

Esther Schipper

Sun Yitian

Portrait

April 28 – May 25, 2023



Sun Yitian, **Alger**, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 205 x 158 cm

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce **Portrait**, a special presentation with works by Sun Yitian whose representation was announced in January. On view will be three new paintings.

Sun Yitian is best known for her paintings of monumentally enlarged mass-produced objects, generally based on staged photographs taken by the artist herself. Lovingly rendered in colorful acrylic paint, the surfaces of the inflatable toys or the heads of dolls—both frequent motifs—shine brightly, often with flecks of reflecting camera lights visible. Sun Yitian's use of scale further draws attention to the inherent tension between pathos and banality on which the works draw: vastly enlarged the objects gaze at us from their huge eyes as if in puzzlement of their newfound sumptuous grandeur.

At the gallery three works from Sun Yitian's series of doll heads will be on view. Depicted in gigantic scale, the three male heads look out unconcerned at the world around them with a friendly smile. Each painting portrays a head with distinct skin tone and hair color against a near monochromatic background and floor. The bearded **Alger** has dark brown hair and honey-colored skin; **Kevin** is dark-haired and Black; **Jason** is blond-haired and fair-skinned. The heads are set in a deeply compressed space, yet the viewer nonetheless infers a three-dimensional area from the dark shadow they cast. With their depictions of gracefully curved lips and perfectly placed cheekbones, the paintings capture the generalized beauty of dolls. Small details—among them a section where **Alger's** beard rubbed off, **Kevin's** impossibly smooth hairline or the way **Jason's** strands of blond hair are inserted into the doll's head—draw attention to the paradoxical state in which the dolls' life-like yet vacuous presence hovers.

Iconography and Sun Yitian's manner of execution are perfectly paired: the plastic shells of the represented toys, their photographic representation, and the flatness of the painted canvas fuse, tenderly capturing mass-

produced objects in a traditional medium associated with individual expression and unique creation. Seen up close, the impression of the paintings' photographic precision dissipates, as the painterly and coloristic effects created by the artist's expert application of paint become apparent. Carefully placed to seduce our gaze—to "remove all resistance to perception" in Sun Yitian's words—the subtlety of this effect allows the works to exist in a continuously contested realm between representation and abstraction.

Sun Yitian was born in Zhejiang, China in 1991. She studied painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in China, graduating in 2015 and obtaining an MFA in 2018. Sun Yitian is now completing her doctorate in literature at the School of Humanities at Tsinghua University, Beijing. The artist lives and works in Beijing. The artist is also represented by BANK, Shanghai.

In 2023 Sun Yitian received the WSJ China's ON THE FIELD Creator of the Year Award. Sun was selected for the Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia Class of 2019.

Recent exhibitions include **Nián Nián: The Power and Agency of Animal Forms**, Deji Art Museum, Nanjing (2023); **The Infinite Conversation: 2022 Beijing Biennial "Symbiosis"**, National Base for International Cultural Trade, Beijing (2022); **Summer '22**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2022); **The Pieces I Am**, Shanghai, UCCA Edge (2022); **Art's Language, Artists' Game**, OCAT Shenzhen, Shenzhen (2022); **The Disconnected Generation**, Song Art Museum, Beijing (2022).

Sun's work is held in the following collections: Hort Family Collection, New York; White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney; Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar; By Art Matters, Hangzhou; Longlati Foundation, Shanghai; M WOODS, Beijing; Yuz Museum, Shanghai; and Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing.