

Petzel

XIE NANXING

Eight Dreams

April 17 – May 23, 2025

520 W 25th Street

“Dreaming has a meaning, like everything else we do.”

—Carl Jung, “The Analysis of Dreams”¹

Petzel is pleased to present *Eight Dreams*, an exhibition of new paintings by Beijing-based artist Xie Nanxing, opening Thursday, April 17, 2025. The show marks Xie’s second solo exhibition with the gallery and will be on view through May 23, 2025, at 520 West 25th Street.

The premise is simple enough: eight paintings, all in the same format, all relating to the artist’s dreams. The paintings themselves, however, are less straightforward. Xie’s practice is underpinned by a desire to bring figurative painting into new territory, while at the same time questioning the validity of the medium. It is to this end that his dreams have been *exploited*, not interpreted or illustrated, as he turns to the language of the unconscious both as a challenge and for support.

“Many dreams,” wrote Jung, “baffle all attempts at reproduction, even immediately after waking; others can be remembered only with doubtful accuracy, and comparatively few can be called really distinct and clearly reproducible.”² It is this fleeting, elusive quality that Xie seeks to capture. Rather than the fantastical but almost classical figuration of much surrealist painting, the viewer is confronted with an experience that is often more like trying to piece together a dream, of which only hazy memories remain.

Xie’s paintings seem both to encourage and resist interpretation. The first four paintings in the series, which form a group of sorts, all include fragments of text, however these are never entirely clear. In *Exploited Dream No. 2*, the viewer can see seven lines of Chinese characters. These in fact form a poem that relates to the content of the painting. However, they have been emphatically struck through, such that hardly a single word can be made out, and the one that is most visible—哧 (chi), indicating the sound of giggling, heavy breathing or something being torn—is itself deeply ambiguous. Once crossed out, these lines of text become something new: the steps on a pathway that curve up through the painting.

In the last 15 years, Xie has often used a “canvas print” technique inspired by the process of Chinese ink painting. He paints figuratively on a second unstretched canvas that has been laid on top of the work’s surface, so that when it is removed, only the traces that have seeped through are left behind. These “shadows,” as Xie sometimes calls them, are present in all but one of the paintings here. In some works they approach legibility—we can begin to read the central figures in *Exploited Dream No. 2*—while in others they are more obscure. But even when they manifest as almost completely abstract, they always indicate some latent figurative content.

When Xie first used this technique the marks were left against an empty canvas, but here he has taken the risk of letting the paint seep through onto the surface of paintings that were already extensively worked and replete with information. This leads to an overlaying of images that recalls the dreamwork Sigmund Freud described as condensation. In the exhibition’s more obviously figurative paintings, such as *Exploited Dream No. 8*, there is a second competing image whose shadow hangs over the painting. “Every dream,” wrote Freud, “has at least one place where it is unfathomable.”³ Even as we begin to make sense of the work in front of us, we are reminded that there is another layer of meaning that remains hidden.

¹ C.G. Jung, “The Analysis of Dreams,” in *Dreams: (From Volumes 4, 8, 12, and 16 of the Collected Works of C. G. Jung)*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

² C.G. Jung, “General Aspects of Dream Psychology,” in *Dreams: (From Volumes 4, 8, 12, and 16 of the Collected Works of C. G. Jung)*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³ Sigmund Freud, “The Method of Interpreting Dreams: Analysis of a Specimen Dream,” in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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About Xie Nanxing

Xie Nanxing (b. 1970, Chongqing, China) lives and works in Beijing and Chengdu, China. Over the past three decades, Xie has developed a singular practice that draws from both Chinese and Western traditions, exploring and expanding the psychological and formal possibilities of figurative painting. He first drew international attention at the 48th Venice Biennale (1999) where he presented a series of quasi-photorealist self-portraits and male nudes in vulnerable, wounded states. In the early 2000s, Xie began to use blurred photographs and increasingly mediated source imagery to create large-scale paintings that verged on abstraction, three of which were exhibited at Documenta in 2007. He has since introduced a wider range of approaches into his practice, notably including a “canvas print” technique in which he paints onto a second canvas such that only the traces that have seeped through to the base canvas remain on the completed work.

Xie has exhibited widely internationally with solo exhibitions at Capitain Petzel, Berlin (2024); Petzel, New York (2022); Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing (2024, 2020, 2015); Thomas Dane Gallery, London (2023, 2019); Pingshan Art Museum, Shenzhen (2021); Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2018); Kunstverein Hamburger Bahnhof, Hamburg (2005); Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester (2003); and Pulitzer Gallery, Amsterdam (1998).

Recent and notable group exhibitions include: Sigg Prize at M+, Hong Kong (2023); UCCA Edge, Shanghai ‘Painting Unsettled’ (2023); Beijing Biennale, Beijing (2022); Art Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing (2021); Song Art Museum, Beijing (2020); Hive Center For Contemporary Art, Beijing (2020); The Warehouse, Dallas (2020); Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2019); MAK Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna (2019); Casa Cavazzini, Udine (2017); Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chengdu (2016); Today Art Museum, Beijing (2016); Shanghai 21st Century Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai (2015); OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT), Shenzhen (2014); Gerhard Richter and the Disappearance of the Image in Contemporary Art, Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi (CCCS), Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (2010); Painting on the Move, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (2002); Documenta XII, Kassel (2007); and d’APERTutto, La Biennale di Venezia, 48. Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte, Venice (1999).

Petzel Gallery is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquiries, please contact Karolina Chojnowska at karolina@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.