

Press Release

Dark Light Bright Night

Artist: Wang Yi

Exhibition Period: November 8 - December 19, 2020

AIKE is delighted to present Wang Yi's solo exhibition "*Dark Light Bright Night*", exhibiting the painting and installation works from last three years. The exhibition will be on view from November 8 to December 19, 2020.

For this exhibition, Wang Yi gestures a visual and conceptual turn revolving around geometric structures, color systems, and diverse materials in an open, column-free space. With the paintings and installations on view, he presents the seemingly contradictory yet co-existing order and randomness, stability and danger, individual and collective, transience and eternity. The exhibition title responds to the intricate condition of our current coexistence: "When there is light, there is also darkness; talk without a voice, look without seeing". How to live with oneself in a state of restlessness has become the primary issue everyone faces. When facing the uncontrollable and unknown, perhaps it might be necessary to adopt new thinking in reviewing our attitudes towards things and nature.

The color system Wang Yi adopts for his paintings gradually evolved since 2017, from the bright and luminous to the melancholy and gloomy tone. Dark color series embodies the artist's emotional state and comes from his response and thought on both Classical Eastern and Western aesthetics. Light and dark are mutually complementary and inseparable from each other. The Ming Dynasty literary collection, *Master of the Three-Ways*, discusses "the light is born from the dark, and purity from filth," likewise, the collection of Japanese writings *In Praise of Darkness* states, "The eyes of the night, looking afar, under the straw hat," conveying the writer's belief that, "People of the East create beauty out of the emerging shade. Beauty does not exist in the object, but in gloomy ripples and transience of light and shadow." The infatuation with shadow and darkness is frequently discovered among the artworks of Northern Europe during the Renaissance period. Darkness does not only suggest fear but is conceived as a cavity of power. Based on past aesthetic experiences, artists often adopt the chiaroscuro to create a rainbow of colors as subtle and indescribable as the galactic glaze on a Yohen Tenmoku cup. Wang Yi also believes that the relationship between chiaroscuro and the colors is not isolated but emerges from mutual existence.

The gallery is divided into two parts, viewers have to walk through a dark passage to enter the main exhibition space. The refracted natural light outside vaguely lits the passage. On the contrary, the main exhibition space is engulfed under a strong contrast between light and shadow, where the latter becomes the protagonist of an illuminated space. Wang Yi's recent practice further expanded the proportion of dark colors, and the bright colors from the past are compressed into one "pixel". Rather than portraying the light, Wang Yi prefers to depict the shadows using "glazing", a traditional technique to render transparency. With hundreds of overlapping layers, the richness and power of painting burst out from the diffusing purple, dark green, and taupe. Any color would have lost its distinctive significance in this kind of full fusion. Only one's feelings would become more apparent as one stands among the blurry shades.

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Wang Yi uses various structures as metaphors for the existing social forms. The diagonal lines in the “Hub” series divide the picture planes until they are covered in countless intricate geometric shapes, which undermine while constructing the sense of balance. For the two new works on view, the artist magnifies their sharp glitter to point at the possible change and crisis that might happen at any time in the vicinity. The “Cell” series abstracts the connection and division between man and society, as the nodal points where the brushstroke cross seems connected and isolated, identical and alienated. This kind of balanced and divisional structural lines are vague and apparent at the same time to symbolize the development structure of modern cities. The image expands in the formation of squares and colored bars that shape Wang Yi’s abstract urban expression.

In experimenting with many non-traditional painting materials, Wang Yi prefers materials with reflective texture as his painting’s conduit. He thinks the notion of “mirror image”, as contradictory as may be, is traditional and modern. His latest attempt with the “Overlapping” series presents the artist’s application of red and blue pigments on stainless steel mirroring surface with the traditional glazing technique, expanding outwards from the center of the surface. As a result, the surrounding scenery is reflected on the surface of the painting with vagueness. As dark purple shadows float over, the brush strokes and lines on the reflective substrate gradually blend together. The sense of craftsmanship is reduced to a minimum under the enormity of time consumed, whereas, for the viewer, it’s a gift of a momentary yet powerful visual experience. Pixels of the digital world are revived through a classical approach, a paradox that conveys Wang Yi’s confrontation against the current era of rapid consumption through his exquisite techniques.

When we describe the darkest moment, shadow is not the outcome but a process. It has not yet reached the state of “as black as lacquer”. Even so, we would still hopelessly run to the light regardless of nothing awaits there.

About the artist

Wang Yi's artistic creation focuses on the abstract expression of city and natural environment. His works discuss the transformation of painting’s form, material and concept. He tries to use the slow individual manual work to confront the mode of rapid production and consumption, and trace back his respect for the classical painting through the contemporary visual experience. Wang Yi's artistic creation is typical of the new generation of Chinese abstract artists, many of whom choose to give up any obvious comments on politics or society in their artistic creations. Besides pure form of discussion, Wang Yi keeps some clues partially rooted in the real society and nature. By repeatedly combining simple structural elements in his works, Wang Yi discusses the social relationship between “individual and entirety”, and points out the mutual influences between unit and collective, uniqueness and uniformity.

Born in 1991 in Shanghai, China, Wang Yi graduated from Oil Painting Department of China Academy of Art with an MFA. He currently lives and works in Shanghai. His recent solo exhibitions includes ‘Geometry Rules All Phenomena: Wang Yi’, Hive Centre for Contemporary Art, Shenzhen, China, 2018; ‘Inside and Outside: Claude Viallat & Wang Yi’, HdM Gallery, Beijing, China, 2018; ‘Yi Ri Guang’, AIKE, Shanghai, China, 2016.

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