

Liu Chengrui: Sir, you are a true labourer

Artist	Liu Chengrui
Opening	16:00 – 19:00, July 8, 2023
Exhibition Period	July 8 – Aug 25, 2023
Venue	MadeIn Gallery, No.1, -1F Sunken Garden, Lane 9 Qufu Road, Jing'an District, Shanghai

MadeIn Gallery is pleased to present Liu Chengrui's solo exhibition "Sir, you are a true labourer" on July 8, 2023. This is the artist's second solo exhibition at MadeIn Gallery after "Pagan" in 2016. For the duration of the exhibition, Liu will stage on-site performance, connecting his poems, photography, and paintings on display. The artist renders his body as the wrestling field of rituals, myths, consumption, and willpower, in an effort to reshape the grand narrative of humanity and to chart an ambiguous yet empowering territory in between the individual and order, surrender and resistance, the daily and the sublime.

With highly ritualistic and symbolic performances centering around his body, Liu seeks to offset, in a roundabout and repetitive manner, an all-encompassing order within the context of contemporary geopolitics and consumerism. Under this politico-economic order, people can but become part of a social apparatus known to be exploitative, where capital, the instrumentalization of humans, and the reduction of art and artists to a mere occupation are interlinked; meanwhile, local identity and life experiences risk being co-opted by the mainstream narrative of contemporary art across the West and the East. The violence of such an order leaves physical trauma on the subject of Liu's performance, but in their repetition and ritualization of the trauma, they voice resistance through consent and generate a transformative spiritual power.

This exhibition endeavours to build a contemporary mythology where the individual pursues fleeting freedom in a reality permeated by social control. In his newly conceived work, Liu plays an ultimate "true labourer" with his performance, work, and daily life all staged on a comma-shaped stand, representing the schizophrenia of contemporary people. The audience will be able to interact with the artist through acts of consumption, which both satirizes the instrumentality of our daily communication and establishes a form of "living" performance art. Crucially, the audience's consumption is the most ritualistic and painful part: despite being a manifestation of the aforementioned order, the consumption on site can potentially lead to the annihilation of ritual, pain, willpower, and art while generating "products" and pleasure. It is therefore not a somberly suffering body that we see in Liu's performance, but an ordinary one that is enduring what can be endured, enjoying what can be enjoyed. Inherently connected with the world, it is self-mocking and self-coherent in its solitude. In this sense,

the pursuit of freedom by the “true labourer” is arduous and universal – they, or rather us, rebel against ritualism with rituals, against fundamentalism with a fundamentalist methodology, against consumerism with consumption, eventually constructing the daily as an anti-sublimity sacrifice to the sublime.

About Liu Chengrui

Liu Chengrui was born in Qinghai in 1983 and grew up in a semi-nomadic family. In 2005, he graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at Qinghai Normal University and currently lives and works in Beijing. His works encompass performance art, painting, and writing. The "Ten-Year Plan" initiated at Qinghai Lake in 2006 serves as the humanistic cornerstone of his creations. Through the "agreement" that connects numerous participants, they collectively reshape their life scenes and social identities. Liu's works strive to approach one's willpower and the poetic essence in daily life, presenting strong personal beliefs and complex spiritual realities through the imagery of mythology, allegory, and consumerism. Poetry, as the source of imagination, is central to his creative process. He operates a daily-updated poetry platform called "Punishing Pride" and has independently published poetry anthologies including Grief (2017), So the River (2013), and Which Way to East (2004).

Liu Chengrui's major solo exhibitions include "Hello Spring", Cai Jin Space, Beijing (2022); "Pagan", Madeln Gallery, Shanghai (2016); "Into the Sun", X Gallery, Beijing (2015); "So The River", A4 Contemporary Arts Center, Chengdu (2013); "Our Backgrounds are All the Same", Vitamin Creative Space, Beijing (2011). Major group exhibitions include "About Wind", Nanjing Art Museum, Nanjing (2021), "Stratification and Synthesis", Xiezilong Image Art Museum, Changsha (2020); "Heavy Artillery", White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney, Australia (2016); The 3rd Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art, Yekaterinburg, Russia (2015); The 6th Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia (2015); Performance Platform Lublin, Labirynt Gallery, Lublin, Poland (2013); The 19th Nippon International Performance Art Festival, Tokyo, Osaka, Nagano, Japan (2013); The 53rd Venice Biennale – Exhibits from Macao, Venice, Italy (2009). Liu was awarded the Excellence Award in the Youth Plus-Young Artists Promotion Project supported by China National Arts Fund (2015), first prize in the 1st Circle Art Youth Award (2015) and a Merit Award in "Inward Gazes – Documentaries of Chinese Performance Art", Macau Museum of Art (2008).