

Zhang Xuerui

In Search of Lost Time

Exhibition in Beijing: 2023.5.26 – 7.30

Opening: Friday, May 26, 4–6.30pm

“The chest is a repository for emotions.”

—Zhang Xuerui

Galerie Urs Meile Beijing is pleased to announce the latest solo exhibition of Zhang Xuerui (b. 1979, Shanxi), titled *In Search of Lost Time*. Her artistic practice seeks to establish unique logic and methods of artmaking by intentionally setting up various constraints. Her exploration of objects, matter, and materiality underscores an intention to trace transience and temporal modality. By adopting artistic media from painting to sculpture and installation, Zhang uses objects and painting methods to reflect on relationships between the self and others. She conceives her artworks as a conduit of artistic discourse and life spectacles where one discovers history, memories, present, and future.

For her new solo exhibition, Zhang Xuerui extracts the chest-like symbol, a central element drawn from a piece of oral history running in her family, to generate an imaginary space that would conjure the life histories of several generations from associations and fictive narratives. This symbolic figure also triggers latent memories expanding into broader social and historical contexts that have been filtered and refined over time. What Zhang Xuerui leaves on her canvas are time-graced histories, commemorations, and her quest for eternalizing the immaterial through a feminine approach of reconciling memory, experience, and imagination.

This exhibition showcases Zhang Xuerui's latest series of *Still-Life-Chest*. Suspending in pictorial space, the open chest defies the rules of realist depiction, while its symbolic value stores multiple modalities of time and space. The artist, unburdened by the facts of a family story passed down through word of mouth and its blurry boundary between facts and fiction, inspires her to reshape a memory through her imagination. Hence, the chest becomes the entrance for the artist to outline the relationship between the characters in the story, imagine the social context in which the event occurred, and project ripples of sentiments and emotions. The selection of colors on the background of the painting extends from her previous approach of setting up a specific method for rendering its color scheme. Zhang assigns three primary colors for the three corners of the picture and divides the overall image into a square grid. Each square is filled with a blended color from these “three primary colors” of the painting. Traceable in nature, their varying ratios create a subtle gradation of color. The chest, set against various subtly rendered color gradations, crystallizes not only a personal story but also a collective one, taking the form of a common household item found in countless families to reinforce the social relationships it entailed through a re-enactment of the past. The backgrounds mediated by the artist's acute perceptions superimpose multiple temporalities, engendering infinite possibilities for recalling, constructing, repairing, and reconstructing moments of personal emotions that have not yet been reconciled.

(Text by Fiona He)

Zhang Xuerui was born in 1979 in Shanxi, and currently lives and works in Beijing. She graduated from Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 2004. Her recent solo exhibitions include: *River with Three Buoys*, Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing, China (2020); *The Everyday as Ontology*, Galerie Urs Meile, Lucerne, Switzerland (2019); *The God of Small Things*, Art Basel Miami Beach-Kabinett, Miami, USA (2018); *Colours in A Breeze: Zhang Xuerui Solo Exhibition*, Leo Gallery, Hong Kong, China (2017); *Zhang Xuerui: Recent Works*, Ginkgo Space, Beijing, China (2017). Recent group shows include: *The Trace of Civilization: The Great Art of Dunhuang*, Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, China (2022); *A Descent into the Maelstrom*, Mangrove Gallery, Shenzhen, China (2022); *Letters from Beijing*, Gwangju Museum of Art, Gwangju, Korea (2019); *The Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China 2017*, Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, China (2018); *Encounter Asia – Multi-vision of Youth Art*, the Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, China (2018); *Nonfigurative*, Shanghai 21st Century Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2015); *Negotiations – The 2nd Today's Documents 2010*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2010). She participated in Artist in Residence program “Kulturkontak Austria” in Vienna in 2015. Her works have been collected by public collections including White Rabbit Gallery and Cruthers Art Foundation.