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Liu Wei: Colors

2015.2.7 – 2015.4.17

Welcome to “Liu Wei: Colors.” In this constellation of new works, specially organized for this Great Hall, you will see the key ideas that Liu Wei’s art has explored over the past fifteen years distilled to a radical purity. You will watch a common formal language of space and material emerge across a focused sprawl of disparate objects and mediums. You will find yourself in an immersive environment, an occupied city, where visitors can never quite get around, or away from, the works on view. Looking closely, you may discern traces of the industrial systems and labor relations that gave rise to these objects. If you already know Liu Wei’s art, you might discover in this landscape both a summary of his work to date and a blueprint of where he might be headed.

Liu Wei was born in Beijing in 1972 and trained as a painter at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou in the 1990s. He belongs to the generation of artists who began their careers amidst the flourish of visceral work and underground exhibitions that bookended the turn of the millennium. In the years since, he has become a singular presence on the global art stage, known for crystallizing the visual and intellectual chaos of China’s myriad fraught transformations into an artistic language as versatile as it is distinctive. Incised sheet metal, hastily welded barriers and frames, a maze of taut-canvas shapes, a seamless wall of LCD screens showing only gradient hues, a warren of precisely jagged mirrored surfaces, vast piles of books sawed to look like stone, and of course, monumental paintings that originated as digital compositions and were completed by many toiling hands: This is Liu Wei’s aesthetic universe, both of, and slightly removed from, this particular time and place. These are the colors that Liu Wei sees.

“Liu Wei: Colors” is curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari with Assistant Curator Guo Xi. The exhibition is supported by the Liu Wei Leadership Circle: Long March Space, Lehmann Maupin New York Hong Kong, and White Cube. CP and WTi Group are the new media art production partner. Chronus Art Center is the new media art partner. The exhibition publication is supported by the H2 Foundation for Arts and Education Limited.

