



Ullens Center for
Contemporary Art
尤伦斯当代艺术中心

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Long Gallery, Nave, Central Gallery

Press material also available for
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Wang Yin: The Gift

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The Long Gallery, Nave, and Central Gallery form the procession of a “journey” moving through Wang Yin’s departure, sojourn, and return.

From 29 March to 27 May, 2016, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) presents “Wang Yin: The Gift,” a survey including over forty works realized during the last several years of the artist’s career. For Wang Yin, the idea of the “gift” is an allegory of the introduction of “oil painting” from the West to China, a process that has spanned nearly a century, and coincides directly with the period during which China has arrived at its own forms of modernity and postmodernity. The title “The Gift” comes from French sociologist Marcel Mauss’s 1925 treatise on giving and reciprocity, themes which Wang Yin’s paintings address mainly through an iconography that draws equally on history, autobiography, and social investigation. The exhibition is presented within a new installation framework designed by architect Tian Jun, in which the Long Gallery, Nave, and Central Gallery are joined to structure the viewer’s procession through a “journey,” moving unidirectionally through sequences of paintings that evoke the stages of departure, sojourn, and return. Through these individual works and the spatial experience of them, Wang Yin offers highly personalized accounts of modern artistic and cultural history, situating his own images and even the physical materiality which undergirds them in the long arc of China’s twentieth and twenty-first century.

The journey begins at a seemingly abandoned filling station. In the five years that Wang Yin has been producing his “Filling Station” series, this single, quotidian landmark has continued to appear in the muddled distance, removed from the identifying landmarks of any city or village. Referring indirectly to images of filling stations by artists including Edward Hopper (*Gas*, 1940) and Ed Ruscha (*Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations*, 1963 and subsequent paintings), the lonely scene evokes the idea of embarking into the unknown even as it alludes to the art history in which it is situated.

The theme of “departure,” while easily gleaned from the subjects of his paintings, also corresponds to Wang Yin’s personal experience and encounter with the larger discourse of art history. In his youth he was greatly influenced by his father, Wang Qingping (1938-present), a painter trained, like nearly all painters of his generation, in the technique and effect of Soviet



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Socialist Realism. In *Father No. 1* (2010), Wang Yin melds childhood memories with pervasive ideological symbols of the time. Behind the image of his father are two figures of the Tibetan ethnic minority, appearing almost to peel away from the rest of the picture.

Visual representations of ethnic minorities are important symbols within ideological discourse in modern China. Wang Yin repeats this motif in an anachronistic setting, deconstructing its implications. In *Barefoot Painter*, Wang Yin depicts an artist in his studio, the “unhuman” quality of the artist evoking the posable wooden models used to teach figure drawing, relating the process of training to become a painter through the medium of painting. In *Painter No. 2* (2014), Wang Yin adds the figure of a Japanese woman next to the artist, her posture seeming to impose on the work of the artist, hinting at one origin of Chinese oil painting via students returning from Japan, as well as the vogue for Japoniserie that had swept through fin-de-siècle Paris just years before.

For Wang Yin, the “gift” of oil painting serves as a record of the emergence of China’s modernity: It is no coincidence that the ideals of “science” and “democracy” which motivated the intellectuals of the New Culture Movement of the 1920s overlap with the “rationalist” perspective in paintings from the period. For these intellectuals, as for these artists, Western culture loomed large. Wang Yin is especially attracted to China’s early twentieth century oil painters Xu Beihong (1895-1953), Pan Yuliang (1895-1977), Yan Wenliang (1893-1988), Ni Yide (1901-1970), Wu Dayu (1903-1988), and others, in whose works he finds an appealing simplicity owing to the strangeness and novelty of the medium at the time. In *Untitled* (2010, 70 x 120 cm), Wang Yin incorporates Xu Beihong’s *Female Nude* (1930s) to represent the appearance of the “foreign” female nude in China’s artistic history, a reflection, as he sees it, of the artistic discussions and clashes that took place between East and West. She appears surrounded by mangoes, a short-lived fetish object in Cultural Revolution iconography. The starting point of Wang Yin’s “departure” mirrors the journey of oil painting in China as a whole.

In the second phase of his journey, “sojourn,” Wang Yin uses different geographical landscapes to create a series of works that explore the feeling of “roaming” through the nation and the world, relating his “decontextualized” observations. In recent years, Wang Yin has combined different artistic styles from a viewpoint that transcends particular eras and places and brings his



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paintings into the realm of metaphor. The trains, mangoes, ethnic minorities, and suburban landscapes in his paintings serve as references to historic moments in modern China without furthering any specific narrative. By re-appropriating and re-imagining images, Wang Yin creates a series in which China's landscapes host other iconic images, becoming an elemental criticism of modern China and modern art history. In *Northwest* (2015) and *Northeast* (2015), laborers placed in the wilderness, their faces obscured and made abstract, engender a sense of alienation. In *Zhong Xiao Dong Lu* (2014) and *Untitled* (2015, 260 x 280 cm), Wang Yin disassociates political events from their specific settings, thereby diminishing the identity and behavioral significance of his subjects and suspending so-called "historical fact," answering these ephemeral political affairs with wordless silence.

The notion of the "dramatic" sets the tone for the final phase of this journey, "return." Wang Yin studied at the Central Academy of Drama, where he was exposed to a milieu of radical, cutting-edge dramatic theory and plays, even writing a thesis on Polish dramatist Jerzy Grotowski's idea of "poor theater." His fixation on characters on the lowest rungs of society and the omnipresent feeling of solitude in his work evokes the plays of Samuel Beckett. In line with Grotowski's idea of reducing theater to the immediacy of interaction between performer and viewer, Wang Yin tries to explore the oil painting's purest modes of expression amidst "an age of machine copying," and harness the dramatic power inherent in the interaction between this medium and those who view it. These works depict characters engaged in everyday actions—repairing shoes, picking up trash, riding bicycles, walking, talking. Their place within the strictures of the painting gives these figures and their actions a feeling of ritual, as if the flow of time slows down and stops in such mundane moments. Stripped of superfluous temporal context, they hint at the untouchable eternity beneath.

For Wang Yin, the creation of art is a journey of exploration of the self, and his works are his way of reciprocating the "gift" that is for him the medium of oil painting. Throughout Wang Yin's journey of an exhibition, we find a certain out-of-place stillness. This, perhaps, originates with Wang Yin's fundamental alienation, and marks his attempt to witness our age from its own fringes.



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About the Exhibition

"Wang Yin: The Gift" is co-curated by Colin Chinnery and UCCA Director Philip Tinari with assistant curator Lotus Zhang. The exhibition received support and was designed by the architect Tian Jun.

"Wang Yin: The Gift" is accompanied by a bilingual catalogue published by New Star Press. Featuring over forty plates alongside essays provided by Philip Tinari, Colin Chinnery, and Zhao Tingyang the catalogue elaborates the diverse perspectives present in Wang Yin's work, details the evolution of his practice, and provides background on specific paintings. *Wang Yin: The Gift* is produced with support from New Century Art Foundation and available at UCCASTORE.

UCCA has organized a series of conversations in conjunction with "Wang Yin: The Gift." Coinciding with the catalogue launch on 2 April, Wang Yin, Colin Chinnery, and curator Bao Dong discuss the individual and historical implications of the artist's "journey". On 3 April, Scott Lash (Goldsmiths, University of London), Zhang Xu (Renmin University of China), and Wang Min'an (Capital Normal University) discuss the cultural politics behind "the gift", and on 2 May, Qingdao-based writer Li Ming and curator Sun Dongdong discuss Wang Yin's paintings in relation to the history of Qingdao.

About the Artist

Wang Yin (b. 1964, Jinan) is an artist living and working in Beijing. He graduated from the Central Academy of Drama in 1988. Wang Yin has exhibited widely in China and abroad, including "The System of Objects" (Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, 2015); "Hans van Dijk: 5000 Names" (UCCA, Beijing, 2014); "Super-Organism," CAFAM Biennale 2011 (CAFA Art Museum, Beijing); and The 3rd Guangzhou Triennial (Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, 2008).

About the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is an independent, not-for-profit art center serving a global Beijing public. Located at the heart of Beijing's 798 Art District, it was founded by the Belgian collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens and opened in November 2007. Through a diverse array of exhibitions with artists Chinese and international, established and emerging, as well as a wide range of public programs, UCCA aims to promote the continued development of



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the Chinese art scene, foster international exchange, and showcase the latest in art and culture to hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

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