

I'M
STEPPING
HIGH,

I'M
DRIFTING,

AND
THERE
I GO
LEAPING

2022
09/13 → 12/14

CURATORIAL STATEMENT
WENG XIAOYU

The exhibition “I’m Stepping High, I’m Drifting, and There I Go Leaping” features 65 works by 49 female and gender-nonconforming artists around the world. Collectively, their practices seek to explore new visual languages and expand the boundaries of the representation of individual and shared experiences, particularly those made complex by gendered perspectives and historical projections. Focusing primarily on the medium of painting and works made in the past five years, the exhibition functions as a survey and an overview of recent activities and experiments in this expansive field.

The title of the exhibition borrows from artist Theresa Chromati’s large-scale painting installation. Echoing Chromati’s exploration of women’s empowerment and body politics, “I’m Stepping High, I’m Drifting, and There I Go Leaping” challenges the conventional and conservative understanding of “women artists” or “women’s art” and the role it plays in cultural imaginations. The exhibition employs the terms “woman” and “gender-nonconforming” in a maximally inclusive sense, encompassing all those who identify as such—both the participating artists and the audience—regardless of the gender which they were assigned at birth. As filmmaker and writer Trinh T. Minh-ha has put it: “the idea of two illusorily separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or more precisely female), again, partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide-and-conquer tactics.” Minh-ha’s non-dualistic affirmation of women connects beautifully with feminist writer and organizer Lola Olufemi’s argument that the term “woman” is “a strategic coalition, an umbrella under which we gather in order to make political demands... In a liberated future, it might not exist at all.”

“I’m Stepping High, I’m Drifting, and There I Go Leaping” is not a show about feminism. While many artists’ practices are conceived in intimate relation to feminist thought and resonate with feminist concerns, others exist at a distance from any organized social movements. Forgoing a centered agenda, the exhibition opens a fluid space in which non-hierarchical and unexpected connections can occur. Drawn mostly from Xiao Museum’s collection, the works are grouped into five chapters: “Women Looking at Women,” “Body as Landscape,” “Psychogeography of the Everyday,” “Cognitive Illusions,” and “Worldmaking Through Storytelling.” The gallery display is organized in a loosely thematic way, guided by an intuitive logic but with no predetermined trajectory set for the viewer to follow. In “Women Looking at Women,” artists explore notions of looking and being seen through subject matters such as bondage, performativity, and domestic disturbance to foreground the interplay of self-perception and depiction. Continuing the feminist tradition of challenging the treatment of female bodies as objects or source material,

artists in “Body as Landscape” defamiliarize the conventional association of women’s body with nature and reimagine non-traditional approaches to the figure as a kind of landscape. Engaging notions of drifting through the quotidian, artists in “Psychogeography of the Everyday” bring lived experiences in multiple places and cultures together through the intersection of movement and space, both physical and virtual. In “Cognitive Illusions”, artists invite us to engage with our unconscious biases, assumptions, and discomfort through images that create a seductive and vortex-like experience of immersion. By creating new narratives of power structures and caretaking, artists in “Worldmaking Through Storytelling” envision different realities and histories and encourage us to consider how we relate to one another in the shaping and reshaping of worlds.

The practices exhibited here embrace image-making as a way of rejecting the authority or establishment of received frameworks of intelligibility. “I’m Stepping High, I’m Drifting, and There I Go Leaping” hopes to become a propulsive and generative force, registering a dissociation from conservative norms and sparking dreams of radical imagination.

1 WORLDMAKING THROUGH STORYTELLING

Emerging from literary studies, the concept of worldmaking implies that there are many versions present within any singular idea of the world, expressed through symbolic systems including visual representation. This section of works envisions—often through abstraction—different forms of reality and histories by creating new narratives of power structures and caretaking. Employing different strategies, such as using free association (GUAN Xiao, ZHI Wei), desire for self-knowledge (Jadé Fadojutimi) and fantasy (Allison Katz, Yael Bartana) these artists encourage imaginative approaches to consider how we relate to one another in the shaping, and reshaping, of worlds.



01 Christine Ay Tjoe
(b.1973, Bandung, Indonesia)
Wall Prison, 2008
Wire, fabric, resin and yarn, in 17 parts
69.7 × 296.5 cm



02 Yael Bartana (b.1970, Israel)
Two Minutes to Midnight, 2021
 DCP, one channel and sound
 47 min. 15 sec.

In *Two Minutes to Midnight* (2021) Yael Bartana envisions a powerful nation run entirely by women. Set in the peace room, contrasting the cinematic reference of Dr. Strangelove's war room, the film situates a round table of actors and real-world figures to enact this roundtable discussion. Of conversation is the decision of this nation to undertake a process of disarmament as promised to its constituents in the wake of the pending threat of destruction from a neighbouring male state. The final stage of a four year cross-disciplinary project by Bartana, this culmination positions a possibility of what the world may look like if it were run by women.



