

Xia Xing "2007 / 2008 / 2009 / 2010"

January 29 - April 10, 2011

Opening: January 29, 2011; 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.



Xia Xing
selection of paintings from the series "2007",
"2008", "2009", "2010"

oil on canvas, two different sizes:
140 x 200 cm ("2007", "2008"),
35 x 50 cm

Xia Xing "2007 / 2008 / 2009 / 2010"

by Nataline Colonnello, 2010

The Beijing News (Xin Jing Bao) is a popular newspaper founded on November 11, 2003 as a venture between Beijing's Guangming Daily (directed by the Central Propaganda Department and supported by the Communist Party Central Committee), and Guangzhou's Southern Daily Press Group (controlled by the Guangdong Communist Party Provincial Central Committee). Although intended to adhere to the Party line, since its establishment The Beijing News has gained a reputation as one of China's most progressive newspapers. Some of the articles published in its first years are regarded as so audacious that the authorities repeatedly adopted "corrective measures" and made a series of major adjustments, replacing key personnel.

Among its most regular readers, The Beijing News counts Xia Xing (b. 1974), who has been collecting the newspaper every day since its first publication. Trained in typography and printing, Xia Xing left his native Shihezi, Xinjiang Province (Northwest China) in 1998 and moved to Beijing, where he found a job as an advertising photographer before becoming an independent painter. It was 2005 when Xia Xing, interested in the everyday life of fast changing, post-revolutionary China and aware of the significant influence over local public opinion held by a newspaper selling more than 450,000 copies per day, created his first series of works focused on The Beijing News. Like an archivist and records collector, the artist annually selects about 60 images that originally appeared in the newspaper and creates a visual diary of events by transposing the

pictures onto canvas. In his series from 2005 and 2006, each oil painting reproduces a single picture exclusively published on the front page; in 2007, the artist also began to draw some of the source images from the newspaper's inner pages. Simply named after the publication dates of the referenced newspapers, the artworks belonging to the same series are all the same size, which can range from 70 x 100 cm of 2004 (66 works), to 140 x 200 cm of 2008 (58 works), or 35 x 50 cm of 2009 (60 works). Since the first series 2004 (partly executed in 2005), the varying realism of the each individual painting's pictorial style is determined by the specific subject treated; from 2007 onward, the artists began experimenting with an additional technique that is reminiscent of the printing process, resorting to the superimposition of monochrome layers of yellow, red, blue and eventually other colours.

The source material for Xia Xing's paintings is photography. Accordingly, each yearly series of canvasses is conceived in the same way as a photographic edition: besides the whole work comprising approximately 60 pieces accompanied by the pages of the original newspapers, on request the artist can repaint a single canvas twice more, for a total maximum edition of three. In this way, and like the widespread diffusion of news through the media, Xia Xing's series exist both as an entire body of visual information, and also as dissimilar individual stories.

With respect to the content, Xia Xing's works are related to all kinds of news, spanning from amusing events such as the Beijing Winter Swimming Competition of 07.01.07, a painting depicting the middle-aged women of an unofficial, aspiring "Olympic Winter Swim team" who are seen cheering while wearing headgear in the shape of the Fuwa dolls – the mascots of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing – to the most tragic disasters, as in the case of 07.04.19, a picture representing a steel crucible that slipped onto a shed where workers gathered for a meeting in Tieling, Liaoning Province, killing 32 people. Since 2009, however, Xia Xing's paintings have increasingly concentrated on the topic of the safeguarding of human rights, a subject matter initiated by an episode that happened on December 8, 2009, when a citizen named Liu Tianxiao, a representative for consumers, threw a bottle of mineral water at an official during a public hearing over rising water prices in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province.

For the first time, a selection of works from Xia Xing's four most recent series will be featured together in the artist's solo exhibition 2007 / 2008 / 2009 / 2010, on show at the Beijing space of Galerie Urs Meile Beijing-Lucerne from January 29 to April 10, 2011.

In this exhibition, the artist's criticism of the media's strong tendency to make social and political news spectacular, as well as the public's fast consumption and the eventual oblivion of such press images, is emphasized by means of the repeated juxtapositions of paintings related to an expanded timeframe covering four years, a very long time in the forgetful collective memory of a country whose gaze is relentlessly cast into the future.