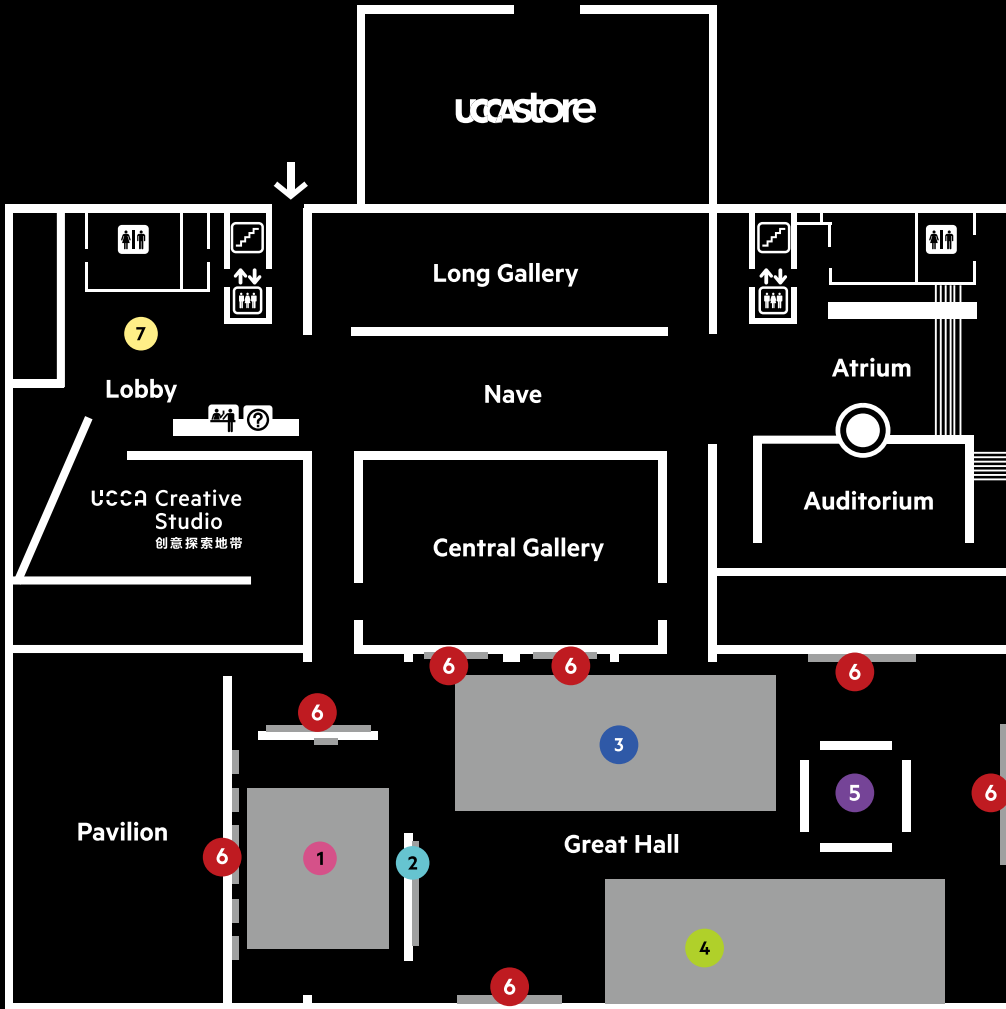


About the Artist

Liu Wei (b. 1972) was born and currently resides in Beijing. He graduated from the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, in 1996. His recent solo exhibitions include: “Sensory Spaces 4” (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2014); “Density” (White Cube, London, 2014); “Liu Wei Solo Show” (Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York, 2013); “Liu Wei Solo Show” (Long March Space, Beijing, 2012); and “Trilogy” (Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, 2011). His first solo exhibition was held at Courtyard Gallery, Beijing (2005).

Select international group exhibitions include: “Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915-2015” (Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2015); “28 Chinese” (Rubell Family Collection, Miami, 2013); “Shanshui: Landscape in Chinese Contemporary Art” (Lucerne Museum of Art, 2011); “DREAMLANDS” (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2010); “Breaking Forecast: 8 Key Figures of China’s New Generation Artists” (UCCA, 2009); “China Power Station: Part III” (Mudam Luxembourg, 2008); “China Power Station: Part II” (Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, 2007); “Art for Sale” (Shanghai Plaza, 1999); and “Post-Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion” (Shaoyaoju, Beijing, 1999), among many others.

Liu Wei has participated in the 51st Venice Biennale (2005), the 9th Lyon Biennial (2007), the 6th Busan Biennale (2008), the 4th Guangzhou Triennial (2012), and the 11th Sharjah Biennial (2013). He received the Chinese Contemporary Art Award for Best Artist 2008 and was nominated for the Credit Suisse Today Art Award 2011.



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Liu Wei, *Enigma* (detail), 2014, mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Enigma

For *Enigma*, Liu Wei uses taut, three-dimensional canvas surfaces to create a maze-like installation near the exhibition entrance. This structure is treated as one work; all of its heterogeneous components, ranging from canvas, steel armatures, found objects, and a video projection, are inseparable from the integrity of the whole. Open-ended and disorienting, the work revisits previous moments in Liu Wei's work, but displaces these ideas from their respective singularities to a

controlled field that is seemingly arbitrarily contextualized. The structure's wandering character spans the artist's creative trajectory, a spatial experience all the more disorienting for its inversion of the status of the artwork within mainstream contemporary art practice—from sacred object to component piece, artwork to material.



Shapeshifting

The monumental video installation *Shapeshifting* comprises dozens of individual LCD screens forming a fluxuating, seamless gradient. A loop of color juxtapositions, the piece variously evokes the visual patterns of screen savers, flags, and fashion design, though its minimalism ultimately confounds any specific reading. The removal of direct social and cultural content is characteristic of the artist's recent practice, even as its vivid spectacle offsets the comparatively muted tone of the other works that inhabit the exhibition space.

Video has been a major element of Liu Wei's practice since the mid-1990s. He has referred to the multi-channel video *Hard to Restrain* (1999) as the first major milestone in his career in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist. The film was first shown in the landmark "Post-Sense/Sensibility" exhibition, establishing Liu Wei as one of the key figures of his generation. In keeping with the Vienna Actionist-esque corporeal themes of the exhibition, the multichannel video depicted naked male and female figures scuttling across the floor like insects, reflecting the artist's interest in biology, the body, and visual representation of physical sensation.

Liu Wei's later video practice shifted from the phenomenological experience of embodiment to the technological and biological underpinnings of visual schema. For the solo exhibition "Yes, That's All!" (2009), he presented a series of monumental video installations that directly engaged the optical structures of color. In *Power* (2011), included in the large-scale exhibition "Trilogy" (2011) at the Minsheng Art Museum, stacked, old television monitors flipped on and off at random, the electric crack of the cathode ray tubes and a single white line across the screen acting as indexical representations of the technological processes that power them. His nine-channel video installation *Colors* (2013) juxtaposes clips of quotidian moments with synchronized flashes of color, a formal intrusion of order and structure that act as metaphors for the structures that governs the lives of those who live on the margins of urban culture.

Puzzle



Puzzle (2014) is a group of large-scale mirrors assemblages, its irregular and overlapping geometric structures simultaneously disrupt the exhibition space while expanding the viewer's perception of it, largely determined by chance angles and perspectives. The artwork has a binary existence as both sculptural object and perceptual experience indivisible from site and space. The exact assemblage of the mirrored plates—interplays of angle and curve, geometric and biomorphic—are determined by the artist during installation, tailoring the visual experience to its surrounding.

◀ Liu Wei, *Transparency*, 2014, installation, mirror glass, metal, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.



Liu Wei, *Puzzle*, 2014, glass, aluminium alloy, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Look! Books

Since 2006, Liu Wei has experimented with using compressed print materials and books as a medium for sculpture, shaving paper down to resemble marble. His first artwork employing this technique, *Stone* (2008), carved books into the shape of a meteor, the beginning of an expansive engagement with the relationship between materiality and theme, playfully conflating the intellectual activities of “reading” and “looking” (which are the same character in Chinese) in the rhetoric of the humanities. Later series, such as “Untitled” (2011) and “Library” (2013), construct model cityscapes out of compressed paper, juxtaposing the presupposed stability of urban architecture with the frailty of the material to imply a sense of ruination, precariousness, and decay.

Beginning with a group of works collectively titled *Density* (2014), Liu Wei has stressed reduction as the key creative principle for recent sculptural pieces, moving towards an aesthetic that stresses the abstract aspects of architecture and spatial construction. Here, *Look! Books* takes the art object itself as a radical reduction isolated from any iconographic referent. A colossal structure built of various geometrical forms, each using different paper stocks, it is simultaneously a fragmented body and a constructed whole, one which stands imposingly in relation to the viewer.



Crucifixion

Though a component of many of his pieces, sheet metal has only recently become a primary medium and thematic subject for Liu Wei. This strategy was first deployed in his artwork *Density* (2014), in which sheet metal was cut into rectangular structures whose compositions were determined by the dissemination of light within the gallery. Here, *Crucifixion* resituates these iron-and-steel assemblages within a semi-open, cathedral-like space. Together they mark for Liu Wei a recent move toward radical, material-based abstraction across a wide spectrum of mediums, an aesthetic characterized by an unmediated visuality.



Paintings

Liu Wei's "Purple Air," along with several later series, is designed by the artist digitally, then later realized in oil by a team of laborers. Though abstract, the visual style of these works is steeped in Liu's distinctive sense of architectural construction, a visual link to the constantly shifting urban and technological terrain of China after the turn of the millennium. The formal properties of the paintings—chopped geometrics, layered components, composite structures—link these works with the surrounding sculptural and video installations, composing a unified spatial experience across mediums.



▲ Liu Wei, *True Dimension No. 18*, 2014, oil on canvas, 500 x 300 cm. Courtesy the artist.

▶ Liu Wei, *Sandwich No. 1*, 2014, oil on canvas, 184 x 224 x 7.5 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Love It, Bite It No. 3

Liu Wei first used oxhide in his work *Love It, Bite It* (2006), for which the artist recreated iconic venues of global prestige and power—the Pentagon, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Tate Modern—out of this atypical medium. After seeing his dog gnawing on an ox hide chew toy, Liu began to consider the relationship between animal urges and human desire for power, his sculptural practice a metaphorical strategy for reducing the conceptual distance between these parallel yens. The oxhide constructions are symbols of structural frailty, the tendency of power to purport ideological infallibility that paradoxically implies weakness. Placed together, the buildings' competing claims to centrality and authority cancel each other out. *Love It, Bite It No. 3*, on view in the Lobby, is the latest work in this series. The visual style of the work reflects an interest in the iconography of religious architecture, extending Liu's material investigations to new ideological territory while scaling the series up from model to life-size.



Liu Wei
Love It, Bite It No. 3
2014, oxhide, wood, steel
dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist.



Hours

Tuesday – Sunday, 10:00-19:00

Last entry at 18:30

Closed on Monday

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