

*The Rabbit
Who Hunts
Tigers*



sebastien bertrand

Lian Zhang

The Rabbit Who Hunts Tigers

3 March – 15 April 2023

Opening:

Thursday, March 2, 6–8:30 pm

Exhibition preview



Lian Zhang, *All our waves are water*, 2022
Oil on canvas, 200 × 160 cm / 77.8 × 62.9 in.



Lian Zhang, *The Silent One*, 2022
Oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm / 31 ½ × 23 ½ in.



Lian Zhang, *Tiger's Den*, 2022

Oil on canvas, 200 × 160 cm / 78 ¾ × 63 in.



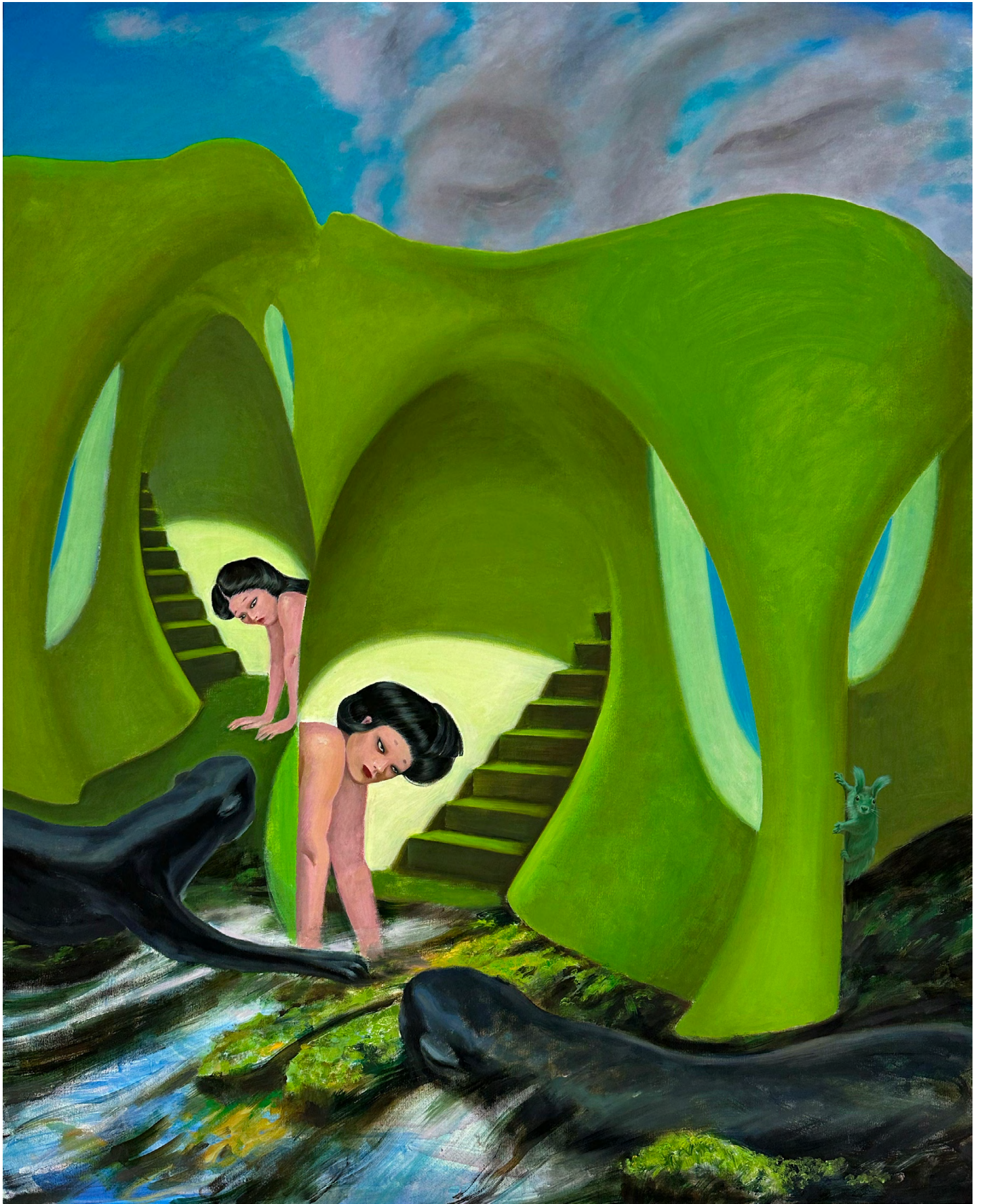
Lian Zhang, *Huntress*, 2022

Oil on canvas, 60 × 50 cm / 23 ½ × 19 ¾ in.



