

# Ju Ting

*When the Wind Comes*

Exhibition in Lucerne: 9.9. – 29.10.2021

Opening: Thursday, September 9, 5:30-7:30 pm

Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to announce the second exhibition *When the Wind Comes* in Lucerne, by the Chinese artist Ju Ting (\*1983), who lives and works in Beijing, China. Following her debut in our gallery in Switzerland in 2018 and her last show *Scales* in our Beijing gallery in 2019, this solo exhibition presents the artist's progressive development in the three on-going series of her works - *Pearl*, *Untitled* and *Coral*.

The first impression of Ju Ting's artworks is akin to the sensation of the first few steps upon arriving at a rocky desert. One is welcomed by an endless monotonous plain, empty, out of time. Ju's technique of layering acrylic paint draws a landscape that neither invites nor repulses but just is. As a Chinese philosophical idea says, it is only when the heart moves that one may see movement: what we see reflects our own inner state. The same thought can be applied to Ju's oeuvre: it gives you back what you give to it. Your gaze may follow the lazy dust in the wind, dancing with dry leaves and sticks. In the distance appears a fragile shimmer, warm air ascending in the sun. Almost like a wave in the sea, the slow hills roll across this panorama. A sudden edge reveals a spectrum of colors: layers of stone and rocks, layered on top of each other by millennia of wind, rain and movement. Cracks lead into the glittery light of gemstones in dark caverns. And between the hills runs canyon deep, a flowing river at its base, lush with crawling vegetation and the play of animals.

This is, arguably, the most painterly character of Ju's work: its self-awareness as a blank canvas for imagination. The three series in the exhibition *When the Wind Comes* ground on layering acrylic and using its drying process to invite serendipity in. The pearl series consists of wooden bases that are covered in layers of alternately colored acrylic and parallel incisions running horizontally and vertically in close manner. The series untitled begins with similar layering only to be ripped down, hanging down like curtains after a storm. And coral consists of sculptures that are made of intertwined strips of acrylic placed on a grey brick, covered by layers of paint on top.

Ju's application of acrylic follows layer by layer the natural behavior of the paint. With each layer this geology is accentuated more and more until the artwork resembles the profile of a landscape, with hills and waves running across the surface, some are even accentuated by the careful application of triangular strips of paint between the layers. It is by the long, parallel incisions that the vertical composition of color beneath the monochromous surface is revealed. Opposing colors delicately shine through, effecting a vibrant spectacle to contrast the tranquil geology on top.

In *Pearl 061521* the dark turquoise waves recall the unclear waters between a calm day and stormy winds. Turbulent life makes itself be seen to you through luminous colors between the waves as a salty-green scent ascends from the foamy coast. Ju offers you a panorama full of imaginative and affective potential. Without representational authority Ju evokes images from the personal memory and state of the heart. This makes this series so much more complex to describe beyond a mere technical description, as the experience is so individual and subject to change through time. Even more remarkable is the differing effect the works have from each other. *Pearl 121819*, another large work within the series, has a widely differing impression due to its varying color composition. A silvery white surface covers another spectrum of colors that evoke other images, memories, and feelings than *Pearl 061521*: snowy peaks that sit atop rocky darkness are equally present as a playful rainbow within the works topography. This is a painterly highlight in Ju's practice, the composition of color as defining structure of the artwork that is reminiscent of western modernism and abstraction as Clement Greenberg championed. Though Ju takes a dramatically different route and benefits from the characteristics of acrylic that differ from classical oil paint.

Traditionally, color-based composition relied on the application of paint on a flat surface, the screen of the painting. This was due to the slow drying of oil paint and that once applied paint still can be mixed with new paint even days later. No matter how thick it was applied, the composition of color remained only possible by spatial separation on the canvas. The quality of the paint, its viscosity and luminosity, were

thus highlighted by painting technique and composition. In contrast, acrylic paints quickly, allowing Ju to paint distinct layers of color on top of each other and expanding the possibility of composition into a vertical dimension: a feature she pushes beyond the limits of painting.

This characteristic is driven even further in the *Untitled* series that sees full layers of acrylic being torn away and left hanging like wet curtains. As one layer is pulled as far to the side as possible without completely ripping out, it creates an effect of layered curtains of individual colors and folding pattern. Again, the layering process unfolds as what may be called the composition of the work. In a spectacle of colors and surface structures Ju's layering is revealed to you as the artistic principle of her work. The draped curtains result as multiple colors merge and display both differing colors on each side and surface structure: bubbly, silky, coarse, smooth. They equally narrate their own making by blatantly displaying the layering, tearing, and draping with which they evoke an imaginative space of mood. It is not exaggerated to notice that the whole series appears as covering a play that takes place in an infinite space behind infinite curtains. One gush of wind would suffice to blow them away, yet it has not come.

Contrasting that closeness in *Untitled*, *Coral* is probably the most open of the three exhibited series. In fact, it is so open that it may feel uncomfortable to look at and into its dark and shadowy corners. These sculptures are formed from stacked and intertwined strips of acrylic on top of a grey industrial brick. Covered by thick layers of acrylic on top, these strips revel in their meandering and remain ungraspable, alive. While *Pearl* and *Untitled* leave their inner working to be discovered by a curious gaze, *Coral* confronts you with its materiality and psychology: there is not much to discover in how it is made and nevertheless something seems to remain hidden behind the apparently living acrylic. Despite the heavy use of paint this series could not be further from painting: There is no surface or image to look at but rather a physical body. With *Coral* Ju pushes her use of painterly and printing techniques into the medium of sculpture. Despite this characteristic the objects remain far from the representational pitfalls of the medium and exhibit both a surprising self-awareness as well as their own material making. You can follow the artist's labor of layering the strips on the brick and paying attention to remain within the rectangular shape of the base while towering up. To top it off, Ju poured various layers of color on top, letting it set on the organic surface and drip from the sides.

Ju's deep material and technical knowledge from her education in printmaking enables her to develop an artistic oeuvre beyond the discreet categories of modern history of art. The merging of painterly material, the acrylic paint, and its treatment with techniques from the printmaking process, as carving and layering are, results in works that both unite characteristics from painting, printmaking, and sculpting and questions art history's fixation with the media of art: Ju uses an artistic strategy that may be seen within the western modernist paradigm and nevertheless results in an aesthetic experience beyond art of the 20th century western canon. In a sense, the artist proposes nothing short of a new Laocoon, to reference once more Clement Greenberg, where the individual aesthetic experience lies at its core as the projection of an individual's inner world. Ju's works give as much back as they are given in the first place as they patiently wait for a new wind to reveal themselves.

Text by Mateo Chacón-Pino

Ju Ting (b. 1983, Shandong, China; lives and works in Beijing, China) is one of China's foremost young female contemporary artists with a work characterized by coalescing two conventional art media: painting and sculpture, and obscuring the boundary between the two. Ju Ting graduated from the Printmaking Department with a BA in 2007, and with a master in 2013. Her works have been exhibited at Museum and institutions including OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Xi'an, China; Stable Gallery of Lal Lal Estate, Melbourne, Australia; Shijiazhuang Art Museum, Shijiazhuang, China; Xinjiang Art Museum, Xinjiang, China, Taikang Space, Beijing, China; Today Art Museum, Beijing, China; Hi Art Center, Beijing, China. Her works are also in the collections of museum and institutions including National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China; Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China and White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney, Australia, etc.