

Chen Zuo

The Unbeatable Winter

Exhibition in Beijing: 2023.4.8 – 5.14

Opening: Saturday, April 8, 4–6.30pm

“I don’t create scenes out of nothing. I still need some true impression: a cold night I walked through, a friend by my side, a few mutts pacing about in the village. *The Unbeatable Winter* is like an ideal imperfect, a truth beyond reality, a predicament, a romanticism and effort out of step with the times.”

—Chen Zuo

Galerie Urs Meile Beijing is honored to announce *The Unbeatable Winter*, the very first solo exhibition of Chen Zuo (b. 1990, Hunan, China). The exhibition will primarily present works the artist created over the past three years at the Roma Lake art district in Beijing, and will sift through the artist’s creative trajectory and methodology since 2016. The exhibition title *The Unbeatable Winter* is the thread that runs through the exhibition, as well as a projection of the artist’s creative experience.

Most of Chen Zuo’s paintings are exercises in self-affirmation as a painter. A feeling, a memory, an impression, a sign, a moment, any of these can be a creative spark for the artist. “I’m obsessed with the sense of randomness and things which cannot be controlled. I think it’s one form of struggle in painting.” Snow, people, and dogs—these recurring elements in Chen Zuo’s recent paintings are a part of the artist’s real life experience at Roma Lake. When creating, Chen Zuo repeatedly grasps a certain thing, something which isn’t graphic, but is instead “a model or structure of an ideal form I have always been pursuing.”

Chen Zuo’s works are filled with perceptions from individual experience, the feel of abrasion under intense conflict, and the order that lies beneath the surface of resistance. They appear expressive and romantic, but are also entangled with reflection and concern about their surroundings. They are divided, anguished, imperiled. The artwork *GuiFei’s love* (2019, oil on board, 108×25×19 cm) is a deep gaze into unease. Mangoes rotting under the joint effects of citric acid and fruit flies reminded Chen Zuo of what he saw at a Killing Fields memorial in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Chen Zuo decided to approach the creation through the attitude and observational methods of portraiture. Behind this extravagant sweetness is the potential for an artist to engage in sympathy, an attempt to grasp that last thread of dignity within the consumption-dominated everyday.

Whether in terms of color, texture, or the picture’s narrative perspective, Chen Zuo’s works appear anything but relaxed. The mottled plane reveals an unsettling sense of conflict and rupture. This destructive behavior is not intentionally orchestrated, but is the result of the artist’s search for the clarity of synchronicity and the unity of harmony between a clear image and a sense of chaos (chance). For Chen Zuo, what matters are the traces of individual action left in the process of painting, the accumulation of material, and the thinking and opposition behind the formation of the image.

“I have always felt that this era has no lack of skepticism. What it lacks is belief, true belief. I want to grasp onto things that can be believed in.” Chen Zuo has consistently been trying to use the medium of painting to mend the ruptures in reality, and because of this, we are able to see his powerful pursuit of wholeness in his works. This is what the artist means when he says that “the classicalist undertone is a path that cannot be avoided.”

Gazing at Chen Zuo’s works, beyond the mystery and solemnity, we are also met unexpectedly with an unbridled “youthful air,” like a young beast baring its fangs at the sky, yet mixed with a cool, romantic poeticism. Viewing Chen Zuo’s works is not a relaxing affair. The traces of time and labor stack up on the canvas, and the precision and richness of the creative path makes the act of viewing more challenging and fascinating.

Chen Zuo was born in 1990 in Hunan Province, and currently lives and works in Beijing. Chen graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts Attached Middle School in 2011; attended Tama Art University in Japan in 2014 as an exchange student; received his BFA from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2015, and his MFA in 2021.