

Esther Schipper

Liu Ye

INTERNATIONALE ARCHITEKTUR

September 11 – October 23, 2021



Liu Ye, **Book Painting No. 30 (Internationale Architektur Bauhaus Bücher No. 1, Albert Langen Verlag, München, 1925)**, 2020
Photo © the artist

Esther Schipper is pleased to present Liu Ye's **Internationale Architektur**, the artist's first exhibition with the gallery. On view will be twelve recent paintings, created between 2017 and 2021.

Among the motifs on which the exhibited works draw are the 1925 Bauhaus building complex by architect Walter Gropius in the German town Dessau, the Rietveld-Schroeder House designed in 1924 by the Netherlandish architect Gerrit Rietveld in Utrecht, and a 1968 equestrian estate built by the Mexican modernist architect Louis Barragán. Two works from 2021 depict figures wearing the iconic costumes the German artist Oskar Schlemmer designed for his experimental **Triadic Ballet** in the early 1920s, while another work, **Prelude**, also pictures a stage-like space, this one screened almost entirely by a red curtain from behind which a figure is looking out. Also on view are works from Liu Ye's series of book paintings, depicting pages from the 1942 edition of Karl Blossfeldt's **Wunder in der Natur** and the cover of the first publication from the so-called Bauhaus Bücher, **Internationale Architektur**, published in 1925.

Liu Ye's work combines both direct and oblique references to the history of art to create a charged personal iconography that draws on real and imagined works of art, fictional and real-life figures. His work is informed by a sophisticated conflation of formal principles and conceptual ideas from both Asian and Western cultures. The recurring depictions of works quoting the Dutch abstract painter Piet Mondrian evoke the history of abstraction, a topic Liu Ye has explored throughout his recent work which plays on the ambiguity of representational and abstract motifs.

Each painting constitutes a deeply personal act. As Udo Kittelmann noted in 2018: Liu Ye's "paintings are also a barometer of a time when the reference to the personal, the subjective, is becoming increasingly topical. And the subjective means our own lives, with all our problems big and small, the joys and fears, hopes and despairs. His pictures take us back to the origins of being and becoming human, provoking and moving us at the same time."

Two works in reference to Oskar Schlemmer's costume designs for his **Triadic Ballet** significantly expand the vocabulary of Liu Ye's exploration of the Bauhaus curriculum. Taking Schlemmer's famous costumes made from colorful geometric shapes as point of departure, Liu Ye imagines the figures in full color and places them in a stage setting. One depicts three faceless doll-like figures, another a single male, reading as real-life person, identified by the title as Schlemmer himself. Both scenes are framed by narrow bands of red curtains — a recurring motif in the artist's oeuvre — complementing the impression of a stage and functioning as a framing device. With **Prelude** the red curtain takes center stage, almost covering the entire canvas as a lone male figure peers out at us from the shadows — "us" being the audience of a performance and the observer of the painting.

The Bauhaus is also the topic of two works from the artist's series of book paintings that depict the first volume of the so-called Bauhaus Bücher, **Internationale Architektur**, published in 1925 by Walter Gropius. The book's cover, designed by Farkás Molnar, appears slightly worn, perhaps as a tribute to the important role of the book as a cherished object of historical significance.

Three works draw on views of the façade of the 1925 Bauhaus building by Walter Gropius in Dessau and combine the artist's interest in architecture with his ongoing preoccupation with the German school and its teachings (exported internationally long after the institutions closure due to National Socialist censure). Their geometric shapes appear almost as abstract compositions, tethered to representation by the lettering or, in one case, the fragment of the letter B. A detail of the Rietveld Schroeder House in a work entitled **Mrs. Schroeder** exerts a similar effect: the nestled rectangles of windows, protruding balconies and handrails can be read as near abstract composition.

An architectural reference to the Mexican modernist architect Louis Barragán (1902-1988) is parred down even more dramatically: silhouetted against a bright pink wall stands a handsome bay horse. The work refers to the 1968 Cuadra San Cristóbal, a large estate with adjunct stables, the architect, who was an avid equestrian, designed. Barragán's characteristic use of pink is all that alludes to the reference.

Book Painting No. 22 and **Book Painting No. 29** depict book pages painted after Karl Blossfeldt's highly influential photographs of plants. Characteristic of Liu Ye's book paintings, it is both the haunting images of enlarged flowers by the avantgarde photographer and the beautifully printed photogravure edition of **Wunder in der Natur** from 1942 that we discover.

With its emphasis on found images and the muted color scheme reminiscent of vintage photography and prints, the exhibition seems to question the status of the image and its reproducibility. Painting here becomes a representation of stillness and contemplation, set outside of the rapidity of today's digital image economy.

Liu Ye was born 1964 in Beijing, China. The artist lives and works in Beijing. Liu Ye graduated from Central Academy of Fine Arts Beijing, China, in 1989 and received his Master of Fine Arts from the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin in 1994. In 1998, he was Artist in Residence at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

Liu Ye's work has been exhibited at various institutions, including: **Liu Ye: Storytelling**, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2020) and Prada Rong Zhai, Shanghai (2018-19); **Thrill of Deception. From Ancient Art to Virtual Reality**, Ludwig Forum, Aachen (2019) and Kunsthalle München, Munich (2018-19); **Hello World. Revising a Collection**, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2018); **Mondriaan and Liu Ye**, Mondriaanhuis, Amersfoort (2016); **The World in 2015**, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2015); **Re-View**, Opening Exhibition of Long Museum West Bund, Shanghai (2014); **MYTH/HISTORY: Yuz Collection of Contemporary Art**, Yuz Museum, Shanghai (2014); **Hans van Dijk: 5000 names**, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2014); **Lightness – A Clue and Six Faces**, Hive Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2013); **Through All Ages**, Opening Exhibition of Long Museum, Shanghai (2012); **In Time – 2012 Chinese Oil Painting Biennale**, National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2012); and **Future Pass – From Asia to the World**, Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam (2011); and **Chinese Window**, Kunstmuseum Bern (2007).

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