

Empty Gallery is pleased to present *Le Contre-Ciel*, a group exhibition curated by Olivia Shao including works by Yuji Agematsu, Francis Alÿs, Paul Chan, Mel Chin, Magalie Comeau, Bruce Conner, Liz Deschenes, Trisha Donnelly, Agustín Fernández, Guo Fengyi, Richard Hawkins, Kong Chun Hei, Leung Kui Ting, Mathieu Malouf, Kazuo Ohno, R.H. Quaytman, Julia Scher, Michael E. Smith, Vunkwan Tam, Tang Kwok-hin, Tom Thayer, Stewart Uoo, Antek Walczak, Wucius Wong, and Yu Ji.

Inspired by a collection of writings by René Daumal, *Le Contre-Ciel* translates to “Against The Heavens” or “The Counter Heaven.” In these early poems, Daumal performs an inversion of symbolic conventions, positioning the sun and sky not as traditional bringers of vitality, order, and awareness, but as tyrannical elemental forces which obstruct the passage to metaphysical truth. The sun enacts a kind of originary violence on the living through its very properties of revealing and form-giving—its premature solidification of the generative flux of being. Instead praising states of blindness, sleep, and bewilderment, Daumal proposes a counter-poetics in which the liberation from false sovereignty can be found only within the undifferentiated realm of darkness—a refuge from the regime of fixed forms, stable identity, and enforced visibility. Shao’s title also calls to mind the contested notion of Tian [天] within Chinese philosophy as well as the so-called “mandate of heaven.”

Le Contre-Ciel touches on all of these themes, bringing together an iconoclastic selection of pieces from ancient Neolithic objects to contemporary artworks and modern ink paintings. The show stages a singular encounter between these artworks and the economic, cultural, and political circumstances of Hong Kong—treating them not as static objects but as animated palimpsests, at once determined by the historical and material circumstances of their own creation, whilst also being open to a kind of prismatic contextual re-reading. Some artworks—Tom Thayer’s sentient stones, Julia Scher’s guardian dogs—are endowed with unexpected resonances when read through the rich symbolic index of literati culture. Others, such as the self-reflexive photograms of Liz Deschenes and the meditative ink paintings of Wucius Wong, are brought together through a sympathetic relationship to material contingency, quasi-ritualistic practice, and reflexive contemplation. Shao finds in these diverse practices a shared approach to art-making predicated on a profound embrace of chance, the ceaseless play between disappearance and emergence, and the mediation of reality through the minimal gesture.

Resolutely cosmopolitan in its approach to cultural difference, *Le Contre-Ciel* proposes a speculative re-inscription of the place of traditional Chinese aesthetics within modern art history, while also challenging its historical and contemporary entanglement with power.

Special thanks to Stephen Cheng and Alexander Lau; the amazing staff at Empty Gallery; all the artists in the exhibition; lenders Rhea Anastas, Mitchell Aligus Gallery, Andrew Kreps Gallery, Bob Nickas, David Zwirner, Gladstone Gallery, Long March Space, Miguel Abreu Gallery, Greene Naftali, Trevor Yeung, Nicolas Chow, Gaga Gallery, Johnson Chang, Derek Eller Gallery, Kiang Malingue, Galerie Buchholz, Maria Kiang, Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio, Clay Hapaz, and DREI Gallery; Phillippa Shao; Rich Aldrich; and Jay Sanders.

Olivia Shao is the Burger Collection & TOY Meets Art Curator at the Drawing Center in New York. She has also organized exhibitions and projects at independent spaces, galleries, and institutions in New York City and Los Angeles, as well as in Europe and Asia.

Empty Gallery 隆重呈獻由 Olivia Shao 策展的展覽《Le Contre-Ciel》，參展藝術家包括陳佩之、Richard Hawkins、Mel Chin、梁巨廷、R.H. Quaytman、Antek Walczak、Michael E. Smith、Julia Scher、Stewart Uoo、于吉、Liz Deschenes、王無邪、譚煥坤、弗朗西斯·埃利斯、鄧國騫、Mathieu Malouf、Yuji Agematsu、Tom Thayer、鄭鎮禧、Magalie Comeau、郭鳳怡及大野一雄。

是次展覽從 René Daumal 一系列文章中獲得靈感，《Le Contre-Ciel》意為「對抗天空」或「逆天」。在這些早期的詩篇中，Daumal 顛覆象徵符號的慣性，不再視太陽、天空為活力、秩序和醒覺的象徵，而表現其為阻礙通往形而上真理的專橫力量。太陽代表一種藉其顯露及形態支配（其對生命流態的過早固體化）本質而強加於生命的原始暴力。Daumal 沒有頌讚盲目、昏睡及迷惑，而是提出一種相對的詩意性，當中錯置主權的解放只能於無差別黑暗領域（逃離固定形態、穩定身份及強制能見度的避難所）中找到。Shao 的展覽標題喚起中國哲學概念裡及所謂「天命」中，「天」具爭議性的定義。

是次展覽涵蓋這些主題，在展品挑選些上一反常規，展出由新石器時代物件及至當代藝術品和現代水墨畫作。展覽呈現了這些藝術品與香港的經濟、文化和政治環境之間獨特的相遇——不把它們視為靜態之物，而視其為動態複寫本——既取決於其創作的歷史和實質環境，亦開放出一種多重脈絡的重新閱讀。有些藝術品，如 Tom Thayer 的知感石頭，Julia Scher 的守護犬，在文人文化豐富的象徵意象下閱讀，會有意想不到的體會。又如 Liz Deschenes 自我反思式的照片與王無邪冥想式的水墨畫作，透過物質偶然性、類儀式行為及反省沉思之間的交感性關係而連繫起來。策展人在這些看似不同的創作實踐中發現了相同的藝術創造方法，乃是基於對機遇性的強烈抱擁、在消退與浮現之間不斷的遊玩、以及透過最簡單的姿態來導介現實。

《Le Contre-Ciel》毅然地以世界視野處理文化差異，對中國傳統美學在現代藝術史中的定位提出一種思辨式的重新展述，並同時挑戰在歷史上及於當代中其與權力的糾葛。

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Olivia Shao 是 Drawing Art Center, Burger Collection & TOY Meets Art 策展人。她曾在紐約、洛杉磯以及歐洲和亞洲的獨立空間、畫廊和藝術館組織過展覽和項目。