

**"Likes in the Flow, Ab-Ex on the Street"**  
**Xu Zhen® Solo Exhibition**  
**Nanjing G Museum**  
**2023**

The Nanjing G Museum is pleased to present XU ZHEN®'s solo exhibition "Likes in the Flow, Ab-Ex on the Street" on July 14, 2023. The exhibition will showcase XU ZHEN®'s latest creations from the *Passion* series alongside a multimedia work *Base* (2023). Xu Zhen was born in 1977 and is considered an iconic figure in Chinese contemporary art. He has gained international recognition for his innovative and thought-provoking artistic creations. Xu Zhen has been active on the global art stage since the late 1990s. His artistic practice spans various mediums, including installation, sculpture, painting, photography, and performance, often exploring themes of cultural identity, globalization, consumerism, and more.

Xu Zhen's *Passion* series, under the surface of abstract expressionism, represents both the derivative of intelligent social media and a reflection of everyday online life. Its foundation lies in a remarkable invention - the screenshot function of smart phones. All the images are transcribed from the constantly forwarded chat contents on our phones, as well as various cropped and edited screenshots.

The *Passion* series of paintings explores the data-driven reality of the social media era and depicts its possible manifestations. It creatively continues and develops the genres of Pop art, conceptual art, and abstract expressionism in the context of the global shift towards cloud computing and artificial intelligence. The *Passion* paintings exhibit a distinctive style. Xu Zhen fully adheres to the logical and visual habits of social media interfaces in his painting practice. Using oil paint as the medium and constrained by three colors, he comprehensively expresses emotions from social media. Emotional communication, information exchange, thought rhythms, and the density of confessions all morph into the primary dynamic relationships on the canvas and directly influence the language and visual expression of the artwork. In doing so, Xu Zhen integrates painting and screens, as well as the ubiquitous elements of virtuality and reality in the contemporary world, expanding and strengthening his visual language. The artist takes this relationship to the extreme, prompting us to reflect on the logic and ethics of the social media era.

In the exhibition "Likes in the Flow, Ab-Ex on the Street" at G Museum, XU ZHEN® will present his latest works from the *Passion* series, marking the first large-scale and systematic display of the series in a museum space. In these new works, the expressive power of emotions is noticeably enhanced. The atmosphere of the paintings is split by the contrasting emotions conveyed through different dialogues, while the textual content and relationships of social media conversations are transformed into abstract brushstrokes and shapes. The experience of both perceiving the expressiveness and attempting to translate it into emotions and content alternates throughout the viewing of this series. Abstraction, expression, and stylization become less definitive. The ultimate goal of this series seems to be to present a process of communication, a reality of digital desire. This creates a new relationship among the elements of the artwork, transcending their role as a form of language and becoming practical tools of communication.

Unlike XU ZHEN's® large-scale paintings, the protagonists of the artist's "Signal" project – thousands of small paintings from the same series – appear neatly and densely on the wall, like lines of code ready to be called upon. In the past year, over 2,000 small paintings have been gifted to the artist's friends and audiences in different countries, who then display the paintings on their respective social media platforms (WeChat, TikTok, Instagram, etc.) to reach a wider audience. In this exhibition at G Museum, Xu Zhen selected some images of the *Passion* paintings taken by the audience themselves from these social media channels and juxtaposed them with the actual "Passion" paintings in the gallery. In doing so, the artist embeds the gestures of smearing from his own paintings into the actions of posting, sharing, liking, and commenting of these social media images. Xu Zhen appropriates how the audience uses his paintings' images and overlays them with new paintings. He implies the question of "how a painting appears today" and mobilizes the audience's sensitivity to the digital and real-world interface.

The design of Apple Store has a high level of recognition worldwide, providing people with an experience of innovation and high technology in a retail setting. In *Base*, Xu Zhen directly appropriates a complete set of display items from Apple Store, including tables and mobile devices, and designates them as sculptures for the exhibition. The Apple devices, such as iPhones, play real digital content generated during their actual usage. These authentic digital contents disrupt the comfortable, secure, and professional high-tech atmosphere created by commercial design. Here, the artist integrates various aspects of social production, incorporating industrial design, consumer experience, contemporary technology, and big data platforms into the artwork. The entire set of products and display arrangements become the "pedestal" of the sculpture, while the content on the phone screens represents the "shape" of the sculpture, making *Base* a conceptual artwork that continuously captures the reality of digital image production.

Similar to the assembly of data-infused emotions and the circulation on social media, in the exhibition "Likes in the Flow, Ab-Ex on the Street" at G Museum, XU ZHEN® creates a portrayal of the digital era and places it within the urban landscape projected by the museum at an altitude of 200 meters. This arrangement organizes a new reality of technological culture in terms of aesthetics and sensibility. The collaboration between G Art Museum and XU ZHEN® in presenting this solo exhibition not only aligns with the museum's ongoing support for contemporary Chinese art, bridging reality and envisioning the future, but also serves as a further interpretation of this purpose following its inaugural exhibition "Eternal and Ever-changing" of artist Yu Youhan in 2022. It aims to provide an alternative aesthetic path for urban life in Nanjing through contemporary art.

The exhibition catalogue, "Likes in the Flow, Ab-Ex on the Street", will be published featuring a review by the guest author Wang Yamin and will include another article written in 2021 by philosopher Lu Xinghua, titled "In The Excrement Lies Gold, Where Aimless Prodding Births Divinity".