03 Louise Bonnet
 (b.1970, Geneva, Switzerland)
Untitled, 2020
 Oil on Linen
 101.6 × 76.2 cm
 (LB20.016)



04 Jadé Fadojutimi
 (b.1993, London, United Kingdom)
Let me just button up this veiled hope
 2021
 Oil, acrylic and oil stick on canvas
 180 × 170 cm



The Night That Didn't End, 2021
 Coloring pencil, marker pen and oil stick
 on paper
 28.3 × 34.4 cm

Jadé Fadojutimi describes herself as a composer of color, space and environments. Lived experience, memories, popular culture, emotions and various dimensions of perception intertwine on her canvases. Her painting practice slides freely on a spectrum from figurative to abstract, without being conceptually limited to either end. Fadojutimi applies a wide array of visual vocabulary to achieve fluency in her own visual language.

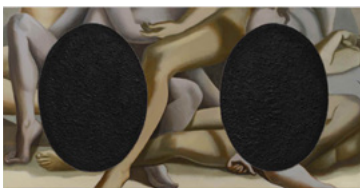
In a history of abstract painting laden with white masculine names, Fadojutimi shows a new maturity of the medium by freely flowing between elements on canvas to escape the chatter of the exhausted debates on the conventions of painting.



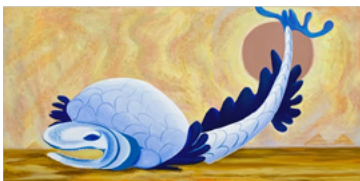
05 GUAN Xiao (b.1983, Chongqing, China)
Strawberry Eyes, 2021
 Rim, ceramic
 108 × 78 × 23 cm

Observing and creating conflicts amongst materials is a theme consistent in Guan Xiao's sculptures. By utilizing materials with varied qualities, volumes, and symbolic meanings in the same work, the artist creates ongoing and dynamic confrontations between different elements within the work, which gives the sculpture a new and unique quality overall. In *Strawberry Eyes*, the mechanic wheels appear to be squeezing an irregularly shaped ceramic, a hard material that appears soft. Guan's collages illuminate surprising characteristics of found objects, such as the soft temperament of stiff materials, or a curious resemblance between wheels and two staring eyes.

Courtesy ANTENA SPACE

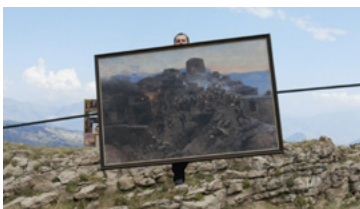


06 Allison Katz
 (b.1980, Montreal, Canada)
 2020 (*Femoral*), 2021
 Oil, acrylic and sand on canvas
 110 × 220 cm

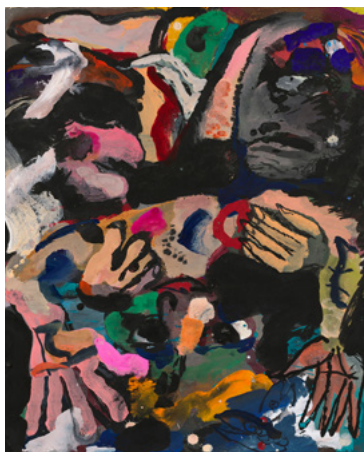


Whale III, 2021
 Oil on canvas
 122 × 244 cm

The paintings of Allison Katz are visually rich playgrounds where fantastical scenes of nature and human bodies intersect with the artist's personal experience. Employing familiar motifs – such as a whale and several femurs on display here – her method of parsing these references proposes slippages of memory between what we think something may look like and how she imagines it. As such, her paintings hold a sense of power in interrogating subjective experiences that invites viewers to question both how we enter an artwork and how that may influence our experience of artistic narratives.



07 Taus Makacheva
 (b.1983, Moscow, Russia)
Tightrope, 2015
 4K video, colour, sound
 58 min. 10 sec.



08 Dana Schutz
(b.1976, Livonia, Michigan)
Diver, 2021
Gouache and graphite on paper
76.2 × 63.5 cm



Singer Songwriter, 2013
Oil on canvas
195.58 × 228.6 cm

***Singer Songwriter* depicts a confident musician performing to a lone and seemingly self-conscious audience member. *Diver* shows a panicked aquanaut struggling away from faceless threatening antagonists who seem to already have the diver in their grasp. Dana Schutz's paintings often depict individuals in troublesome situations, bending over backwards for absurd goals, running headlong into disaster or reeling from its repercussions. The worlds she creates are compelling in their awkwardness, with figures pushed to the edges of the frame by their own volume or kinetic chaos threatening like almost-boiling water underneath a precarious stillness.**



09 Zhi Wei (b.1997, Beijing, China)
Jesse, 2022
Acrylic on Jacquard fabric, tulle, buttons and thread
200 × 120 cm

Zhi Wei's practice is marked by an extensive and daring use of non-traditional painting materials. The simplicity perceived from a distance is slightly deceptive, as the abundance of texture and layering is exposed as a pleasant surprise upon a closer look. The richness of the painting's surface owes to an assortment of mark-making techniques, such as diluting ink to dye checkered fabric, layering semi-transparent tulle on the surface, and painting the bare frame.

