

Here, Where, There?

Jul 12 — Aug 10, 2024 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to present a group show by Cai Zebin, Chen Yingjie, Hou Zichao, and Tseng Chien-Ying, on view from July 12 to August 10, 2024.

“...a painter is a kind of choreographer of space, and he creates a kind of dance of elements, and it becomes a narrative art instead of a visual art.”

— Barnett Newman

Since the dawn of humanity, there has always been an innate urge to create the illusion of space on flat surfaces. Prehistoric humans used cave walls as their canvas, as seen in the life-like murals of La Grotte de Chauvet created more than 30,000 years ago; standing before them, one is almost transported back to a distant era. Though Modernists and Purists might view the construction of fictional spaces on canvas as mere illusionism, dismissing it as artifice and deceit to viewers— these fictional spaces on canvas undeniably captivate us, drawing us into a captivating, shared space with the artist.

Here, Where, and There? brings together four emerging Chinese artists—Cai Zebin, Chen Yingjie, Hou Zichao, and Tseng Chien-Ying—who work by creating unique spatial constructions and expressions on canvas, roaming real and fictional, digital and cosmic spaces, bringing the viewer along for a trip through the multiverses of art.

For **Cai Zebin (born in Guangdong, China in 1988)**, "my imagination is the sum of the images from my everyday reality." His works are firmly rooted in real-life spaces, enriched with meticulous observations and reflections on everyday life. Ordinary scenes of domesticity are imbued with new possibilities, with humanoid robots present in these everyday settings, evoking dramatic interplay between the extraordinary and the mundane. Cai invites viewers to experience a sense of the surreal within the familiar in his paintings, showcasing the artist's long-standing fascination with exploring the relationship between symbolism, imagination, and reality in his works. **Chen Yingjie (born in Guangdong, China, in 1991)** works across various mediums, including canvas paintings, large-scale murals, live performances, and art installations. He explores the fusion of traditional Chinese ink painting with Western street graffiti to establish a new, personal artistic language, taking viewers on a journey through time and space into an infinite cosmic space where the past, present, and future intertwine. Filled with a magnificent sense of the universe, Chen's paintings depict majestic landscapes while showcasing the mysterious vastness of the cosmos. Through his work, we witness the sublime splendor of nature and reflect on humanity's humble existence within the broader universe.

Traversing between reality and fantasy, **Hou Zichao (born in Shanxi, China in 1988)** blends traditional painting techniques with the visual language of digital imagery. Viewers are transported into virtual digital spaces that are both familiar and brimming with novel visual elements. The artist is particularly interested in constructing personalized fictional landscapes, embarking on spatial explorations within his canvases that detach from real-world environments. For Hou, the digital imagery evoked in his mark-making represents traces of the present moment, which he views as "new visual habits arising from the normalization of electronic imaging," leaving ample room for the viewers' imagination to wander and interpret. **Tseng Chien-Ying (born in Nantou, Taiwan, in 1987)**, renowned for his meticulous 'Gongbi' Chinese-style paintings—characterized by highly detailed brushstrokes and vivid colors depicting narrative scenes—captures the fantasies and illusions of the human mind in surreal scenes full of magical colors, like a dreamscape. Each of his works embodies profound concepts of human existence, depicting various states of emotions and desires, allowing viewers to glimpse beyond the illusions of the mortal world and reflect on deeper states of thought and mind. In his highly personalized style, Tseng explores the boundaries between dreams and reality, bringing viewers on a fantastical journey through the space of the mind.

If physical space is objective, existing outside the human mind, and philosophical space is subjective, existing within it—then the artistic space in paintings embodies both the objectivity of external reality and the subjectivity of human creation. Chinese architect Tong Ming mentions in *The Myth of Space*: "The center of space is the person who perceives it. Therefore, in each space, there is a directional system that changes with human activities. The space is not neutral but has boundaries. More specifically, it is limited, non-homogeneous, and determined by subjective perception. In this space, distance and direction are determined based on their relationship with people within it." As a result, viewers in front of a painting are more than just passive observers; they actively engage in the construction of artistic places within each work. They can immerse themselves in the numerous dimensions and feelings constructed by the artist, becoming part of the space on canvas, and even co-creators.

— Athena Chen, art researcher and writer