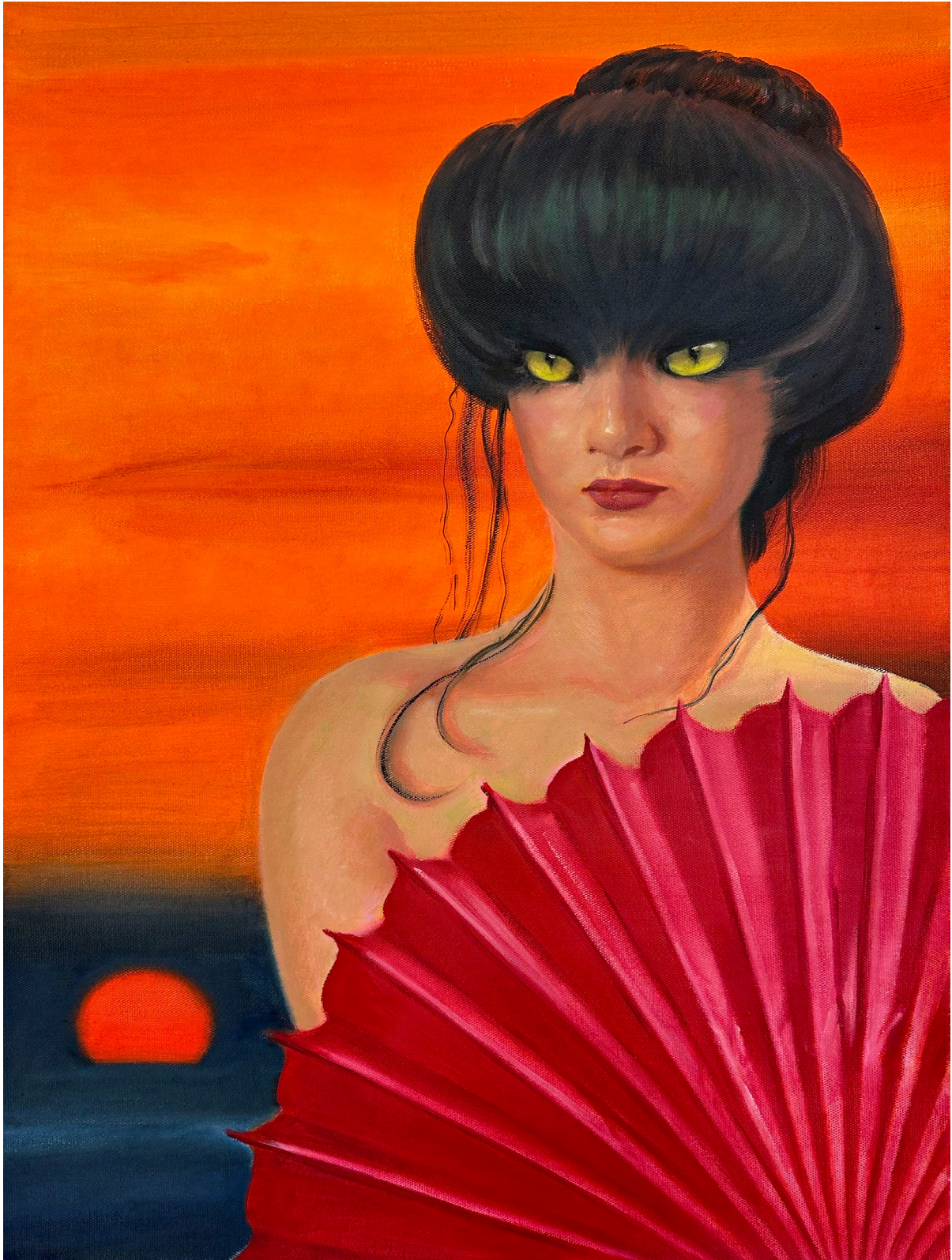
Lian Zhang, *Ambush*, 2023

Oil on canvas, 120 × 120 cm / 47 ¼ × 47 ¼ in.



Lian Zhang, *The Invasion*, 2022

Oil on canvas, 200 × 160 cm / 78 ¾ × 63 in.



Lian Zhang, *Tropical Sun*, 2022

Oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm / 31 ½ × 23 ½ in.



Lian Zhang, *The Archer*, 2022
Oil on canvas, 70 × 50 cm / 27 ½ × 19 ¾ in.



Lian Zhang, *Bystander*, 2022

Oil on canvas, 90 × 70 cm / 35 ½ × 27 ½ in.



Lian Zhang, *Cry of a Friend*, 2022
Oil on canvas, 90 × 70 cm / 35 ½ × 27 ½ in.

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Sébastien Bertrand is pleased to present the first solo show of the artist Lian Zhang (1984, Hangzhou) at the gallery.

Zhang creates powerful, emotional landscapes that transport the viewer to another time and place. Her nostalgic, illusory scenes incorporate autobiographical fragments alongside references to Eastern and Western mythology, folklore, art, history, and popular culture. Each composition dwells on contradictions that blend past and future, good and evil, myth and reality, tragedy and comedy, and hints at multifaceted narratives that strain in many different directions at once. Her works draw from Surrealism, Symbolism, Taoist philosophy, and her personal experience living in London as an immigrant.

Executed with a vivid color palette and filled with the energy of both stasis and motion, her paintings embody a fluidity between objects and figures. Zhang aspires to achieve a form of soft power via delicate, flowing, water-like brushstrokes that interlace disparate elements across the surface of the canvas.

“I always imagine that my hands become water; they travel freely when moving here to there in a painting.” – Lian Zhang