***Jesse* belongs to a series of works which are all given arbitrary names of people. Through the process of creation, the works develop both a life and a personality of their own, inhabiting the studio space, morphing into unexpected shapes and slowly acquiring their own semi-subjectivities.**

2 BODY AS LANDSCAPE

In 1971 art historian Linda Nochlin published her groundbreaking essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” which explored the exclusion of women from the Western canon of art history. Since the rise of feminist art movements, women artists have sought to confront the treatment of female bodies as objects or source material—not dissimilar to extractivist attitudes towards nature. Evident in this grouping of works is the strategy of abstracting and fragmenting the female form to reimagine non-traditional approaches to the figure as a kind of landscape. Through the use of directional movement (Tammy Nguyen, ZHANG Zipiao), distinctive palettes (Theresa Chromati), and extending beyond the limitations of frame or material (Carol Bove, Emma Cousin) these artists defamiliarize conventional understandings of the relationship between women and nature.



10 Anastasia Bay (b.1988, Paris, France)
Dancers, 2020
Acrylic, oil on canvas
200 × 220 cm



11 Zoé Blue M.
(b.1994, Los Angeles, United States)
Untitled, 2022
Oil on canvas
210.82 × 132.08 cm



12 Carol Bove (b.1971, Geneva, Switzerland)
La Luce, 2019
Stainless steel and urethane paint
62.9 × 58.4 × 29.8 cm

American artist Carol Bove is celebrated for her sculptural practice, which challenges the way we think about materials through shifting their physical characteristics. Belonging to a group of works referred to as her “collage sculptures,” *La Luce* (2019) presents a dusty rose seated figure. The artist used a hydraulic press to carefully bend and massage the structural steel tubes into an organic shape, which was then painted with an automotive paint. The resulting object deceptively resembles clay, a malleable material, without reference to the intricate systems of labor used to produce it.

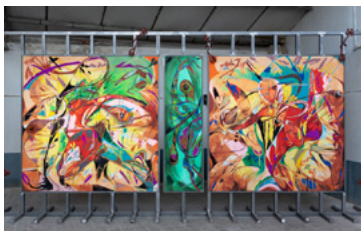
Private Collection



03 Louise Bonnet
(b.1970, Geneva, Switzerland)
Untitled, 2021
Colored pencil on paper
27.9 × 35.6 cm

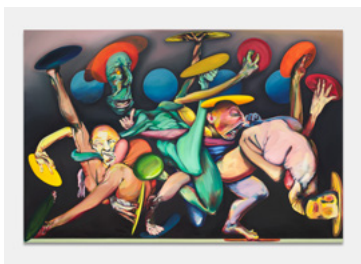


Untitled, 2016
Colored pencil on paper
30.5 × 23 cm

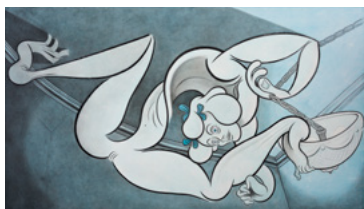


13 Theresa Chromati
(b.1992, Baltimore, United States)
I'm stepping high, I'm drifting, and there I go leaping (stages of arrival), 2022
Acrylic, glitter and soft sculpture on linen supported by foam on steel
249 × 500 × 75 cm

Theresa Chromati's large scale *I'm stepping high, I'm drifting, and there I go leaping (stages of arrival)* (2022) presents explorations of self-discovery as a process of dynamic movement. The installation places glitter and soft sculpture atop canvas backed by steel bars to create a sensorial tension between pleasure and discomfort, for example: a horn-like nipple emerges from an abstracted breast in the centre panel. The fragmented female forms are resonant with ongoing discourse on the representation of women as subject or object, such as in contrast to Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1911). Chromati's glittery and prickly artistic response implies a sense of empowered agency over these historical narratives.



14 Emma Cousin
(b.1986, Yorkshire, United Kingdom)
When All The Saints, Come Marching In
2022
Oil on canvas
240 × 190 cm



15 Koak (b.1981, Lansing, United States)
Sit Pretty I, 2018
 Graphite, chalk, ink, and casein on rag paper dyed with acrylic ink
 135.5 × 241.5 cm



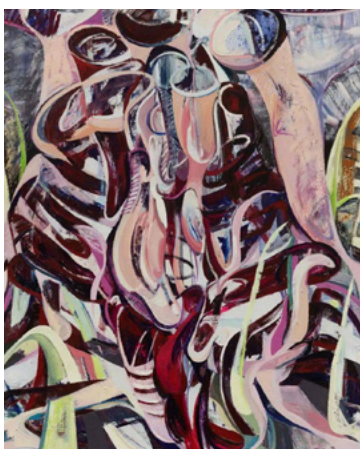
16 Tammy Nguyen
 (b.1984, San Francisco, United States)
Yolanda, 2018
 Watercolor, vinyl paint, paste, on paper stretched over wood panel
 101.6 × 76.2 cm

Bananas drift down the vortex at the heart of the image as if being drawn by an invisible force, swirling and gathering with an unfathomable collective will of their own.

