

**PRESSBOOK**

CHEN Fei

*HuArts*

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## Chen Fei: Captured Moments, Continuous Stories

2017-09-06 Peter Hagan HuArts



*Big Model (detail), acrylic on linen, 290 x 200 cm, 2017, courtesy Perrotin*

“Frankly speaking,” is the first thing that came out when I was talking about Chen Fei’s artwork to a friend. For art that is made with such clarity Chen’s work is not so simple to explain. His work shares qualities with comic books and film storyboards with figures outlined in solid black, accentuating the form, while individuals are caught mid-action in the middle of a scene. At times, Chen’s paintings feel like we stepped into an awkward conversation we weren’t supposed to witness. Awkwardness makes people uncomfortable and turns us away but that awkwardness is intentional, full of meaning, and should cause us to examine why we react this way at all.



*Middle-Aged Square, acrylic on linen, 220 x 290 cm, 2016, courtesy Perrotin*

Chen concerns himself with what art is capable of communicating. “I focus [ ] on the language of art itself. I do not intend to voice my concerns on society or people through art for most discourses; instead, I explore the potential of art through [relationships, emotions, notions of identity, and more]... I hope my work can indwell in our time, and that later generations can perceive our time from my work.” Chen’s art acts as a frame or panel of an ongoing story, capturing the evolving scene of life.

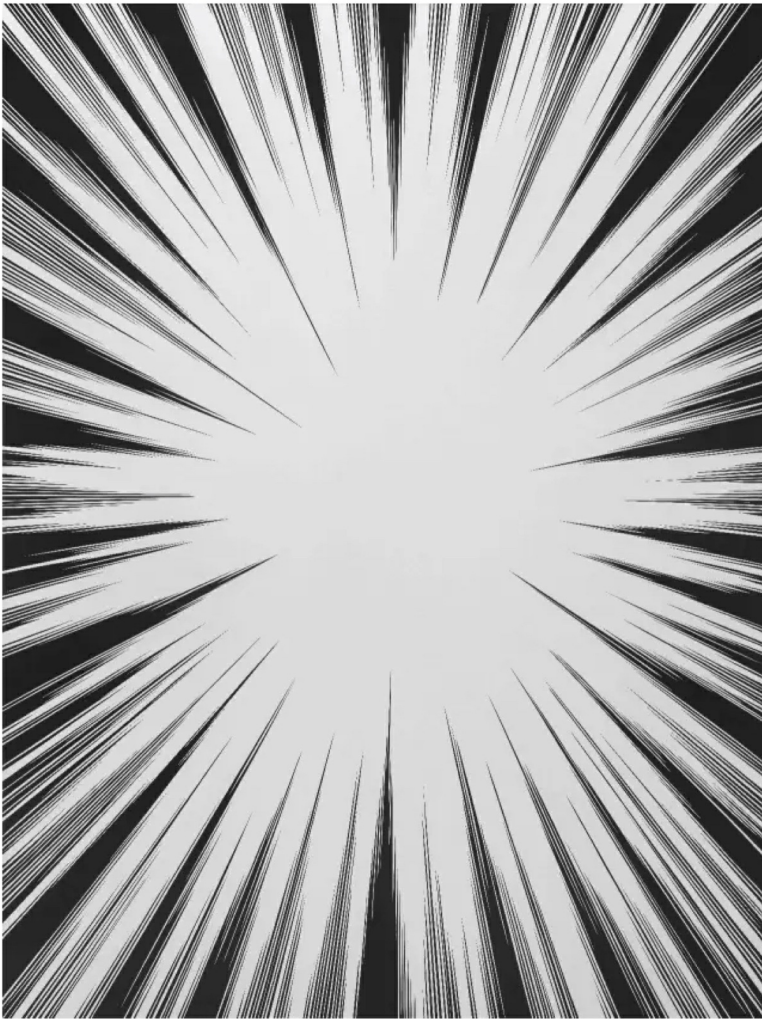


*National Conditions*, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 2017, courtesy Perrotin

Initially, Chen Fei's work is narrative-driven. Before painting, Chen creates a fictional story. Each painting is a culmination of a series of events occurring to Chen's characters and Chen captures them at a significant point in the narrative. Like people we meet on the street, the elements that coalesce into the painting's scene are unseen forces forming unexpected results. Similarly, Chen states, "[the] readability of painting [is] as a form of language. After I complete a work, how the reader interprets or gets inspired or discerns another perspective is out of my control. What I'm capable of is to convince or even exceed myself during the practice more frequently, which is one of the few approaches to express my thoughts."