Water formless, shapeless, and adaptable – is an important component of Zhang’s work and a great source of inspiration. In that regard, she refers to Bruce Lee’s metaphor about water, quoted in Yin Yin’s album *The Rabbit that Hunts Tigers*, which gives its title to the exhibition.

While many of Zhang’s previous paintings were about exploring the experience of living abroad, this new body of works is about returning to an estranged homeland and confronting one’s deepest fear by ripping off the old wounds. They are based on the idea that life is impermanent, but one should never stop battling with inner demons and fight for a better future. The exhibition features ten paintings, three of which are large-scale atmospheric, dreamlike scenes. The other seven are uncanny portraits of female hybrid characters defying the viewer with their intense gaze.

The large work *Tiger’s Den* challenges the conventional storyline of predators and preys and reminds us that those presented as the perfect embodiment of strength and evil are, first and foremost, animals. Indeed, the demons we are afraid to face are always inside us. We are also reminded of this through *All of our waves are water* that depicts a tidal viewing ceremony of the Qian Tang River, which the artist could witness from her balcony.

“My studio was on the 24th floor, I saw so many tiny humans standing on the shore the whole afternoon just to see the waves which pulled by the gravitation of the moon goddess.” – Lian Zhang.

This piece takes this event further, to when everything gets out of control and the moon goddess stands on the water and fights her way out by cutting waves with her warping swords to kill the beast that blocks her way.

