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Wang Yin: The Gift

2016.3.29 – 2016.5.27

UCCA

Ullens Center for
Contemporary Art
尤伦斯当代艺术中心

Wang Yin: The Gift

Wang Yin (b. 1964) sees painting not as a neutral distinction of genre, category, or medium, but rather as a gift. In China, painting, and specifically oil painting, carries traces of an evolutionary history just more than one hundred years old. This painting arrived in China from Europe, where it first functioned as a weapon of resistance and an agent of modernization in the artistic revolution of the New Culture Movement of the 1920s. Later, it underwent debates throughout the Republican era (1911-1949) as practitioners, mostly returned from studies abroad, argued the relative merits of realism and abstraction. After the founding of the People's Republic, painting orthodoxy took a Soviet shift as a new mode of socialist realism came to drive most aesthetic production. In today's market-driven China, a wide variety of styles and positions are in play. One way to approach the art of Wang Yin is through this history and heritage of "Chinese oil painting": he is an artist keenly aware of the history of his chosen medium, educated in the orthodox tradition of Soviet-style realism, and engaged intellectually with the contemporary world. In painting he finds not just the possibility to express his own ideas, but a form whose very visual and material particularities are functions of larger ideas.

The more than forty pieces on display in this exhibition are installed in a particular sequence that might be read as a journey. Here three galleries—the Long Gallery, Nave, and Central Gallery—come together as a whole, each corresponding to the three different parts of a journey (departure, sojourn, and return) representing Wang Yin's process of acceptance, inspection and reciprocation of the "gift" that is painting. This journey also outlines his intellectual response to art, culture, and society throughout the fraught history of Modern China.

"Wang Yin: The Gift" is co-curated by Colin Chinnery and UCCA Director Philip Tinari with assistant curator Lotus Zhang. The exhibition received support and was designed by the architect Tian Jun. The bilingual catalogue *Wang Yin: The Gift* is produced with support from New Century Art Foundation.

Publication Support



Floor Plan



① Departure

② Sojourn

③ Return

 Restroom

 Elevator

 Information

 Tickets

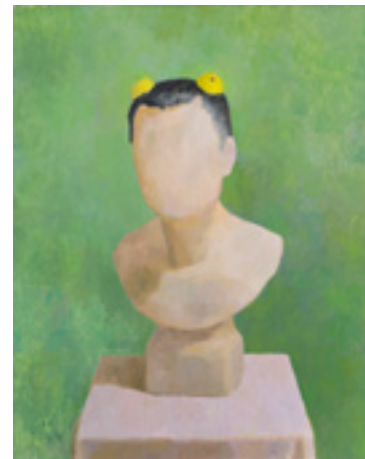
Departure

In this exhibition hall, images of mangoes, female nudes, and easels appear like ghosts on different canvases, referring to specific events in the history of oil painting in China. The mango is a motif that appeared

widely in Cultural Revolution art for a brief moment in the late 1960s after Mao regifted a box of the fruit to a particular Red Guard faction. The nudes refer to oil painting as a Western import. The easels refer to

the pedagogy and educational system that grew up around this new medium. Through unexpected juxtapositions and combinations, these images come to seem familiar yet weirdly estranged. Wang Yin's

paintings depict fictional, deeply personal moments that grow out of, but do not directly follow, history.



▲ *Self-Portrait No. 4*
2009
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm

◀ *Mango No.4*
2016
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm

Departure

Barefoot Painter, Painter No. 2



◀ *Painter No. 2*
2014
Oil on canvas
180 x 125 cm

In *Barefoot Painter*, Wang Yin renders a scene of a painter at work, his hands and face blurred. Even if these identifying elements remain elusive, the easel and a still life with mangoes is clearly visible, signalling that the artist is hard at work on the

creation of another image inside the pictorial space of this painting. The word “barefoot” in the title together with the mangoes refer to the Cultural Revolution, when hordes of young artists lacking education and facing ideological indoctrination went “up to the



◀ *Barefoot Painter*
2013
Oil on canvas
155 x 105 cm

mountains and down to the countryside.” In *Painter No. 2*, Wang Yin has added the image of a Japanese woman next to the artist, her placement seeming abrupt, as if alluding both to the early days of Chinese oil painting influenced by Japan, and to the

late-nineteenth century Parisian vogue of Japoniserie. Many of Wang Yin’s works turn on a “repetition of difference,” adding new layers, permutations, and angles in subsequent permutations of a given image, creating a kind of intertextuality.

Sojourn

In this section, Wang Yin departs from his initial reflections on the history of painting to focus more broadly on current social predicaments. In these paintings,

intentionally blurry scenes, faces, and details render concrete political events or news happenings indistinguishable, in a pictorial process that mirrors our own

removed psychological relationship to the historical events unfolding around us. Only the titles hint at a given painting's possible geographic location, *Northeast* and

Northwest. This form of decontextualized reflection sublimates dissociation from reality into an aesthetic position, possibly as a way of arriving at another kind of truth.