Yolanda is part of a series of works that re-imagine the land of the Cyclops in Book 9 of *The Odyssey* as the far reaches of colonial empire. Tammy Nguyen casts the Cyclops as indigenous female inhabitants of the tropics of the Pacific Rim. With this warped narrative, Nguyen reckons with one of the most fundamental texts of western canon and lays bare the flip side of the West's self-constructed identity. She speculates what the same tale would sound like when told from the perspective of the Cyclops, the Others of the original story.



17 Christina Quarles
 (b.1985, Chicago, United States)
Over It and Under It, 2017
 Acrylic on canvas
 152.4 × 121.92 cm



18 ZHANG Zipiao
 (b.1993, Beijing, China)
Battle Field 08, 2021
 Oil on canvas
 240 × 190 cm

3 COGNITIVE ILLUSIONS

Broadly, cognitive illusions expose our unconscious biases and learned assumptions which affect how we visually perceive the world around us. This cluster of artists invite us to engage with our own quiet assumptions and discomfort. Although innocuous at first, the visual pull of these images engages a seductive and vortex-like immersive experience. Through implying sensual interpretation (Loie Hollowell, Angela Heisch), exasperation (Leelee Kimmel, Yayoi Kusama) and illusion (Amalia Pica) these artworks offer the opportunities to question our beliefs in new ways.



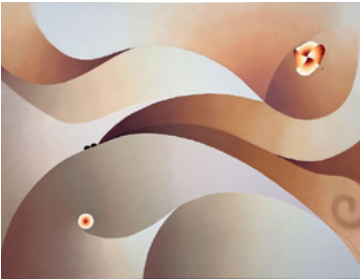
19 María Fragoso
(b.1995, Mexico City, Mexico)
Unison (two boys swimming in green water), 2021
Oil on canvas
101.6 × 91.44 cm



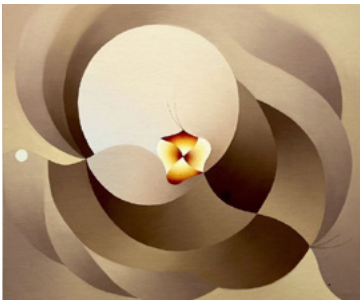
20 Angela Heisch
 (b.1989, Auckland, New Zealand)
Bright Night, 2020
 Oil on canvas over panel
 50.8 × 40.6 cm



21 Loie Hollowell
 (b.1983, Woodland, United States)
Giving Head, 2015
 Oil on linen laid down on panel
 70 × 50 cm



Rolling Lashes, 2020
 Oil on linen over panel
 91 × 122 cm



Sandy And The Moon, 2020
 Oil on canvas over panel
 50.8 × 61 cm



Linked Lingams in orange (yellow, purple and blue), 2018
 Oil paint, acrylic medium, sawdust, and high-density foam on linen mounted on panel
 122 × 91.5 × 9.3 cm



The breastfeeding talk (Cambria and Loie), 2021

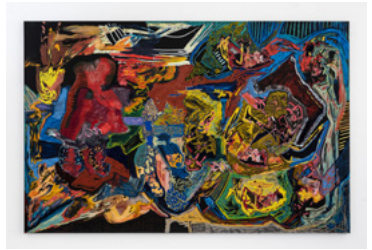
Oil, acrylic medium, epoxy resin on linen over panel

54 × 53.7 × 12.7 cm

Across her practice, Loie Hollowell asks: how do we understand a body and the changes it goes through? Her paintings approach this questioning through a highly personal approach, combining the use of light which reflects her Californian upbringing and an interest in traditional Italian *chiaroscuro* (the use of strong contrasts between light and dark), as well as her own lived experiences with abortion and pregnancy. What at first may read as shapes reminiscent of *mandorla* (almonds), transform into dimensional surfaces depicting breasts, reproductive organs and genitalia. Her intuitive approach results in art works which emanate light and invite viewers into her explorations of sensual desire.



- 22** Yayoi Kusama
(b.1929, Matsumoto, Japan)
Pumpkin, 1991
Mixed media sculpture
11.5 × 16.5 × 15.3 cm



- 23** Leelee Kimmel
(b.1983, New York City, United States)
Night Rider, 2021
Oil, oil stick, acrylic on canvas
193 × 274.3 cm



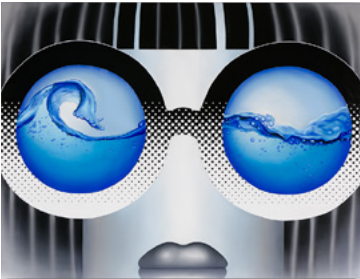
- 24** Mira Dancy (b.1979, Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom)
Moonlit View, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
94 × 114.3 cm
Courtesy SPURS Gallery



- 25 Amalia Pica
 (b.1978, Neuquén, Argentina)
A ∩ B ∩ C ∩ A ∩ B ∩ C, 2014
 Two-channel video projection and
 sculpture installation
 Dimensions variable, 46 min. 26 sec.

