

Zhu Yu: Mute
May 21 – July 12, 2020
Long March Space, Beijing

Mute, Zhu Yu's third solo exhibition at Long March Space, will open on Thursday May 21, 2020. Visitors will enter through the newly-renovated gallery entrance into a symmetrical space leading them through the artist's painted world, comprising twenty new artworks created in the past five years.

"Mute" is a principle of action followed by the artist. The choice to remain completely silent implies a practice that rejects all systemic support and conceptual validation. "Mute" is also the artist's operational mode in the real world. Like a submarine lurking quietly beneath the sea, turning itself into a "void" to human detection technology, which is the only way it can achieve the ideal state under which to carry out its mission. For this reason, *Mute* is also an exhibition that eschews text and speech. It does not provide any artist statement, critical interpretation, artwork labels or any other form of guidance to the exhibition.

This exhibition does, however, lay bare the past five years of the artist's work, in a form customarily described as painting. The works in this exhibition include a recent self-portrait, a series of still lifes, and partial views of posed figures. The still lifes that form the main body of the exhibition include: single or multiple hearts placed in plates, this essence of blood and flesh somehow taking on a cold, metallic texture; a series of metallic plates with ashes and burn marks from cigarettes, remnants both material and temporal providing an anchor point for shifting time and space, a flick of the fingers giving rise to a vast universe; and blank white porcelain plates appearing in pairs, arranged symmetrically on the painting, the round forms taking on an ephemeral quality in the moonlit atmosphere.

In Zhu Yu's work, painting is action, as well as experiment, but it is not image or concept. The communication between the artwork and the viewer, and its connection to the world, is rooted in the vision of the individual. The discrepancies in individual experience, often manifest as the viewer's skepticism of or resistance against the artwork, are testaments to the uniqueness and freedom of art. In fact, according to Zhu Yu, everything about the artist is determined by god before he is even born, and his life's practice is the quest for that uniqueness god has bestowed on him. Placing this "uniqueness" at the core, Zhu Yu has rejected all standard rhetorical devices, and excluded people's dependence on shared experience and standards.

Coinciding with the opening of Zhu Yu's 2020 solo exhibition *Mute*, Long March Space is opening its Artist Room with a unique printed work presenting Zhu Yu's past paintings—a single, continuous fold-out that forms a river of all of the artist's past paintings. Here, Zhu Yu's painting becomes a trail of evidence, a "case". This object is

a component of the special project *A Case* created by researcher and curator Liu Tian regarding the work of Zhu Yu.

About the Artist

“For me, painting is just another way of engaging in thinking on 'life' and 'death'. It is an experience of the question of life in every day and each stroke of the brush, so to me, a painting is more of a work of performance art. In this process, the value of the image content has yielded to my research of the graphic language system.”

—Zhu Yu

Zhu Yu (b. 1970) born in Chengdu, Sichuan province, was a pioneer of conceptual art in the 1990s. Whether in the painting practice that spans his career, his conceptual artworks or his early performance works, the artistic language he has explored has always defied classification. The contemplation and probing of the independence of contemporary art language are the true aims of Zhu Yu’s work as an artist.

From the 1990s to the early 2000s, Zhu Yu mainly worked in performance art. He then created a series of works in the form of artwork proposals, such as *192 Proposals for Member States of the United Nations* (2007), which placed symbols of globalization, cultural geography, society, economics and religion into a series of frameworks to form a fixed model that could be used to create art in any country, using light humor to engage in satire on the methodology of contemporary conceptual art.

The 2001 work *Offering* stands as an interlude to the artist's work in painting since 2004. The dishes left over from the onsite performance of *Offering* became a visual link to the highly subjective oil painting work *Leftovers 01* (2004). The paintings of Zhu Yu are not simple depictions or researches into still life objects. Here, the artist's focus is instead on probing the essence of painting through the longtime accumulation of concepts, techniques, visual language and ways of seeing. For more than fifteen years since the *Leftovers* series, Zhu Yu has progressively delved deeper into his research of painting language, creating such works as *Stain*, *Pebble*, and the new works presented in his 2020 solo exhibition *Mute*. Zhu Yu’s painting attempts to avoid social metaphor, refining the barriers to individual experience through an exacting critical practice in order to re-create the freedom and uniqueness in art.