画家画像

格蕾丝·韦弗
Grace Weaver
Painters & Portraits

画中自我

要理解格蕾丝·韦弗 (Grace Weaver) 的图像世界，需要先进入艺术家构建的复杂如迷宫一般的视觉系统。这不仅要我们绕过外在事物的假象，还要使我们直接深入内在的自我。在本次展览中，韦弗通过她的作品，探索画家、画像、以及画中自我的互文关系，探讨关于艺术和自我的主题。

在一些作品中，看着手机和电脑屏幕的女孩们创造了凝视的循环：电脑屏幕中的"自我"是一幅"画中画"。两张相似的脸庞之间形成了双向交流路径——自我和自我的投射，当电脑屏幕外的女孩注视这屏幕中的镜像时，也在被屏幕中的镜像所注视。值得注意的是，艺术家有意使得屏幕之中的女孩和屏幕之外的女孩虽然看起来相似，但并不是完全相同，镜中人可以是女孩的映像，也可以是正在视频通话的双胞胎姐妹，甚至只是长相相似的另一个人。这种"他者"还是"自我"的不确定性，进一步挑战了视觉惯性，为这看似日常的一幕增加了一分异乎寻常的质感 (uncanniness)。

整个展览也在此基础上构建了一组"视觉嵌套"的体系。艺术家 2023 年的新作系列超越了纯粹概念性的"元绘画 (meta-painting)"，她将那些绘画性的、直觉性的、姿态性的对立风格与元绘画重新结合在一起，转向更直接的表达，以此方式将直接表现融入元绘画之中。

正在注视着屏幕中的自己的女孩与屏幕中的画面形成了一组有趣的互文，而灰白底色的单人肖像更像是将屏幕中的人物独立出来的个人肖像，特别具有绘画性——用宽大的画笔和极少笔触粗略描绘，勉强凝聚成人脸。在这里，"肖像"的边界变得模糊：当观看者凝视肖像的同时，又能时刻感知到在画面之外的"屏幕"的存在，乃至进一步感知到"屏幕"之外的那双探究的眼睛。在某种程度上，当观看者在欣赏灰白底色的单人肖像的时候，观看者本身自动占据了《笔记本电脑绘画》(Laptop-painting) 中的那个屏幕外的女孩的位置——而这位女孩自身也并

不存在于现实世界，而是在画作当中。这种迷宫般层层嵌套的视觉体系，建构出"自觉的绘画 (self-conscious painting)"。[1] 所有这些题材的绘画都极具表现力，并具有物质的直接性，强调了它们的构造特性。它们既是图像，也是绘画对象。绘画在呈现图像供人观看的同时，自身亦是一双向外凝望的眼睛。绘画在这里成为了如哲学家拉康所说的一个凝视的循环系统，在反映真实的同时，也在扭曲真实；既是被投射的对象，也是投射的主体。

自然，这套视觉系统可以追溯到洛可可时期的镜像绘画的艺术史脉络，韦弗本人特别提到了华托 (Jean-Antoine Watteau) 的作品《格桑的招牌》(L'Enseigne de Gersaint, 1720–1721 年) 有关元绘画的方面。不过，这种视觉迷宫的表达，在古老的中国亦有神合之处；不仅是视觉上的相似，更是内在深层意涵的共振。例如，清乾隆曾多次化用一幅宋代册页中的"双像"结构，将自己与自己的镜像共同入画。艺术史学家巫鸿认为，乾隆曾传令宫廷画师一遍遍重复这个构图，无休止地创造自己的一对对镜像，而每一次都在对自己的身份表达上有些微的差别。[2] 这种着迷，与其说是形而上的吸引，不如说是一种自我意识的体现。而当今天的我们观看这件作品时，除了画中两个双生肖像的眼睛，同样不可忽略的是画外的那双凝视的眼。当乾隆无数次面对自己的双重自画像的时候，他也许也正在寻求一种视觉幻境："是一是二，不即不离"，当真实的自我与幻象的自我难分伯仲的时候，什么是真实的依然重要吗？

这种面对"自我"时的亦真亦幻的感受，呈现了人们在认知自我时不可避免会抵达的一种"中间地带 (liminal space)"。而这种状态，也体现在艺术家一贯以来选择的描绘对象中。艺术家的作品选取了日常生活中不被注视的微小时刻，那些游离于生命宏大叙事之外的瞬间：工作了一半被手机吸引、用打扫卫生逃避现实、和朋友视频或者欣赏自拍，将自己圈禁在由屏幕和小房间所组成的狭小空间里。这些时刻没