The Invasion, semi-autobiographical in a surrealist way, depicts a time when both the inner life and outer world are floating, leading to a plot that repeatedly happens in a distorted, dreamlike labyrinth inspired by reality.

Her ongoing series of female portraits explores Asian female identity, while highlighting and undermining some of the ways in which Asian women are stereotyped and objectified. *Ambush* is based on Anna May Wong, the first Chinese American actress to gain international recognition, but is yet mostly remembered for her stereotypical supporting roles as “Dragon Lady”. *Huntress*, *Bystander*, *Tropical Sun* and *The Silent One* are inspired by vintage posters in which the main protagonists were objects of male gaze. By giving these models a peculiar twist, Zhang makes them gaze back at the viewer with their monster eyes and unconventional expressions. *Cry of a Friend* and *The Archer* explore the symbol of rebellion and satisfy our thirst for freedom.

*I said empty your mind
Be formless
Shapeless
Like water*

*Have you put water into a cup?
It becomes the cup
You put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle
You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot
Now water can flow or it can crash
Be water, my friend*

– Bruce Lee, quoted by Yin Yin, in “One Inch Punch” – *The Rabbit That Hunts Tigers*, 2019.

About the works

Tiger's Den

In *Tiger's Den*, Zhang challenges the conventional storyline stating that tigers are powerful and evil predators while rabbits, meek and quiet, are destined to be preys. She portrays an humanlike rabbit wearing a Chinese warrior suit, looking at her audience fearlessly, about to enter an unknown realm bare-handed. Is she going to fight? Sacrifice herself for something bigger? Set the giant tiger free? A huge tiger eye is almost bursting through the elegant gate as if the prison can no longer hold it. In the foreground, a tiger with ghost-like green eyes is testing the depth of the water, while the lucky turtle might be surprised by a sudden attack. But while presented as the perfect embodiment of strength and evil, in a quick nod to Blake's poem *The Tyger*, we must remember that tigers are first and foremost animals. This is hinted at by the mother and its cub, hiding in the background behind the flame-like grass, vulnerably burning bright. The inner demon always comes from inside of us.

The Invasion

The Invasion depicts a time when the inner life and outer world are floating, ultimately leading to nightmares that repeat in circles. This piece is semi-autobiographical in a surrealist way and a subtle comment on the larger world. The haunting black creature, representing an unknown dark force, awaits for the right moment to attack. The woman hiding behind the pillar isn't entirely innocent, as she set her home in the creature's habitat. A grey cloud in the shape of a broken face is drowsily witnessing this stalemate, too weak to intervene. The same plot thus happens repeatedly in a distorted, dreamlike labyrinth, inspired by reality.

All of our waves are water

“For nearly six months I had a studio in a balcony with a view of the Qian Tang River where the world's largest tidal bore visited multiple times in August. The beast makes loud noises like an airplane, the marching waves form a curvy white line on the river, dividing it into a Tai-chi like field, one side in stillness, and one side in motion. My studio was on the 24th floor, I saw so many tiny humans standing on the shore the whole afternoon just to see the waves which pulled by the gravitation of the moon goddess. Each year the tidal washes away some people, but it never stops more gathering on the shore the next year.” – Lian Zhang
This piece takes this event further, to when everything gets out of control and the moon goddess stands on the

About the works

water and fights her way out by cutting waves with her warping swords to kill the beast that blocks her way. A human face in the mirror indicates that the demons we are afraid of are always inside us.

Ambush

Ambush is inspired by Anna May Wong, the first Chinese American actress to gain international recognition. She is mainly remembered for her stereotypical supporting roles as “Dragon Lady”, whilst her documentary films were much less known, even when there were few female directors at the time. The painting ironically exaggerates that stereotype by portraying her as an alien-like, cunning huntress waiting patiently for her prey.