▲ *North No. 2*
2016

Oil on canvas
90 x 120 cm

◀ *Untitled*
2015

Oil on canvas
260 x 280 cm

Sojourn

Northeast, Northwest



Northeast, 2015, oil on canvas, 200 x 285 cm.



Northwest, 2015, oil on canvas, 300 x 400 cm.

The paintings *Northeast* and *Northwest* are Wang Yin's most recent works. These two monumental canvases depict small crowds of generalized figures placed into what appears as remote wilderness, accentuating

a sense of alienation. The workers in the desolate background are missing their faces and are collectively engaged in the hard labor of planting trees or moving things. The tools and heavy objects that were

supposed to embody the workers' strength have been simplified such that they seem to have lost all heft. Here, the Sisyphian fate is pushed to an even more ironic level: even when the stone loses its weight, the daily

performance of laboriously pushing the stone uphill must continue. One might read this as at once a meditation on futility and a critique of cynicism.

Return

A series of humble works that reflect on daily life form the final phase of this journey. One characteristic of Wang Yin's painting is its distinctive theatricality. Trained at the Central Academy of Drama, Wang Yin was exposed to and influenced heavily by theater and performance theory, even writing a thesis on the Polish avant-garde playwright and director Jerzy Grotowski and his manifesto "Towards a Poor Theatre." Here we see him exploring painting as a medium for pure expression, and evoking the medium's theatrical power in directly facing an audience.

Head Shaving No. 2

2014

Oil on canvas

80 x 100 cm

Return



In recent years, Wang Yin has used “ordinary” pictorial language to depict everyday scenarios such as shoe repair, garbage collection, bicycle rides, walking, and conversation. In

these works, Wang Yin intentionally removes any trace of painterly flourish or even learning, aiming to present a deliberately “common” experience. The sobriety of the painting gives the work



▲ *Wangjing*
2015
Oil on canvas
130 x 160 cm

◀ *Untitled (Shoes Fixing) No. 4*
2015
Oil on canvas
165 x 200cm

a sense of ritual, as if the flow of time is temporarily halted in the fleeting moments of life, extracting transient details as a way of pointing toward an untenable eternity.

Public Program

Conversations

Wang Yin's Departure, Sojourn, and Return + Book Launch

2016.4.2 (Sat) 14:00-16:00 UCCA Auditorium

Speakers: Wang Yin (Artist), Colin Chinnery (Curator), Bao Dong (Critic)

Language: Chinese only

Cultural Politics behind the Gift

2016.4.3 (Sun) 14:00-16:00 UCCA Auditorium

Speakers: Scott Lash (Professor, Goldsmiths, University of London), Zhang Xu (Professor, Renmin University of China), Wang Min'an (Professor, Capital Normal University)

Language: Chinese only

Lu Xun Park: Wang Yin's Paintings and the History of Qingdao

2016.5.2 (Mon) 14:00-16:00 UCCA Auditorium

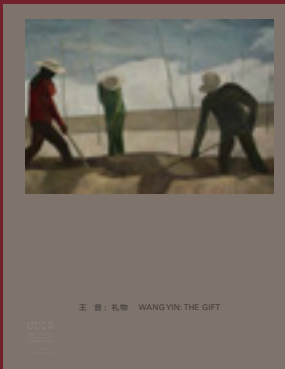
Speakers: Li Ming (Qingdao-based Writer), Sun Dongdong (Curator)

Language: Chinese only

About the Artist



Publication



"Wang Yin: The Gift" is accompanied by a bilingual catalogue published by New Star Press. Featuring over forty plates alongside essays provided by Philip Tinari, Colin Chinnery, and Zhao Tingyang the catalogue elaborates the diverse perspectives present in Wang Yin's work, details the evolution of his practice, and provides background on specific paintings. *Wang Yin: The Gift* is produced with support from New Century Art Foundation and available at UCCASTORE.

Wang Yin (b. 1964, Jinan) is an artist living and working in Beijing. He graduated from the Central Academy of Drama in 1988. Wang Yin has exhibited widely in China and abroad, including "The System of Objects" (Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, 2015); "Hans van Dijk: 5000 Names" (UCCA, Beijing, 2014); "Super-Organism" CAFAM Biennale 2011 (CAFA Art Museum, Beijing); and The 3rd Guangzhou Triennial (Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, 2008).

Hours

Tuesday – Sunday, 10:00-19:00

Last entry at 18:30

Closed on Monday

Address

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

798 Art District, No. 4 Jiuxianqiao Road

Chaoyang District, Beijing 100015

Tel: +86 10 5780 0200

www.ucca.org.cn/en/