笔记本电脑绘画
Laptop-painting

布面油画
Oil on canvas
165.1 × 154.9 cm
2023

笔记本电脑绘画
Laptop-painting

布面油画
Oil on canvas
88.9 × 83.8 cm
2023

无题 (头)
Untitled (head)

布面油画
Oil on canvas
40.6 × 33 cm
2023

有任何意义, 也不会带领人们走向任何目的地, 但却如空气和呼吸一般弥散在人们的日常生活中。

艺术家自己这样描述: "尽管这些绘画中没有描绘窗户, 但在我的想象中, 窗户就高悬在画面之上。"[3] 这些没有被画面所描绘、但时时高悬在画面之外的城市的窗户, 就如同那些不可见、但无处不在的事物——没有目标、不从何处来, 亦不往何处去。那些事物已然被剥除了任何可能的外在价值, 只剩下其永恒不变的内核本质——存在本身。这种处于中间地带的模糊感受, 时时刻刻充斥在我们的日常中。我们知道我们已经将它们永久丢失了, 然而又明确地知道它们永远不会离去, 存在于无法抓握住的虚空之中。从这个层面上来说, 韦弗的作品是忧郁甚至残酷的, 因为这些作品在捕捉了这些不可言说的时刻的同时, 又坦率地揭露——这些时刻无法具名。

艺术家曾在采访中借用了一个神学词汇——"via negativa"——来形容这些无法具名的时刻, 即从高远、神圣的事物转身, 看向那些微小、晦暗、不足为道的时刻。[4] 例如盯着镜子里的自己足够长时间直到感到陌生的时刻, 那些在手机黑屏的片刻突然从屏幕里看到自己倒影的时刻……这些瞬间既无聊、又有一种陌生的恐怖 (uncanny) ——尤其是, 当这些时刻以一种鸿篇巨制的形式陡然出现在人们面前的时候。韦弗采用了历史画常用的超出人身的大尺幅, 观看者以仰视神明一般的角度, 观看那些表情飘忽、看起来有些孤独和尴尬的人物。而这个时候, 人们在仰视的并不是某个具体的个人或者人物, 而是他们自身的一部分——那些无所事事的、拖延的、无意义的瞬间, 那些通常不被承认和看见的部分。

这些黯淡的瞬间, 在韦弗的作品中, 同时具有永恒性。在很多作品中, 画面中的人脸并不是具体的外在形象, 而是许多抽象元素的综合体——含义模糊的面孔, 可以成为任何时间、

地点的任何人, 也因此跨越了时空的限制, 在某种程度上达到了隽永。在这一点上, 艺术家吸收了从拜占庭时期到早期文艺复兴时期的宗教绘画, 乃至抽象主义大师比如马蒂斯 (Henri Martisse) 等人的艺术史渊源。与面部表情的空洞相反, 在对人物肢体的处理上, 艺术家有意扭曲、延长了画中人的肢体, 仿佛每一处关节的转折都充满了情绪的张力, 以一种夸张、不容忽视的方式提醒着人们, 画中人并不是游刃有余地站立在一些神圣、重大的事件当中; 相反, 她们似乎是在极为平常的生活的舞台上被突然抓拍下了快照。这些超日常 (ultra-mundane) 的瞬间, 与带着永恒性的面部表情并置, 如同钻石上的朝露。而这也正是韦弗所理解的"绘画"这一媒介的本质, 也是一种介于瞬间和永恒之间的、不可名状的"中间地带"。

韦弗的创作技法也因此发生了转折。自从2020 年以来, 艺术家逐渐从原先追求平滑、波谱式的"完美"表面到如今更为粗粝、近乎雕塑式的画面。艺术家选用了用于建筑业的巨大刷子和厚重颜料, 以及互相碰撞、彼此交叠渗透的色彩, 这样每次刷子划过表面时, 每种颜色都会带到邻近的颜色, 但不会完全弄脏表面。这样一来, 绘画的过程被记录在最终的图像中, 连同那些失败的、忧郁的、拖延的、逃避的瞬间一起, 凝结在了永恒的画面之中。有趣的是, 在这种情况下, 绘画作品本身的"物质性"显得如此具有安抚的效力, 也许这就是为什么韦弗选用了很多醇厚、大地一般的色彩——画面中的重力因此具有了实感, 宽宏大量地接住在"自我"的漩涡中随波逐流的人体和物件。

