

The Rhythm of Transfiguration
by Liya Han

In this object, simultaneously intense and partial, insistent although accidental, in this contradictory *objet*, we must understand the fragile moment of a disfiguration that nonetheless teaches us what figuration is.

—Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image*

The body and portraits have long been important motifs in Xie Qi's painting, appearing throughout her various creative periods. Drawing on a sweeping imagination and rich perceptions, Xie Qi bestows on these shifting figures the warmth of emotion, the tension of desire, and tones of gloom. She sources her subjects of depiction from friends, everyday objects (portrait-bearing coins, plants resembling human organs), candid photographs and classic themes, capturing and depicting them in an approach akin to "psychological profiling"—the artist refines the components of the image through observation and perception, adding or removing details, destroying and reconstituting whole forms, restoring the figure to magnify parts and moments filled with dramatic tension.

He who paints, also commits to being a player in a game. By painting, one constantly maneuvers back and forth within the logic of the senses, depicting and re-presenting the real world one encounters through myriad wavering details. Since the conception of photography as art form, painting seems to have been constantly coming to terms with the curse of its inevitable demise. It is no longer able to lay itself bare to the vulgar/divine world via mirror-like reflection. With realistic portraiture having circulated between different generations of artists in various incarnations throughout the history of modern and contemporary painting, and after having been subjected to endless deconstruction and misinterpretations in the age of post-modernism, how are we now to reexamine and breach the boundaries of this ancient medium? Xie Qi's paintings seem to have formulated a clear-cut answer to this question.

"The Summer Heat Has Been Gone For Years" is a look back, a look back on the long, hot days of summer break; that sense of time so abundant it causes the mind to wander has been utterly wiped out by the unpredictably shifting present, leaving listlessness and the unknown as its only traces. This exhibition is also a look back on the recent creative trajectory of artist Xie Qi, and a concentrated presentation of her bold experimentation and breakthroughs in recent years. The exhibition presentation continues along the artist's past creative thread, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the artist's unique individual style and painting language. In such works as *Green* (2019), *Soft Ball* (2020), *Clock* (2019) and *Shades of Red* (2019), the artist has employed her trademark gloomy, hazy color transitions, a method for concealing the brushstrokes that fills the painting with a sense of a chromatic shroud, the soft edges of the forms concealed within provocative lighting. The subjects in Xie Qi's paintings—those realistic, partially depicted bodily shapes—have fully become full-fledged objects of the spectator's gaze, and serve as medium and material through which desires can be intuited. Xie Qi's depiction takes place between recollection and creation. The concealed brushstrokes, blurred boundaries and phantom colors of the pictures often radiate with a mysterious air from a past time.

Unlike the shapes and forms depicted in traditional portraiture, the aim of Xie Qi's approach by no means lies in outlining the materiality of the depicted bodies, nor their performativity when subjected to the viewer's gaze. On the contrary, her paintings come closer to rendering an abstract sense of desire. In her works, erratic and gloomy light causes the spectator to become deeply immersed in a veritable quagmire of the gaze. The bodies depicted in Xie Qi's paintings become truly animate in the eyes of those who behold them: the gazing spectator becomes captivated by the staggering color transitions and textures, ultimately oblivious of their own presence. This gaze doesn't involve any differences in gender, skin color, race or movement. Instead, it entails a sudden stabbing sensation, tedium, dread or perhaps delight: a re-discovery of the gaze and the patterns of desire that come with it. This (re-)discovery is both a trauma, afflicted by the limits of consciousness and perception, and a seduction, brought about by the infinite entanglements of desire.

In an entirely new series of works from 2021, the artist has intentionally inserted harder edges and more rigid color fields into the picture, a subtle shift that is most clearly embodied in the works *Density of Green* and *Wrinkles from Summer*. In *Daydream* (2021), *Mosquito Song* (2021), and *A Riddle* (2021), Xie Qi has entered into a state of push and pull between abstraction and figuration, as the figure details of the picture fade into lighting formed from the coalescence of color. Within this push and pull, these objects with their still faintly discernible outlines present a liquid or vaporous flow. These real bodies and faces drift amidst the picture, like phantom illusions. By depicting pure flesh, Xie Qi's creations have given shape to humanity's seemingly empty spirit and undercurrents of desire, and her painting has come to bind the shattered resonance between the vulgar and divine.