Amalia Pica is internationally recognized for her unique approach to using abstracted color, shape, and form to explore mechanisms of communication and their intersection with politics. This artwork builds upon *Venn Diagrams (under the spotlight)*, which examines the politicization of the mathematical method in Argentina during the 1970s. At the time, the military *junta* forbade teaching the diagrams in fear that it might inspire collectivity and resistance by citizens. For *A ∩ B ∩ C ∩ A ∩ B ∩ C* (2014), Pica, in collaboration with artist Raphael Ortega, documented performers maneuvering colorful translucent shapes to construct overlapping configurations. The resulting sculptural works fix arrangements which remain open to narrative interpretation.

Courtesy Cc foundation



- 26 Emily Mae Smith
 (b.1979, Austin, United States)
Wake Tank, 2017
 Oil on linen
 129.5 × 170.2 cm

4 PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF THE EVERYDAY

As a practice, psychogeography encourages a form of drifting through the everyday: a consideration of the intersection of movement and space as a way of knowing places and interpreting realities, both physical and virtual. Many of the artists in this cluster of works have moved between different places and cultures. The multiplicity of their lived experience results in a rich array of artistic approaches: in particular, senses of disorientation or clash (WANG Yuyan, HAN Bing), depictions of urban space (CUI Jie), emphasis on mark-making (WANG Xiyao), and an engagement with pop culture (Barbara Kruger) that illuminates the negotiation between individuals and their environments.



27 Katherine Bradford
(b.1942, New York City, United States)
People in the Neighborhood, 2019-2021
Acrylic on drop cloth
203.2 × 147.32 cm



28 SUN Yitian (b.1991, Wenzhou, China)
A Duck That Can't Be Cooked, 2017
Acrylic on wood panel
53 × 45 cm

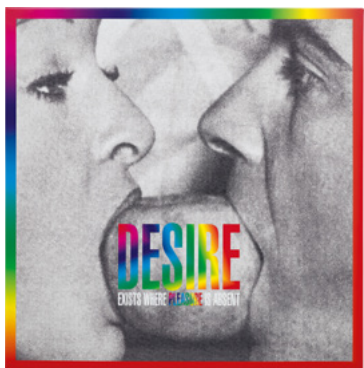


29 CUI Jie (b.1983, Shanghai, China)
Untitled, 2014
Oil painting on canvas
200 × 150 cm

Cui Jie creates portraits of architectural projects to shed light on the social and political contexts that gave rise to their existence. She captures buildings and sometimes public sculptures that range from well-known regional landmarks to mundane or anonymous locations. In her composition, an uncanniness is set loose which enables disparate ways of seeing. While her painting style evokes contorted perspectives of architectural sketches and glazed surfaces of design illustrations, the questions Cui raises deviate from the highlighted man-made spectacles. Instead, she redirects questions towards historical memory, collective living, and natural environments which are entangled with such projects.



30 HAN Bing (b.1986, Shandong, China)
Silver Lining, 2019
 Oil on linen
 143 × 178 cm



31 Barbara Kruger (b.1945, Newark, USA)
Desire Exists where Pleasure Is Absent
 2009
 Screenprint on vinyl
 225 × 222 cm



Untitled (Striped 2), 2019
 Digital print on vinyl
 244.5 × 198.1 cm
 Courtesy Wu Meng Collection

Since the 1980s, American artist Barbara Kruger has been celebrated for her powerful artworks that juxtapose pithy social commentaries with found images from the mainstream media. Critiquing issues such as abortion, consumerism, and neoliberal politics, Kruger's works are alarmingly resonant as many of the same social issues raised at the onset of her career cyclically reappear. Both of the works on view are emblematic of the artist's signature directness, whether questioning the role of pleasure and desire as limited to heteronormative relationships and the narrative of Adam and Eve, or the hostility toward the "other" as rooted in a fear of oneself.



32 Katja Novitskova
 (b.1984, Tallinn, Estonia)
Pattern of Activation (Loki's Castle), 2015
 Mixed media, 2 swing elements, 3 cutout elements, 4 truss elements
 Dimensions variable

Katja Novitskova's practice uses technology to bring us closer to nature. To do so, the artist often draws attention to non-visible biological organisms to imagine new futures and cross-species relationships. *Pattern of Activation (Loki's Castle)* transports visitors into the pitch-black depths of the Arctic Ocean, where hydrothermal vents were recently located. The installation conceives a species living in this challenging environment, as a reminder that through technology we will continue to expand our knowledge of the unknown, which influences the shape of possible futures.