可以说, 绘画的本质就是在探索"自我"与"他者"、"有我"和"无我"、"瞬间"和"永恒"之间的一种不具名的模糊地带。最终, 韦弗的作品引导我们思考一个深刻的问题: 或许我们应该更关注的不是那个具象的"我"是谁, 而是在"自我"消逝之后, 我们变成了什么; 而其极具绘画性的画布正为这种沉思创造了媒介。这种探索与思考, 就如同那些高悬于

画面之外的窗户或是女孩凝视的目光, 因其不可见而显得不可思议的巨大, 而这正是绘画所能传达的独特魅力和哲学深度。格蕾丝·韦弗的作品始终将绘画性放在首位, 无论主题是什么, 总有一种对表现力和直接表达的坚持。这种探索, 最终将我们带回到绘画的本质, 以及它如何成为一个窥视自我和世界的镜子与窗口。

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[4] 格蕾丝·韦弗, 于伦敦麦克斯·赫茨勒画廊举办个展"垃圾景观 (*TRASH-SCAPES*)"时接受的采访, 2022 年, https://www.maxhetzler.com/video/1081/artisttalk/artist/303。

Portraits of the Ambivalent Self

To grasp Grace Weaver's visual universe, one must navigate the intricate visual system she has meticulously crafted, akin to a labyrinth, which compels us to move beyond the facades of external objects and directly immerse ourselves in the inner depths of the self. In the present exhibition, Weaver explores the tangled interplay between the painter, the portrait, and the self within the artwork, delving into themes concerning art and selfhood.

In certain works, young women gazing at screens on smartphones and computers establish a cycle of gazes. The "self" encapsulated within the computer screen serves as a "painting within a painting," forging a bidirectional communicative pathway between two resembling visages — the self and the self's projection. Notably, the artist intentionally ensures that the girls within and outside the screens, while appearing similar, are not entirely identical. This depiction of the "other" versus the "self" introduces an element of uncertainty, challenging conventional visual norms and infusing an uncanniness into what might otherwise be regarded as an everyday scene.

The entire exhibition is built upon this foundation, forming a system of nested visions. The artist's new series from 2023 moves beyond purely conceptual "meta–painting" toward something more

immediate, by reuniting meta–painting with its opposite: something painterly, intuitive, and gestural. Thus, she reintegrates meta–painting with direct expression.

The girls gazing at their reflections on screens engender intriguing interactions within the images. The gray–white background single–person portraits more closely resemble individual portraits extracted from the screens and are especially painterly — executed roughly with wide brushes and minimal brushstrokes that barely cohere as faces. Here, the boundaries of portraiture become indistinct. While the viewer gazes at the portrait, they simultaneously sense the presence of the "screen" extending beyond the image and, moreover, discern the inquisitive eyes beyond the "screen." To a certain extent, as the viewer admires these portraits, they instinctively occupy the position of the girl outside the screen in a work like *Laptop–painting*. However, this girl exists solely within the realm of the painting, absent from the tangible world. This labyrinthine system of nested visions constructs a sense of "self–conscious painting".[1] All of these subjects are painted expressively and with material immediacy, emphasizing their constructedness. They are both images and painted objects. In its presentation of images for observation, the paintings themselves embody a dual nature, akin to a visual

手机绘画
iPhone–painting

布面油画
Oil on canvas
140 × 129.5 cm
2023

loop system, simultaneously reflecting and distorting reality. They serve as both projected objects and projecting subjects.

Naturally, this intricate visual system finds its historical roots in Rococo mirror paintings (Weaver herself makes specific reference to the meta–painting aspect of Watteau's *L'Enseigne de Gersaint*). However, the expression of this visual labyrinth resonates profoundly with ancient China, surpassing mere visual resemblance to encompass a deeper level of significance. For instance, the Qianlong Emperor recurrently employed a "double–image" structure derived from a Song dynasty album page, incorporating himself and his "mirror image" into his paintings. Art historian Wu Hung suggests that the Qianlong Emperor instructed court painters to repeatedly reproduce this composition, creating pairs of mirror images of himself, each bearing subtle variations in self–expression.[2] This fixation, rather than signifying a metaphysical allure, reveals a manifestation of self–awareness. As contemporary viewers of these works, we find ourselves confronted with the dual portraits' gazes within the painting, unable to overlook the gaze that extends beyond the confines of the artwork. When the Qianlong Emperor repeatedly faced his double self–portraits, he might have been in pursuit of a visual illusion: "Is it one or is it two, neither connected nor apart?" In an environment where distinguishing the real self from the illusory self becomes nearly impossible, does the concept of what is real still retain its paramount importance?

