

**Elizabeth Jaeger: Contempt****Dates: 2024.08.17 – 10.26****Address: Capsule Shanghai, 1st Floor, Building 16, Anfu Lu 275 Nong, Xuhui District, Shanghai, China**

Capsule Shanghai is delighted to present 'Contempt', the first solo exhibition in China by the New York-based artist Elizabeth Jaeger (b. 1988 San Francisco; lives and works in New York). Loosely inspired by Alberto Moravia's novel of the same name, 'Contempt' brings together Jaeger's most recent body of works, notably ceramic and metal pieces specifically made for this show. The exhibition unfolds across four halls of the gallery - all of which are interconnected yet independent - and explores the idea that contempt permeates various aspects of human life, whether manifested individually or societally.

René Descartes' *Passions de l'âme* marks an important milestone in the history of thinking about contempt as a distinct idea. Prior to Descartes, philosophers rarely included contempt in their taxonomies of the passions, treating it as a subspecies of indifference. To have contempt for something meant to be free of passion in relation to it. Descartes expressed the dual nature of contempt: its potential utility as a discouragement to vice, while at the same time presenting it as just as unruly, capable of abuse, requiring regulation. Following Descartes's intervention, philosophers increasingly came to include contempt among the passions. This led to changes in lived understandings of the concept as well as philosophical implications.

For this occasion, Elizabeth Jaeger transforms the gallery into a living theatre set. The viewer immediately becomes aware upon entering of the unusual presence of a prolonged metallic sound, (whose origins are revealed in the farthest room of the gallery). The sense of alienation is deepened with dystopic scenes depicting a world almost devoid of humans; the viewer walks among artworks that serve as both actors and props, and is suspended in a constant state of semantic ambivalence and liminality. Jaeger's 'Contempt' conveys a strong sense of the passing of time, leading the viewer into an oneiric state where it is unclear whether one is navigating the past, present or future; it enwraps the visitor into a total artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), in which each element speaks to our times at both the micro and macro scales.

The show opens with a post-human scene: a room filled with ceramic flowers, neatly arranged on structures resembling tombs (*Colma, Isola San Michele, Woodside, Borella, Fushimi*, 2024). The delicacy and precariousness of the flowers is experienced through their swaying at the passage of visitors. Beauty and decay share the same space. Juxtaposed with the flowers are insects and animals represented at different scales, a leitmotif of this show: worms, rats, birds, but, most of all, beetles. More than 600 beetles invade the gallery, constituting not just an all-pervading visual element; the energy they emanate, their industriousness and their frantic movements turn them into a sonic element as well, a permeating noise, a crawling synesthesia linking the gallery halls to each other.

When the rooms are not completely devoid of representations of the human presence, individuals are presented as 'drifters' on the verge of collapsing, 'leftovers' whose role in the world is no different than that of the insects or other animals portrayed. The work *In my dreams I am falling, in my life I am falling asleep* (2024) epitomizes this aspect of her works: falling may be a reference to 'falling to pieces', free falling, falling from grace or many other notable falls in the story of humankind. Dreams are, for Jaeger, realms of intensity, where everything is exaggerated; real life is the less intriguing

version. (Un)Crossing boundaries or living between realms and states of existence is not just characteristic of the few human figures presented, but also of the other animals on view: *Rail (Flaco)* (2024), inspired by an owl who escaped the Central Park Zoo in a storm, and spent a year living 'free', peering into people windows and thus reversing the perspective on inside and out, of city and cage, of observer and observed, offers one example of this dynamic. The dogs of *Rail (Polly)* and *Rail (Winston)* (2024) are caught in a state of in-betweenness, too. They express the tension of feeling trapped, wanting to act, but perhaps are too ready to be tamed, programmed by humans to be onlookers and companions rather than the authors of their own lives.

Anxiety reaches its climax in the dog depicted in *Sudden footsteps* (2024). Sharing the same room with *Contempt* (2024), a mysterious kinetic machine, the canine looks frightened, as if signaling a bad omen. This last space also holds a lifesize woman, *Blaming God* (2024) - whose mirror-like body reflects her surroundings - the body expresses ferocity with her piercing and intimidating eyes but also vulnerability.

Contempt is an expression of knowledge and will, but in this case, it is rendered mute. Jaeger's works position the idea of contempt as an aborted driving force that, rather than being a catalyst for change or fighting the targets of one's distress, instead testifies to a process of acceptance, of impotence rather than stoicism. The prevailing feeling is of a humanity that has become empathically impaired by a blind faith in progress, a product of the erroneous faith in the primacy of civilization. Here one is aware of one's flaws but unable to correct them, and so becomes embedded in a system that perpetuates itself relentlessly despite its unsustainability.

Like Jaeger's protagonists, humanity finds itself at a crossroads. The instinct to act does not equate to the capacity to act. Awareness of this state is itself a vector of tragedy; as in Jaeger's *Blaming God*, it seems as if humanity is left grimacing, its shaking body fit only for procrastinating rather than truly engaging.