Courtesy Cc foundation



33 Hilary Pecis
(b.1979, Fullerton, United States)
Studio Vases, 2022
Acrylic on linen
137.2 × 111.76 cm



34 Marina Perez Simão
(b.1980, Vitória, Brazil)
Bloodstream and Birdseed, 2020
Oil on canvas
150 × 180 cm



35 Avery Singer
(b.1987, New York City, United States)
Untitled, 2018
Acrylic on gessoed board on canvas
101.6 × 114.3 cm



Untitled (Study), 2016
Acrylic on gessoed board
76.2 × 98.5 cm

Painter Avery Singer rose to quick acclaim in the mid 2010s for her innovative approach to the medium that blurs the line between analogue and digital. Each of her airbrushed canvases begin with an underpainting designed using 3D modelling software such as SketchUp. Using masking tape to build dimensional illusion as she airbrushes, the gridded black and white geometric designs create a perceptual framework which both draws you into her paintings and leads you to question which form of the world they relate to.



- 36 WANG Yuyan (b.1989, Qingdao, China)
One Thousand and One Attempts to Be an Ocean, 2021
 Video
 11 min. 30 sec.

In this experimental short, Wang Yuyan explores how it might feel to move through the world without the perception of depth: the optical inability to understand the distance between two objects. Emulating trance music, the film presents an eleven-minute stream of found videos which are subcategorized as “satisfying” by their creators. Divorced from their original sound tracks and abruptly cut together, Wang’s film alternates between sensations of riding waves and being caught in a strong current. In doing so, she both expands and contracts the space between disparate subjects and objects in our various information and image-driven societies.



- 37 WANG Xiyao (b.1992, Chongqing, China)
The Crystalline Moon Palace No.4, 2022
 Acrylic, oil stick on canvas
 200 × 400 cm



- 38 Issy Wood
 (b.1993, Durham, United States)
Miami / from shame to grace, 2018
 Oil on velvet
 165 × 125 cm

Issy Wood is interested in the everyday items and commodities, of which fashion goods are a prime example, that we use as proxies for a constructed identity. Her image-making process highlights the materialities of different surfaces and skins and foregrounds distinct tactilities and temperaments, and how they are borrowed by the wearer as a layer of armor that signifies a chosen social identity.

The current work is part of a series that depicts leather items using oil paint on the surfaces of stretched velvet. Two materials with vastly different sheen, texture, and societal connotations melt into each other, as everything we have come to know about the materials and objects are turned on their heads.

5 WOMEN LOOKING AT WOMEN

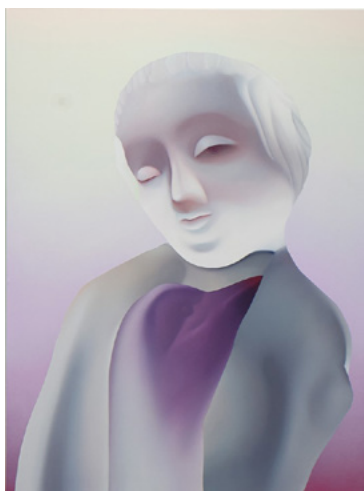
At first glance, many of the paintings in this selection read as traditional portraits of women. However, upon closer looking, each work reveals a nuance or undoing of this genre by asking what it means to be looked at, and furthermore what it means to be seen. Through gestures such as drawing a curtain (Veronika Pausova), implications of bondage (Sarah Slappey), domestic disturbance (Joeun Kim Aatchim) or a moment of private indisposition (Aubrey Levinthal) we are provided with a complex series of propositions on the representation of women. Together, these works emphasize self-perception and depiction as ever-evolving processes.



39 Sarah Ball
(b.1965, Yorkshire, United Kingdom)
Laurent, 2021
Oil on linen
160 × 160 cm



40 Vivian Greven
 (b.1985, Bonn, Germany)
Ham, 2021
 12 silkscreens on paper, framed
 behind museum glass
 Each 48 × 60 cm



Leda I, 2021
 Oil, acrylic on canvas
 160 × 120 cm



41 Brook Hsu
 (b.1987, Pullman, United States)
La Froggy Victime, 2020
 Ink on canvas
 243.8 × 271.8 cm
 Courtesy Kiang Malingue



42 Arghavan Khosravi
 (b.1984, Shahr-e Kord, Iran)
The Burden of Thoughts, 2022
 Acrylic on canvas mounted on shaped
 wood panels
 215.9 × 200.7 × 17.8 cm



The Glass Box, 2021
Acrylic on found textile stretched over
shaped wood panel
35 × 62 cm

Arghavan Khosravi is interested in various forms of contradictions and their resulting tension. Raised in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, Khosravi contemplates the roles and social realities of women in Iranian society through her delicate and expressive imagery.

The Burden of Thoughts depicts three women who are trapped with threatening objects of violence: a bomb, an iron ball, loose floating rocks, and a missile. The visual style reflects Khosravi's interest in Persian miniature painting, where depictions of women in subservient roles are common. Juxtaposing the spectacle of caged women and an ancient medium that is steeped in patriarchal ideology, Khosravi's tension-filled image arouses a sense of unease.



