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展评 CRITICS' PICKS



Xie Nanxing, "Adverb High Command" exhibition view, 2022.

New York
Xie Nanxing
PETZEL GALLERY
456 West 18th Street
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The object is hidden, only traces remain—such is the usual impression given by Xie Nanxing's paintings. The artist's first solo exhibition in New York, titled 'Adverb High Command', is a very apt reminder of that perception: The subject (image) is suppressed, interrupting our desire to seek a narrative from the pictorial surface; the adverb (traces of suppression and

guidance) remains, and what drives the operation of the object is the unstable and irrational structure.

In Xie Nanxing's two previous solo exhibitions ('Spices' at UCCA in 2018 and 'A Roll of the Dice' at Galerie Urs Meile in 2020), his main method of concealing objects and obtaining traces was to rely on the penetration of pigments between paper or canvas. In this exhibition, light spots and mosaics are two other means of concealing the portrayed object, as manifested in the two series 'The Dwarfs' Refrain' (2019–2020) and 'Shadows of Painting' (2020–2021). Of course, there is no order of precedence among these 'methods', which have been central to Xie Nanxing's long-term practice. They all serve the same exploration, what we might call the identification of a subject through its appendages. The prototype images of 'The Dwarfs' Refrain' series are illustrations in the style of children's drawings that Xie Nanxing invited his father to make. The artist put them against strong light and took photographs of them, resulting in prints of various light spots and blurry images, which he then used as subjects for his paintings. The 'Shadows of Painting' series, on the other hand, utilizes the grid-like structure of the mosaic to conceal or reveal the image underneath. Here, the dotted and blurred 'mosaic' in Xie Nanxing's earlier works is given a clear-cut tiled shape, a more concrete reference to image consumption and censorship. And yet, light spot or mosaic, the ultimate purpose of these methods applied by Xie Nanxing in his paintings to interrupt the narrative and suppress the 'subject' is still to guide the viewer's gaze from a specific object to its purpose and operating mechanism.

Nevertheless, the works in this exhibition are nothing calm and neutral, but instead convey a strong sense of melancholy and anger. It is most intuitively manifested through the use of highly saturated

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colors, and the emergence of abrupt lines and contours. For example, in *The Dwarfs' Refrain #1*, the large areas of bright red and the violently twisted barbed-wire-like black lines create an uneasy atmosphere roiling between the gathering and fragmenting of the image, appearing all the darker once we learn that the 'prototype' of the series is an illustration in the style of children's drawings. The forged harmony is torn open and overflows the banality of evil. In the largest exhibition room, two paintings mirror each other: In *Shadows of Painting, No. 4* (2021), dark blue and greyish black mosaic color tiles intersect and erode the image underneath, upon which hovers a cloud of black spiral, which in turn is crossed over by a horizontal band of bright yellow, on which is repeatedly scrawled the word 'loneliness' in Chinese. Opposite it is *Shadows of Painting, No. 3* (2021), in which the prototype of the image, Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melancholia I*, is covered up by grey and white tiles as to be undistinguishable. The few strands of blue violet and scarlet emerge from between the tiles like in a technical display error, reminiscent of weeds growing in the cracks of brick walls and their unbeatable vitality. Placed within context of the time when these works were made, it becomes apparent that they are closely related to the technology governance and life experience in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, inevitably carrying the artist's personal feelings, which also makes them more potent in arousing the viewer's specific emotions or emotional awareness.

Originally written in Chinese by Leo Li Chen

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