

Variance

Tang Contemporary Art is proud to announce the opening of “Variance,” an exhibition for artists Wu Wei and Li Erpeng, on March 28, 2020. Wu Wei’s installations and Li Erpeng’s paintings are characterized by highly saturated, intensely contrasting colors, clean lines, and complex forms suggestive of living organisms. At the same time, they respond through their work to alienated reality and the difficult circumstances we currently face; they transform and distort living power, and they resist industrialized structures.

Wu Wei’s works are made of paper, a choice of material that evolved from his early use of books. He adapted traditional paper cutting methods, transforming different colors of paper into fur. He then incorporated the layered embroidery techniques of thangka production into combinations of layered fur and forms that seem to undulate and grow. The texture of paper is emphasized in his long, complex process, done entirely by hand. This visual element easily triggers our psychological associations with animal fur, and the sense of touch is activated in the course of looking. The works are delicate yet warm, and they reflect Wu’s pursuit of primeval, hidden power.

Although his work is related to ancient mythical creatures, Wu Wei removes their narrative elements, shifting the focus to the forms of the animals and the grain of the fur. His color palette is as clean as possible. He carefully chooses a secondary color dictated by the primary tone, which is sometimes simply matte white set off by a bright white.

As Wu has said, “My exploration of power and experience begins with personal emotion. I return from reality to the primitive experience and spirituality of the Eastern tradition, in order to spark the direct reactions that things cause in people using a language that I am gradually purifying. It’s visual, but it’s also psychological. In materials and space, I attempt to find an ultimate, pure intuitive state.”

In Li Erpeng’s paintings, the colors are bright and saturated, the forms are clean and simple, and the symbolism is obvious. Intense color is the subject of his work, but it is also a vehicle for symbolism and metaphor. Depending on the cultural context, yellow may stand for nobility and money, or sexuality and calamity. Within the context of these visual relationships, the juxtaposition of yellow and black is frequently used in industrial applications, and the visual power of both colors is magnified when they are contrasted in this way. He abstracts the subject he wants to express, grafting the coldness of industry onto the expressiveness of painting and providing a space or a path for the exploration of painted texture. In addition to the single paintings, he has also attempted to use combinations of canvases to express a kind of violent expansion.

Li’s works are relationships made visible. In his paintings, he creates organisms with different forms, depicting them resisting, disciplining, fusing, and cooperating with metal rings. The paintings record the relationship between life and meaning, and between confinement and freedom; they record that life in these times has gradually dissolved meaning or kept a respectful distance from meaning, thereby moving toward modernity and “rashly building a memorial to this historic moment.”

For Li, his work is like a mirror that augments reality. “We can see meanings twined around us, and through the painting, see the relationship that exists between ourselves and meaning. We examine the organisms in the painting, but we also examine ourselves. ‘Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they.’”

This exhibition does not present the work of these two artists in clearly demarcated spaces, so that their works visually respond to one another, while also providing context for one another as the viewer explores their meaning.