

VACANCY

Press release

Exhibition title: *Self-Dismiss*

Artists: Michael & Chiyan Ho, Huang Ko Wei, Li Hei Di, Ni Hao, Sydney Shen, Yu Linhan

Venue: Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai

Duration: January 15–March 5, 2022

Gallery Vacancy is pleased to announce the group exhibition, *Self-Dismiss*, featuring works by artists Michael & Chiyan Ho (b. 1991 & 1993), Huang Ko Wei (b. 1989), Li Hei Di (b. 1997), Ni Hao (b. 1989), Sydney Shen (b. 1989), and Yu Linhan (b. 1990), on view from January 15 to March 5, 2022. Across various mediums, *Self-Dismiss* introduces different approaches to dissect the self and the body through processes of externalization, exteriorization, and deconfiguration, attempting at substantiating the unretainable form of the self in art. The exhibition encompasses the storytelling mechanisms employed by Michael & Chiyan Ho and Li to recount stories of the marginalized; it further illuminates the prosthetic relationships between organisms and material objects as portrayed in the works of Ni and Yu; meanwhile, the figurative undergoes the processes of deconfiguration and subsequently metamorphosis as demonstrated by Huang and Shen. Concurrently, *Self-Dismiss* seeks to unveil the complexity within the labyrinth of the body and the self, further complicating the dialogues through the lens of contemporaneity.

In *The Grace of Echo* (2021), Michael & Chiyan Ho reinterprets the classical Roman myth of Echo and Narcissus in an alternative setting, suspending the figure and their reflection in an illegible landscape. While the textured background indicates a liminal space of ambiguity, its superimposed figure and reflection, rendered in a concrete and saturated manner, suggest an interesting double play between perception and reality. In their rendition, the painting centers the reflection of Narcissus rather than the subject himself, departing from the traditional interpretation of the myth in art history. Nevertheless, the supposed beauty reflection of the Greek god is disrupted by an unknown force of the rippling effect, obscuring reality and reinforcing the projected perception of the self.

Akin to the approach of the artist duo, Li carves out liminality in popular culture, specifically films that depict Chinese myths and strange tales. In *Elixir* (2021), Li filled her canvas with amorphous subject matters, which abstractly refer to the story of “The Painted Skin” from Pu Songling’s *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Through the original text and film adaptation of the story, Li captures a theatrical moment when the demon sacrificed herself to bring a deceased mortal lover back to life, in which her existence is materialized into a pearl-like ball, presenting as a cure for mortality. The close investigation of the form of life in fiction allows the artist to unearth the possibility of trespassing, to spot a glitch, which surpasses both the corporeal and structural limitation.

Ni’s works scrutinize bodily rituals popularized under capitalist consumerism. In *Grid IX* (2021), he merges the handmade scented soap with mass-produced IKEA drying racks, colliding an amorphous organic substance with a standardized industrial object. As a quintessential household object, the soap in Ni’s work serves not only as a metaphorical extension of the living entity but also a device of affirmation of the body’s livelihood. Compressed, molded, and shaped by an external structure, the portrayed state of soap alludes to various oblivious structures and systems created by human beings to regulate the body, catering to the capitalist agenda of sufficiency and productivity. Scrubbed, scraped, and dissolved, the soap and the body hold a curious relationship in which each scrupulous interaction purported by hygiene seems to be at the cost of our living environment. Underneath the pristine outlook of the sculpture, the artist oftentimes conceals a layer of self-inflicting violence that is perpetual and pervasive in our daily lives.

Yu constructs the self in duality with the conformity of silkscreen traces, medically inspired collages, and interlacing brushstrokes. Extracting from his personal experiences with medical treatments, Yu introduces the forms of medical images and instruments to intrude the organic body through a series of intricate compositions that thread through the internal and external body. Vacillating between the sense of restraint and randomness, Yu’s works strike as the reflection of the sinuous nervous system that underlies the body from its basic components, yet extends to the complicity of the self’s spiritual construction. The Slice series reveals the similar yet different visual matrix established in his practice which

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transcends visibility, allowing objects to organically make connections beyond their original sphere. The intervention of medical instruments fractures the integrity of the original body visually and systematically, signifying not as an act of delete but erasure, which retains the self in a detour, as it sets the irreversible difference at a constant state between movement and stagnation.

Though situated in the realm of figurative painting, Huang's practice constantly seeks to push the boundaries of representationality. *Afterglow* (2021) depicts the figure in an antiquity manner, capturing the moment of interaction among a human being and animals while prolonging the dynamic motion through fluid lines. The materiality of acrylic paint is underscored through the meticulous build-up of color patches and brushstrokes; such treatment traverses the hierarchy between subject and background, stripping away the commend of details in representational paintings to retain an essential bodily form. The process of deconfiguration foregrounds fluxes of swirling energy, where the discussion of a concrete body is replaced by fluidity, echoing the dynamic currents of the real world.

This Pencil Was Stolen From Puritan Salvage Demolition Co. (2021) by Shen features a two-meter-long authentic Liberty graphite pencil decorated with a classic teddy bear eraser on one end. The fictional brand trademark on the work, *Puritan Salvage Demolition Co.*, served as a dark-humor lead, invites viewers to enter a disoriented world, where the hidden messages are magnified to create an illusion of depth that is both true and false. The decorative teddy bear refers to the historical incident in which early medical identification technology mistook bear paw bones found in the countryside for the remains of missing people. The classified identity of bear and human becomes the beginning of mysterious unsolved cases along with the foreshow of deliberate or accidental killing, echoing the mutual existence and substitution of hunters and prey in the pursuit of hunting.