

XIE NANXING

“THE SECOND ROUND WITH A WHIP”

Artist: Xie Nanxing

Opening: Saturday, 10 November 2012 – 4PM to 7PM

Exhibition: 10 November 2012 – 13 January 2013

Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne, Beijing:

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The most interesting painters today are those who remain compelled to advance the medium's potential through experimentation and innovation. In this regard, Xie Nanxing (*1970, Chongqing, China; lives and works in Beijing and Chengdu, China) is a maverick. “THE SECOND ROUND WITH A WHIP,” his solo exhibition at the Beijing branch of Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne, presents two new series of large-scale oil paintings. One, informally called the Canvas Print series, is characterized by the works' stippled surfaces. Seen over time, these whorls and dots of pigment give way to vivid scenes that are mutually constructed by the artist and the viewer. The second series on view is loosely based on illustrations found in an interior design catalogue, which Xie Nanxing transforms into spaces redolent with references both personal and historical. Thematically, the exhibition explores what the artist calls the “ashes” or “dust” found in every representation.

In the works on view in “THE SECOND ROUND WITH A WHIP,” there are no clear references to a familiar story. Instead, we are forced to look hard at what unfolds before us. To generate the exploded pointillism of the Canvas Prints, the artist places a panel of rough, woven canvas between his brush and the painting; the daubs of color that comprise the nebulous figures in the finished work are the result of paint passing through the cloth and onto the work's surface. When the Canvas Prints are viewed with care, forms begin to emerge from the ashes: the figure of the milkmaid can be made out, and Disney's seven dwarves appear to create some mischief. As in his previous work, the scenarios are freighted with allusions to desire and violence, though in their reduced state they cannot spell out their conditions. Like finely drawn maps of territories long ago renamed, they point to an elsewhere we can only imagine, but can also be admired for their own aesthetic qualities.

As the German cultural critic and architect Siegfried Kracauer (1889 – 1966) observed, “Spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of these images are deciphered, one finds the basis of social reality.”¹ For Xie Nanxing, these hieroglyphs are etched in the fashionable rooms appearing in the pages of *Dazzling Colorful Home Furnishings*, a look book for would-be interior decorators whose images the artist has appropriated and customized for four of his new paintings. These works are not “about” the tastes of China's nouveau riche. Instead, Xie Nanxing investigates how even the most innocuous pictures are crawling with symbols and associations. These include the cherished fantasies of the artistic avant-garde of the early 20th century; hence the irony implicit in the title *Improvisation 500 (Oblivion)* (2011, oil on canvas, 190 x 290 cm) which alludes to the Russian artistic pioneer Wassily Kandinsky's *Improvisations*—a large, numbered series created with a spontaneity meant to counter the materialism of everyday commodity culture. In another of these works, *Cubist Night* (2011, oil on canvas, 185 x 265 cm), the hieroglyphs are personal. Shrouded in an eerie blue haze that is akin to the shade that dominates the artist's 2008 *The First Round with a Whip* series, the faces of the artist's immediate family surface on the model living room's walls and furniture, haunting the room like disembodied spectres.

¹ “Über Arbeitsnachweise,” *Frankfurter Zeitung* 17 June 1930, cited in Karsten Witte, “Introduction to Siegfried Kracauer's ‘The Mass Ornament,’” *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975), p. 63.

Those who have seen Xie Nanxing's earlier works, whether in reproduction or in major international exhibitions such as the 48th Venice Biennale (1999) and Documenta 12 (2007), can easily recall the strange beauty of his exactly executed canvases, which seldom tell us anything directly but leave us with a great deal to consider. If his recent paintings don't look like the previous ones, this is because Xie Nanxing refuses to lapse into a signature style. The new paintings on view in "THE SECOND ROUND WITH A WHIP" may offer us the ashes of visual culture, but this exhibition invites us to stare directly into the flames.