*Graphic Selection*, acrylic on linen, 290 x 220 cm, 2016, courtesy Perrotin



*A Big Event*, acrylic on linen, 240 x 180 cm, 2016, courtesy Perrotin

Chen's admission that he cannot control the outcome on one hand professes that art does have meaning but on another he is not responsible for what is understood. Regarding aesthetics Chen notes, "there is no specific standard [ ]. It varies from individual to individual. Personally, what I convey is more based on my taste and my own perception of art." By relinquishing his autonomy over his own art, Chen entrusts the viewer to understand the art in their own terms, which, in his opinion, is inevitable. Yet, there are common interpretations we may all be able to agree upon. For one, that Chen has a knack for blending Chinese and Western aesthetic cultures. We can see this in *Still Life*, *Graphic Selection*, *National Conditions*, and *Huaqing Hot Spring*. In fact, these blends are not uncommon in China, where popular bath houses are stylized with Greco-Roman themes. Within the image, the blend results in a scene straddling meanings, where metaphors are indeed open to the viewer. Further, Chen expects the outcomes can be drawn along cultural lines, "national conditions, cultures, the ways of thinking, and philosophies are all different. However, even until today, I don't think the Western mainstream has gained insight into contemporary China or has any deeper interest in learning about it. But it is understandable, since it is not necessary for them to fathom a disparate culture system."



Sketch, acrylic on canvas, 240 x 180 cm, 2016, courtesy Perrotin

Chen Fei has an affinity for narrative and this is readily apparent in the scenes he depicts. While the scenes are diverse there is continuity, “artists cannot digress from the discussion on or the influence of art history. In fact, what I am discussing is exactly about our time. Probably since I don’t have much interest in politics, many people don’t get that.” Chen Fei’s newest exhibition at Perrotin in Paris focuses on, “a return to fundamental educational aesthetics or how to visualize such fundamental aesthetics. It might be an extremely intimate yet pointless thesis, but it might also be a grand task for us to take a new perspective on fine art.”



Huaqing Hot Spring, acrylic on linen, 210 x 300 cm, 2017, courtesy Perrotin

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Chen's recent compositions are balanced, geometric, and mature, subtly playing a bigger role in his new work compared to the earlier pieces. *Huaqing Hot Spring* has clear compositional harmony and balance of color and elements. Our eyes follow clear lines leading us to the shower-headed deity in the middle of the painting, and from there to the two statues flanking the stained glass. We find similar focus on composition in other paintings like *National Conditions* and *Sketch*.



*Still Life*, acrylic on linen, 80 x 100 cm, 2016, courtesy Perrotin

Chen Fei's return to "fundamental aesthetics" is not only technical return but is also a professional return. Chen shows more interest in youth subcultures than in the art establishments. His "return" is not a submission to this established order of art; he has never been one to follow societal expectations. His paintings are breaching into the art world through a "very fundamental level of educational aesthetics" with all the backing of his previous works. Chen's work is disruptive and insightful, often causing the viewer a bit of discomfort, but, with enough patience and acceptance, we too are in on the joke.



*Natural History*, acrylic on canvas, 290 x 220 cm, 2016, courtesy Perrotin

Chen Fei will exhibit "Fine Art" at Perrotin in Paris from 7 Sept. 2017 until 7 Oct. 2017. Press "Read More" for a link to Perrotin's website with the rest of Chen Fei's work.

Chen Fei lives and works in Beijing.

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