at Almine Rech Brussels in 2015. Xu questions the role of currency in our modern society in relation to power, a theme which led to his series of 'zoomed-in' works on canvas that explore the design of monetary currency. In *Euro 200* (2020), Xu cropped a section of a Euro note, adopting a softer color palette. Once you identify the universal iconographic designs of the currency, the perception of the painting is altered towards abstraction.

In his dramaturgically precise, carefully composed installations, German artist Gregor Hildebrandt offers dynamic visual networks that bridge gaps in our perception of time and space. *Herr, erbarme Dich (Bach)* (2017) draws on music and underground cultures, arranging and combining visual elements of sound recordings and various recording media such as magnetic tapes on canvas.

Similarly, *Z-AC1650* (2016) by Chinese artist Zhang Wei strikes viewers through the immediacy and dynamics of the red and green colors that strive to exert control over each other, leaving the white to capture and diffuse the tension. This is extended beyond the physical borders of the linen. In other words, colors serve as a conduit to emphasize the power of white and emptiness ("Liu Bai" in Chinese). *Spring* marks the first presentation of Zhang Wei by Almine Rech in one of its premises.

Working with a Color Field vocabulary, as exemplified by her works from the 1970s presented in the next room, American artist Vivian Springford produced an extraordinary series of stain paintings composed of bursts of color on square-shaped canvases.

Springford's canvases are presented alongside a painting by Turi Simeti. Employing the motif of the oval on a bright yellow canvas, Simeti has developed an irregular writing system that liberates the surface of the canvas from the principles of materiality, allowing nothing but silence and meditation. The elliptic shape is obtained by a handmade wooden matrix and Simeti's modulations that create a tension on the canvas surface.

Exploiting paradoxes and the ambiguity of futility, Sylvie Fleury has a pivotal part to play in *Spring*. By oversizing everyday objects, such as her series of monumental makeup palettes, she shifts their rigid figuration. By morphing geometry-like compositions in *Make Up For Ever Ultra HD Blush Palette* (2019), Fleury challenges the relation between desire and power attached to cosmetic objects.

Fleury's approach to consumerism leads to the second section of the exhibition, which aims to highlight contemporary figurative painting's stakes across several generations of artists, showcasing the various approaches inherent to self-representation. "When the selfie act, that initially implies self-recognition is transformed into a crowd-pleasing gesture, the subjectivity of the painting subject flees from itself: the body that is spiritually void is like a mirror, reflecting without expressing," says curator Yang Zi.

Working with a flattened perspective, Brian Calvin is an influential figurative painter who expands beyond portraiture through a close-up treatment of subjects with flat fields of luminous colors. Calvin's new paintings and works on paper follow an aleatory composition punctuated by the mouths and their shapes; finishing with eyes here and there, surrealist faces are created.

In a similar manner, Todd Bienvenu's figurative paintings are expressive and uninhibited. He depicts himself, his relatives, urban scenes and fragments of everyday life. He sees the internet as a way of depicting his own autobiographical universe. *Selfie* (2018) embodies this renewed interest of contemporary artists in social networks and self-promotion.

Bienvenu's canvas is presented alongside a work by Berlin-based artist Matthias Bitzer. Bitzer's work combines drawing, painting and sculpture into an experiential space for exploring both history and identity. Bitzer continues his exploration of history and identity in his gold monochrome paint on canvas and encrusted metal coins, as in his recent work *In Door d'or* (2019). A mirror effect can be found, hidden beneath this work, interacting with reflection.

The exhibition culminates with Li Qinq's work, *Images of Mutual Undoing and Unity·Bacchus* (2018), testing the tension and contradiction between image, language, symbol and social space. Qing's work connects the multi-level elements of experience in series to construct a conflict structure. His new series, *Images of Mutual Undoing and Unity,* depicts the process of two forms destroyed and merged with one another. Here, a self-portrait by Cindy Sherman mingles with others and brings them together, as she dresses as Caravaggio's famous painting *Bacchus* (c. 1596). His observation on the identity of Chinese Art in the context of Global Art reflects his historical consciousness among the younger generation of Chinese artists.

Almine Rech is pleased to share this incredible presentation of artists from across our programme, by appointment only, in keeping with COVID prevention measures. We look forward to making the space fully accessible to the public, as soon as it is safe to do so. In the meantime, we are deeply grateful to our artists, friends, collectors and partners for their continued support.