



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

Xie Nanxing: Spices

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The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is pleased to present “Xie Nanxing: Spices,” running from March 17 to May 27, 2018. The exhibition consists of a new cycle of seven major oil paintings through which the artist explores his own relationship to European art history and iconography. It is set in the Nave, Long Gallery, and Central Gallery, which have been specially configured into a new circulation route and painted a custom shade of green in keeping with the artist’s intentions. The exhibition also includes supplementary materials, such as sketches that Xie undertook in preparation for the series, elucidating his creative trajectory. Audiences can listen to an audio guide, based on Central Academy of Fine Arts professor Wang Yanhui’s writings on the artist, for a detailed analysis of each painting.

Xie Nanxing’s work is richly varied, the result of his continued efforts to renew, and outdo, himself. While previously his work sought to mediate between realism and conceptualism, in “Spices,” the artist returns to the origins of oil painting, tracing its evolution from the Renaissance on. The title refers to Christopher Columbus, who famously mistook the Americas for the Indies, and a kind of Caribbean tree bark for a new spice. Each painting, titled solely by its number in the series, reflects a willful “misreading” of Western art history. Viewers may be able to discern the references—to Titian, Giorgione, Manet, and Duchamp, among others—in Xie’s work: a Lucretia or a Europa, resisting rape; a nude descending a staircase; a group of men and women reclining on the grass; and a kind of *Supper at Emmaus*. Yet rather than imitate the masters, Xie takes these subjects and breathes new life into them. One by one, elements are stripped away from the original paintings and transformed into the “spices” that season his irreverent artistic vocabulary.

The works in this series riff on time-worn topics—formal beauty, temporality, desire, and death—with an experimental painterly language. Colors that were once bright and distinguishable turn thick, gloomy, and mysterious. The human figure is simplified to blocks of color, alternately vibrant and dull, and motion is reduced to



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diagrammatic lines. Yet, as is the case with much of his previous work, Xie Nanxing is not interested in providing any easy interpretive footholds; instead, he requires the viewer's sustained diligence in decoding his work. Xie scatters his canvases with clues, like the parrot in *Spices No. 3*, symbolizing the anxiety of influence, or the ghostly digital clock in *Spices No. 5*, linking classical notions of space with modern notions of time. That there are merely seven paintings, mounted throughout an expansive exhibition space, adds to this element of mystery. Carefully placed on green walls like newly unearthed relics, the paintings both announce, and obscure, their provenance. They are simultaneously familiar and distant, like faint memories. Through them, the gaze of the viewer and the artist intersect, forming an open-ended relationship, producing multiple valences of meaning.

By taking old master compositions, tropes, and subjects and reintroducing them, obliquely and ambiguously, on his canvases, the artist demonstrates the complex relationship between two vastly different visual traditions, and the incongruity inherent to the Europhilic, enlightenment tenor that has historically undergirded narratives of the Chinese avant-garde. How might a Chinese painter, educated in the context of Socialist Realism, and having come of age amidst an initial flowering of international interest in Chinese contemporary art, form an accurate understanding of Western classical art?

About the Artist

Xie Nanxing (b. 1970, Chongqing, lives and works in Beijing and Chengdu) has been widely exhibited since 1999. Selected solo exhibitions include “untitled: 3 x” (Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing, 2016); and “Xie Nanxing Paintings” (Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg, 2005). Group exhibitions include “The Latch” (C-Space+Local, Beijing, 2017); “China 8” (Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, 2015); “New Works #1” (OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shenzhen, 2014); and “Our Future: The Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation Collection” (UCCA, Beijing, 2008). Xie's work has also been shown in major periodic exhibitions including documenta XII (Kassel, 2007); and the 48th Venice Biennale (1999).



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About UCCA

UCCA is China's leading independent institution of contemporary art. Founded in 2007 out of a commitment to bring Chinese contemporary art into global dialogue, it has since become a cultural landmark for Beijing, a conduit for international exchange, and an incubator for new talent. Located at the heart of the 798 Art District, it welcomes more than one million visitors a year. Originally known as the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, UCCA underwent a major restructuring in 2017 and now operates as the UCCA Group, comprising two distinct entities: UCCA Foundation, a registered non-profit that organizes exhibitions and research, stages public programs, and undertakes community outreach; and UCCA Enterprises, a family of art-driven retail and educational ventures. UCCA's work grows from its core belief that new art can change lives, broaden perspectives, and enrich the conversation between China and the world.

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