43 Joeun Kim Aatchim
(b.1989, Seoul, South Korea)
*Piggyback Rescue, Deliver Her like a Thief
in the Night*, 2022
Egg tempera, distemper, earth & mineral
pigment watercolor, wax, resin on linen
79.1 × 101.6 × 2.5 cm

This mixed media painting by Korean artist Joeun Kim Aatchim is part of a series of works in which the artist delves into an obscure and sinister period of her childhood – a traumatic period shared not only by all her family members but also the entire Korean population who collectively lived through the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

As an adult, Kim Aatchim uses image-making as a tool to piece together the events of the time together with her family, prompting each member to recollect and retrieve suppressed memories and emotions. Her translucent, multilayered, and subtle images give shape to perceptions, emotions, and coping mechanisms invented by her young self that evade the capturing of words.

Courtesy Make Room Los Angeles



44 Aubrey Levinthal
(b.1986, Philadelphia, United States)
Morning Women, 2021
Signed, titled and dated verso oil on panel
121.9 × 91.4 cm



45 Jesse Mockrin
(b.1981, Silver Spring, United States)
Black Night Covered Her Eyes, 2021
Oil on linen
180 × 125 cm

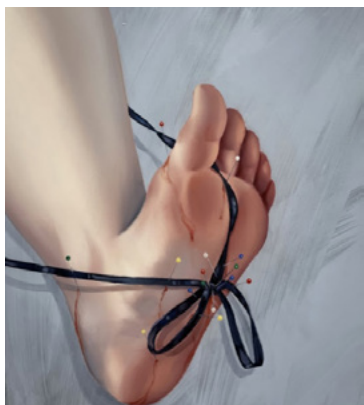


46 Ebecho Muslimova
(b.1984, Dagestan, Russia)
Fatebe Previz Tank, 2021
Sumi ink, gouache and watercolor on paper
22.9 × 30.5 cm

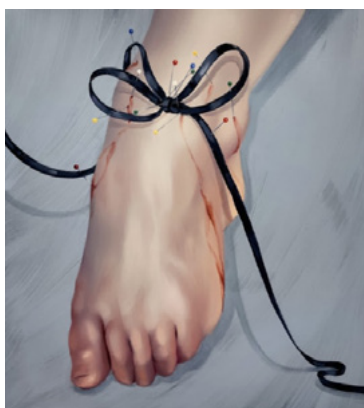


47 Veronika Pausova
(b.1987, Prague, Czech Republic)
Love Mime, 2021
Oil on canvas
190.5 × 170.18 cm

In Pausova's *Love Mime*, an undisclosed narrative unfolds as gloved hands both reveal and grasp an object in the image. The rich texture of velvety curtains and crisp metallic orb are juxtaposed against industrial rubber clad appendages that are puppeted from below. In contrast to the visually seductive surface, Pausova's placement of far-removed hands contribute to a sense of disorientation, which perhaps suggests that the circular object is too dangerous to hold, or reminding viewers of the artist's presence.



48 Sarah Slappey
(b.1984, Columbia, United States)
Navy Ribbon and Pins I, 2021
Oil and acrylic on paper
50.8 × 45.7 cm



Navy Ribbon and Pins II, 2021
Oil and acrylic on paper
50.8 × 45.7 cm

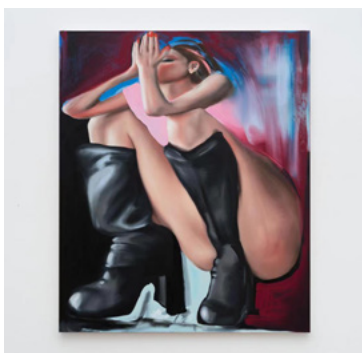


Sacrificial Bow (Green), 2021
Acrylic and oil on canvas
71 × 66 cm



26 Emily Mae Smith
(b.1979, Austin, United States)
Broom Life, 2014
Oil on linen
122 × 94 cm

In Emily Mae Smith's *Broom Life*, a seductive blonde-haired household broom sits atop a melting ice cube while holding a drink. Humorous, even absurd, at first, the painting soon draws comparison to art historical depictions of female nudes and odalisques. Through using a symbol of mundane domestic labor, Smith complicates the commodification of women in art history from a contemporary perspective, which draws visual reference from popular culture. In doing so, she creates a witty entry point into considering the role of class and sexualization in the representation of women today.



49 Amanda Wall
(b.1985, Hood River, United States)
Prayer Boots, 2022
Oil on canvas
182.88 × 152.4 cm

SPECIAL PROJECT: A READING ROOM

As the beginning of a long-term project, Xiao Museum of Contemporary Art will also invite researchers to present a reading room that accompanies the exhibition “I’m Stepping High, I’m Drifting, and There I Go Leaping.” This reading room centers women-related topics and curates a series of publications for public viewing. We invite the audience to sit and read after seeing the exhibition to find the multiple resonations between their own experience, the literature, and contemporary artistic creations.

