

PRESSBOOK

CHEN Ke

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01 Chen Ke: *Dream · Dew* Solo Exhibition at
Galerie Perrotin

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HONG KONG

CHEN KE: DREAM · DEW

Galerie Perrotin | 11 May – 25 June 2016

'Dream · Dew' is a solo exhibition of Chinese artist Chen Ke. The Chinese title of the exhibition, also a literal translation of 'Dream · Dew', describes the exhibition a little more that refers to Marilyn Monroe. The exhibition splits across two separate halls in blue walls in the gallery. One of the halls shows paintings of Norma Jeane in her teens and childhood, whilst the other halls shows her in the days of having adopted the name of Marilyn Monroe after becoming a celebrity. Inasmuch as Chen regards Marilyn Monroe as a representation of dream and an opposite of reality, her works are an opposite of the American and Hollywood dream of which Chen accused Marilyn Monroe.

Style-wise, Chen opts for a blurry treatment of figures and colours are bright overall. The figures in the painting look cheerful like fantasy as details are reduced. This is the basic level of how Norma Jeane as an innocent girl and Marilyn Monroe as a celebrity are portrayed as a dream in the exhibition. The dream-like feeling is enhanced by the blue walls of the exhibition space, especially because of its contrast against another solo exhibition being held at the same time in the gallery.

However, texts in Chinese can be founded in the paintings. Upon close examination of the paintings, the texts are marked on the painting by scratching directly on the smooth painting surfaces. Technically, the texts are an odd interception in the painting although they are placed very softly in the compositions and the contents are gentle. To think more deeply, that fact that the texts are in Chinese is no more mild than the scratching technique. If Marilyn Monroe is a representation of American and Hollywood dream of which Chen accused Marilyn Monroe, then the paintings are very much a Chinese interception of the American dream.

During Monroe's times, Hollywood as a specific form of the American dream was a clear leader of world popular culture. Nowadays, the Hollywood dream is still very much a leader in world popular culture, but neither is its leading status too clearly above other major forces in the film industry nor is it thoroughly American. Like the Chinese texts interception in Chen's painting, the Hollywood dream is to be interpreted by foreign forces on a lot of occasions. Or on the contrary, foreign forces want to force themselves to sharing the interpretation of the Hollywood dream and the American dream.

The Chinese texts on Chen's works look so implicit from afar yet so profound closely. The dream that the figure of Marilyn Monroe was supposed to have established, namely the American and Hollywood one, is not entirely how it has been appropriated in Chen's paintings. Whatever dreams and dew as opposed to dreams of Norma Jeane and Marilyn Monroe are, they could be some sort of false conceptions anyway when they are intercepted by the Chinese texts. They become the artist's subjective Chinese conception of the American and Hollywood dreams. (text: Bernard Yeung)