Huntress, Bystander, Tropical Sun, The Silent one

These four female portraits are inspired by vintage posters in which the main protagonist was an object of the male gaze. By giving these models a peculiar twist, Zhang makes them gaze back at the viewers with their monster eyes and unconventional expressions. This group of characters seem suddenly aware that they are mere characters in a play and, beginning to question their identity, eventually decide to quit acting.

Cry of a Friend and The Archer

Cry of a friend is inspired by pictures of women cutting their hair during a protest subsequent to Iranian Mahsa Mamini’s death. Similarly, *The Archer* responds to the national protest against abuses related to the harsh Covid-19 methods in China.

Lian Zhang

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16, rue Cécile Biéler-Butticaz

1207 Geneva

Switzerland

+41 (0)22 700 51 51

info@sebastienbertrand.com

Hours: Tuesday–Friday 2pm–7pm

Saturday by appointment

Lian Zhang

Biography



#LianZhang

Born 1984, Hangzhou, China

Lives and works in London

Lian Zhang (b. 1984, Hangzhou, China) lives and works in London after completing her first MA in Painting from the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou (2007-2010) and a second MA from the Royal College of Art, London (2011-2013).

Zhang's works hint at multifaceted narratives that strain in many different directions at once, creating a current of tension that runs under an overlying sense of serenity. The past and the future are suspended, interweaving allusions to precise historical periods with timeless imagery. Zhang investigates the connections between interior and exterior worlds, constructing scenes both from personal memories and from imaginary landscapes. Through soft brushstrokes and a vivid color palette, Zhang creates delicate scenes of transformation. Filled with the energy of stasis and motion, her paintings embody a fluidity between objects and figures.

Zhang's paintings are firmly sited within a rich art historical tradition, drawing particularly on the Surrealist and Symbolist movements. They are also inspired by the teachings of Chinese philosophy and Taoism. Zhang's latest works explore Asian female identity and the experience of living abroad as an immigrant, challenging preconceptions and weaving together complex painterly narratives about what it means to live across multiple cultures. In particular, her recent paintings highlight and undermine some of the ways in which Asian women are stereotyped and objectified.

Lian Zhang

Biography

Born 1984, Hangzhou, China
Lives and works in London

Education

2013 Royal College of Art, MA painting, London, UK
2010 China Academy of Art, MA Painting, Hangzhou, CN

Solo Exhibitions

2023 *The Rabbit Who Hunts Tigers*, Sébastien Bertrand, Geneva, CH
2022 *Windy Paradise*, Nicodim gallery, Los Angeles, US
Weathering with You, Lychee One, London, UK
2020 *Constellations and Folds*, Lychee One, London, UK

Group Exhibitions

2022 *Angels with Dirty Faces*, Ojiri Gallery, London, UK
Dream baby dream, Fritzovia Gallery, London, UK
Ode to Orlando, Pi Artworks, London, UK
2021 *A Couple of*, Hive Art Center, Beijing, CH
Unfair Weather, Lychee One, London, UK
'Fortune exhibition of Li's Family House', Whitespace Beijing, Beijing, CN
Fertile Laziness, Platform Projects, London, UK
2020 *Antisocial Isolation*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
Oil on paper, Lychee One OVR, London, UK
2018 *Bone Memory*, Lychee One, London, UK
Rifts in Silence, M Art Center, Shanghai, CN
Flickering Boundaries, MadeIn Gallery, Shanghai, CN
2017 *Mingled Spaces*, Lychee One, London, UK
2015 *Elsewhere*, Lychee One, London, UK
Art 15, Lychee One, London, UK
2014 *10 Year Anniversary Exhibition*, Cynthia Corbet Gallery, London, UK
The Open West 2014, Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, Cheltenham, UK
Deserts of Humanity, Display London, London, UK
2013 *Painting Show & Performance*, Winter Projects, London, UK
Young Masters, Sphinx fine art, London, UK
The masks we wear, Arteco gallery, London, UK
RCA degree show, Royal College of Art, London, UK

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