NIGHT OF THE WORLD

Curator / LUAN Zhichao

WHY A READING ROOM?

We are all familiar with the word “female,” a word that is permeating the current sociocultural discourse as a noun, pronoun, and even methodology. This (phenomenon) of course points to the growing interest in women-related discussions, but it also exposes the fact that women are subjugated to a chain reaction of dilemmas in their everyday reality while they reclaim those rights that have been lost on a macro level. In these discussions of these dilemmas, concrete or abstract words such as structure, law, empathy, etc., are also involved, which means that the question of what women can do is in a more intricate situation.

For most of the past century, the awakening of female consciousness was enveloped in the discourse of revolution and liberation; until the 1990s, it was inseparable from the rise of market economy and individualism. In the new century, with the globalized context of the internet, the situation women face is more complicated—the traditional patriarchal system has been embedded in the cyberspace, which is accompanied by the widespread dissemination of commodity markets and consumer culture, while effective female practices and discourse methods have not yet formed. With the birth of new women’s theories and movements in the global society, gender issues are more intertwined with social discourses such as minority, ethnicity, capital, immigration, space, identity, and class. Therefore, the discussion of gender turns to reflections on societal and cultural structures, while reaching the realization that the study of gender is not simply about fighting for power for a single party but breaking the existing power structures. Going beyond the logic of binaries becomes a necessity as it contributes to the reflection of the overarching structure.

WHAT TO DO IN THE READING ROOM?

This reading room does not try to capture or display all knowledge or discussions about women’s issues. Instead, it provides a

context of reading and invites readers to enter into the narrative, thinking, and action. As such, “reading” is not about a subject-object relationship between a reader and the knowledge in a book but encountering thinkers and activists from another time-space in one that is limited; the most important is not what they (the author) say, but what “I” can do about it.

Behind the Curtain. The “Iron Curtain” is an invisible ideological fence, a formless barrier that creates divisions. The gender question is by no means an issue of physiology itself, but an issue of how patriarchal ideology becomes an overall social structure. (We) can only strategize and take effective action by clarifying the historical process and socio-cultural structure of how this fence— how gender-based social norms become a system, how they continue, and how individuals are trained to develop a corresponding identity and subjective actions— was formed.

Articulate the Interval. The connections between women’s gendered identity and social identity and between the boudoir and the world have been blocked for a long time. Regarding how to excavate other possible relationships between individuals and the outside world in the existing power relations and social worlds, there have been many examples of thinking and actions in history that highlighted the involvement of women in the public sphere and social issues.

Beyond the Past. Are women just minor additions to the grand narrative and collective memory? Or is it simply that the vocabulary and writing of one’s personal history and experience are rejected by the mainstream? In the face of the lack of social identity and exclusion from mainstream narratives, efforts to reconstruct narratives are at the same time a response to a rejected and ignored past.

A Corner of One’s Own. Encountering a book and a person is the gender issue in this reading room, which is also the main issue, and a life issue. The dialogue with these subjects in thinking and action, that is, observing how they communicate with the outside world and form their personal narrative and identity, is to learn the language and theory of their description and experience of writing. Through interacting with them, one finds connection with one’s own life.

WHY “NIGHT OF THE WORLD”?

“Night of the World” is the all-encompassing night, the infinite disappearance of an existence that is certain, the absolute collapse of constructed reality, and the potential against the binarism of logos. Therefore, women can be a metaphor for a group, which entails all individuals who are trying to construct themselves. The social reality of patriarchy encloses these individuals and constrains their living conditions and possibilities of life. “Night of the World” thus points to the pursuit of pure self and a force that questions the framework of reality.

When entering “Night of the World,” we must first face the journey of self (that consists) of repeated pondering, back-and-

forth exploration, confusion, hesitation, and returns. We must face the institutional logic behind women's issues and observe how these mechanisms and logics penetrate into the social reality and individual life, causing women to fall into self-contradictions and predicaments. Based upon these reflections and questions they raise, (we) feel how certain practices have been carried out in the familial and public spheres repositioned themselves in social networks; (we) question how mainstream narratives and collective discourses transform into norms, prejudices, exclusions, and constraints in everyday life; (we) study how individuals constantly reflect, exercise, and construct self-identity and subjective agency and find appropriate ways to express a sense of agency.

From presenting patriarchy in its entirety to the practice of questioning and dismantling it, to taking women out of the shackles of boudoirs into the wider realms of society and present them in various fields—film, biology, international politics, architecture, etc.—which are neglected related practices of women, to the neglected narrative of women's history, how women's writing records the collective memory of women using images and text, to the storytelling of an individual or group of women. From writing about women to women's writing, individuals and systems, individuals and the public, the dynamic relationship between the individual and the Other is staged in the "Night of the World" in turns. These reflections and practices, as well as the negotiation and definition of such relationships, wish to provide a paradigm of reference for the self-construction of all constrained and oppressed individuals and the construction of their relationship with external social frameworks.