Text by Manuela Lietti

伊丽莎白·耶格：蔑视

展期：2024.08.17 – 10.26

地址：胶囊上海，上海徐汇区安福路 275 弄 16 号 1 层

胶囊上海荣幸呈现纽约艺术家伊丽莎白·耶格（Elizabeth Jaeger，1988 年生于旧金山，现居纽约）在中国的首次个展“蔑视”，呈现其为展览特别最新创作的陶瓷和金属作品。展览在画廊的四个独立又相连的展厅中循序展开，受阿尔贝托·莫拉维亚（Alberto Moravia）的同名小说启发，探讨了“蔑视”这一概念在个体和社会生活不同维度中的体现。

勒内·笛卡尔（René Descartes）的《论灵魂的激情》（*Passions de l'âme*）一书是哲学领域将蔑视作为一个独立概念来思考的重要里程碑。在笛卡尔之前，哲学家鲜少在情感分类中将蔑视归为人类主要激情之一，而是将其视为冷漠的一种体现。对某事物抱有蔑视之情，意味着对其毫无热情，无动于衷。笛卡尔指出了蔑视的双重性：一方面，它可能成为遏制恶行的有效手段；另一方面，它也和所有其他激情一样，是难以自抑的内心波澜，有泛滥的风险，因而需要加以控制和干预。笛卡尔的著作促使更多哲学家将蔑视纳入人类主要激情范畴，从而改变了人们在生活和哲学层面对这一概念的理解。

伊丽莎白·耶格将画廊变为一个充满生命力的剧场。观众踏入展厅便可听到阵阵清脆悠远的金属碰撞声（而声音的来源则在展览的末尾才会揭晓）。随着作品中鲜有人迹的错位场景接连出现，一种异界感逐渐浮现。作品既是演员也是道具，观者穿行其间，仿佛游离在暧昧不明的临界状态。在这个梦境里，强烈的时间流逝感如影随形，观者身处的是过去、现在还是未来已难以分辨。整体艺术（Gesamtkunstwerk）将观者环绕其中，每一个元素都在宏观和微观层面与我们的时代产生共鸣。

展览以一个颇具后人类意味的场景开篇。一个房间里摆满了陶瓷的花朵，整齐排列在宛如棺柩的结构上（《科尔马》《圣米歇尔岛》《伍德赛德》《波雷拉》《伏见》，2024）。当观者经过时，花朵或将轻轻摇曳，更显脆弱飘零，美丽与衰败在同一空间中交织。花朵周围遍布着形态各异、大小不一的昆虫与动物，它们是贯穿展览的核心意象——蠕虫、老鼠、飞鸟，最难以回避的是甲虫。超过 600 只甲虫侵入了展览空间，不仅成为了无处不在的视觉元素，它们忙碌不休的身影和细密高频的动作更令其散发出一种独特的能量和气场，静态的雕塑仿佛有了簌簌的声音，穿透进脑海，犹如一条蜿蜒的通感之流，穿梭流淌于各个房间。

在为数不多的出现人物的作品中，个体被塑造成崩溃边缘的“流浪者”或“遗落者”，他们的社会角色无异于上述的昆虫和其他动物。这是耶格创作的着眼点之一，在作品《我在梦境中坠落，在现实中沉睡》（2024）中便可见一斑。坠落可指摔落成碎片、自由落体、跌落神坛，或人类历史上任何其他意义重大的陨落。对于耶格来说，梦境是强烈的，一切都被夸张放大，相比之下现实则平淡庸常。她的作品中，不管是人还是动物，都仿佛在跨越界限，徘徊于不同维度的罅隙之间。《围栏（弗拉科）》（2024）的灵感来自一只同名猫头鹰。它在风雨中逃离了纽约中央公园的动物园，度过了一年所谓的自由生活。它时常在纽约居民公寓的窗外窥探人类的生活，内与外、城市与牢笼、观看者与被观看者就此调换。《围栏（波莉）》和《围栏（温斯顿）》（2024）中的狗则在各种层面上都陷入了一种不前不后的“中间状态”，它们表现出被困的紧张和渴望行动的急迫，但或许其实也同样急迫地等待着被驯化，等待着成为某人的观众和同伴，而非自己生活的主宰。

在《突如其来的脚步声》（2024）中，焦虑达到了顶点。它与《蔑视》（2024，一个神秘的动态机器）共处同一展厅，狗的形象显得异常惊恐，仿佛预示着不祥。房间里另一件作品《怨天》（2024）中，近乎真人尺寸的女性镜面身体反射出四周的环境。她的灼灼目光锐利摄人，身姿却流露出脆弱彷徨。

蔑视是智识和意志的表现，在这里被刻画得缄默无声。耶格的作品中，蔑视这一情感既不是推动改变的催化剂，也并未引发与困境根源的抗争，而是作为一种胎死腹中的驱动力，见证了一个接受的过程——一种无力，而非坚忍。人们因盲目信奉进步而丧失共情能力，这是文明至上的错误信仰的产物。在这里，人们意识到自身的缺陷却无法加以纠正，最终陷入一个不懈地自我维系但本质不可持续的系统中。

如同耶格作品的主角，人类正站在十字路口。行动的冲动并不等于实际的行动能力。对这种状态的觉知本身就带有悲剧的底色。正如作品《怨天》所示，人类似乎只能苦笑面对，颤抖的身躯拖延挣扎，却难以投入行动。

撰文：玛瑙