

PRESSBOOK

ZHANG Yunyao

The Artling

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"WITHOUT HOPE, WITHOUT FEAR": ZHANG YUNYAO AT PERROTIN

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Portrait of Zhang Yunyao (Image courtesy of Ringo Cheung)

Congratulations on your first show with Perrotin and solo show in Hong Kong. Could you please tell us more about your background and how the relationship with the gallery came about?

Thank you. I was born in Shanghai, where I completed my degrees and continue to live and work. I started to learn Chinese ink paintings since I was very young, and later turned to the study and practice of western painting after I went to middle school. My major in the Academy of Fine Arts of Shanghai Normal University was traditional western oil painting. After graduation, I continued my own artistic practice. There was one year in which I stopped producing my own works, and instead, I travelled to many small counties within China and painted murals for local museums with friends. Then I came back to making my own creations again, and met my representative gallery Don Gallery through a mutual friend. We have been working together ever since. The collaboration with Perrotin began with an occasional encounter, followed by a studio visit, and they started to follow my works. Until this year, they decided to organize a solo exhibition at the Hong Kong space.



*"Study in Figures" (2017) by Zhang Yunyao, Graphite on Felt, 300cm x 225cm
Image courtesy of the artist, Perrotin and Don Gallery*

What is the underlying theme for your show and could you elaborate on the title, 'NEC SPE, NEC METU' ("Without Hope, Without Fear")?

The exhibition title is in Latin, which means "without hope, without fear" in English. It was Caravaggio's motto. This eloquent phrase came up to me when I was thinking about the title for the show. I admire Caravaggio a lot. I think the best way to understand the title is to connect every work in the show to it. I blended my understanding and extended interpretation of the phrase in my works.

Many of the works you have produced for the exhibition are monochromatic and use a very traditional medium of graphite. You're also using felt as your main material which is a very unique pairing. Why this choice of medium?

I found a napkin made of special texture at a hotel restaurant in Ireland. I took it back to Shanghai as a sample and found the felt I use for my current practice in the fabric market. Compared to traditional linen, its fluffy texture on the surface is more subtle in terms of the realization of details. Perhaps it provides a different angle for the audience to view from. Graphite is one of the oldest materials in painting media history. I chose it because I have been using it since the very beginning when I started drawing, and I am very familiar with its characteristics.



*An installation view of Zhang Yunyao's solo exhibition 'Nec Spe, Nec Metu' at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2017
Image courtesy of the artist, Perrotin, Don Gallery and Ringo Cheung*

In "Study in Figures", you make particular reference to Hercules and Diomedes. Why is Greek mythology so fascinating for you and your artistic practice? How do these latest collection of works fit into your practice as a whole and how do you envision the work evolving?

I always believe that the origin of our feelings, desires and interpretations of fate can be traced back to Greek mythology. Those are the characteristics that everyone inherits and eventually passes on, of course including myself. Therefore, I wish I can have my own language to delineate those eternal motifs. It is very difficult for me to define how these latest collection of works fit into my practice as a whole, as my artistic career has just begun to take off, isn't it? I will continue the series of "Study in Figures" and present various emotions and feelings through paintings.



*An installation view of Zhang Yunyao's solo exhibition 'Nec Spe, Nec Metu' at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2017
Image courtesy of the artist, Perrotin, Don Gallery and Ringo Cheung*

You are clearly inspired by classical master painters like Caravaggio, as the title of the exhibition is taken from his motto "Nec Spe, Nec Metu". Which other artists inspire you and why?

Just as I said, Caravaggio's work and life influenced me. During the years in exile after he accidentally killed a provocateur, he continuously created stunning paintings, with fear and anxiety of being arrested. I feel inspired by such talented people.



*"Hope" (2105) by Zhang Yunyao, Oil on Panel, 30cm x 30cm
Image courtesy of the artist, Perrotin and Don Gallery*



*"Fear" (2015) by Zhang Yunyao, Oil on Panel, 30cm x 30cm
Image courtesy of the artist, Perrotin and Don Gallery*

Could you describe your creative process; how do you develop your works from initial concepts to execution? For this current show, there are varying sizes, some that dwarf the human scale. How does scale come into play within your narrative?

There are always figurative images and baffling emotions intertwined during the production process. I use printed/digital images that I had collected time by time for the draft and make other relevant preparations, then I narrow down and decide the basic elements such as composition, and start to paint, which takes a much longer period. The size of each painting depends on the emotion contained in the work. For instance, the scale of "Study in Figures" focuses on the visual influence of fierce wrestling on the audience, otherwise the strength and tension that I want to express will weaken. The choice of size may be deliberate or accidental, for instance, the door and windows of my studio sometimes also limit the dimensions.



*An installation view of Zhang Yunyao's solo exhibition 'Nec Spe, Nec Metu' at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2017
Image courtesy of the artist, Perrotin, Don Gallery and Ringo Cheung*

Being a young contemporary artist from Shanghai, what do you think are some of the challenges that Chinese artists are facing in today's art world?

In a sense, painting is a simple thing. I am not really concerned about the challenges that Chinese artists are facing at present. If I had the time to think about it, I would rather spend that time painting more pieces.

What are your plans for the future and what are you hoping to achieve through your work?

I've become more short-sighted recently. I think perhaps it is better to view my future in a myopic way, focusing on what I want to paint, steadfastly one work after another – this is my plan for the future. I hope I can make conversations with Caravaggio through my compositions, if it could be achieved someday.



*An installation view of Zhang Yunyao's solo exhibition 'Nec Spe, Nec Metu' at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2017
Image courtesy of the artist, Perrotin, Don Gallery and Ringo Cheung*

Which other Chinese artists do you look up to and why?

Chen Rong, a painter of the Southern Song Dynasty. He depicted dragons throughout his life. There is no reason to not admire a person who portrayed dragons in the way he did.

'NEC SPE, NEC METU' runs through 19 August 2017 at Perrotin, Hong Kong. For more information on the exhibition, [click here](#).