The experience of the quasi–real and quasi–illusory when encountering the

"self" presents a "liminal space," an inevitable threshold one reaches when contemplating the self. This condition is also reflected in the artist's choice of subjects. Weaver's work centers on the unnoticed, fleeting moments in everyday life, those instances detached from grand narratives of existence: moments when work is disrupted by smartphones, when cleaning serves as an escape from reality, or when friends engage in video calls or admire selfies, confining themselves within the confines of screens and compact spaces. These moments bear no immediately obvious significance and do not chart a course towards any destination, yet they permeate daily life like the very air and breath one takes.

The artist characterizes the spaces she depicts, explaining: "Although these paintings do not depict windows, in my imagination, windows hover high above the image." [3] These city windows, unrepresented in the artworks yet perpetually looming beyond the frame, bear a resemblance to those intangible yet omnipresent entities devoid of purpose, origin, or destination. Stripped of any external value, they retain only their eternal and unchanging essence — existence itself. This sense of inhabiting a liminal space continually saturates our everyday reality. We recognize that we have irrevocably relinquished these

One or Two (partial), Qianlong period (1735–1796). Ink and color on paper, 90.3 x 119.8 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

moments, yet simultaneously acknowledge their perpetual presence within an ungraspable void. From this vantage point, Weaver's works assume a melancholic and even brutal character. They capture these ineffable moments while candidly disclosing their resistance to categorization.

In a previous interview, Weaver invoked the theological concept of "via negativa" to characterize these unnamed moments, involving a shift from transcendent and divine dimensions towards the small, obscure, and inconsequential instances.[4] For example, these instances may encompass the act of prolonged self-contemplation through gazing at one's reflection in a mirror until it becomes unfamiliar, or the sudden recognition of one's reflection in a blank smartphone screen. These moments, mundane yet tinged with a peculiar terror (perhaps approaching the uncanny), are particularly striking when they manifest on a grandiose scale. Weaver employs a larger-than-life format, common in historical painting, situating the viewer in a position of looking upward at these figures with elusive expressions that exude an air of solitude and awkwardness. However, viewers at this juncture are not scrutinizing a specific individual or character; instead, they are observing an aspect of themselves — those instances of idleness, procrastination, and meaninglessness that typically go unnoticed and unseen.

Weaver's works imbue these obscure moments with a sense of permanence. In many of her works, the visages within the images transcend specific external identities, amalgamating various abstract elements into an enigmatic facial composition. These enigmatic faces possess an open-ended quality, allowing them to be relatable to anyone, anywhere, and at any time, thereby transcending the constraints of temporal and spatial limitations, offering a glimpse of the eternal. The artist draws inspiration from the historical lineage of art, spanning from Byzantine periods to the early Renaissance, and even modern masters such as Matisse.

Counter to the vacant expressions adorning these faces, the artist deliberately distorts and elongates the figures' limbs, imparting a palpable emotional tension at every joint. This conspicuous exaggeration serves as a poignant reminder that the figures within the painting are not standing confidently amid grand, significant events. Instead, they appear as if they have been spontaneously captured in a snapshot within the realm of an exceedingly ordinary life. These ultra-mundane instances, juxtaposed with visages that exude a sense of eternity, resemble dewdrops adorning a diamond. This is the very essence that Weaver encapsulates within the medium of Painting, a nameless "liminal space" situated between the ephemeral and the eternal.

Weaver's artistic technique has undergone a significant transformation since 2020. The artist has shifted her focus from the pursuit of polished, spectral perfection to coarser, almost sculptural depictions. She employs substantial brushes typically used in construction and heavily pigmented oil paint without paint thinner or mediums, allowing colors to intersect and blend with each brushstroke, without entirely obscuring the underlying surface.

Consequently, the act of painting becomes a recorded aspect of the final image. Mirroring her subject matter, this very method of painting allows Weaver to encapsulate moments of painterly failure, erasure, and thinking, all within the final work. Notably, the physical materiality of the painting exerts a soothing effect, partly due to Weaver's preference for a palette of rich, earthy colors. The color scheme lends a palpable sense of gravity to the painting, which adeptly captures the human figures and objects caught in the vortex of the "self."

The crux of painting can be described as an exploration of an unnamed and ambiguous domain situated between the "self" and the "other," the "self" and the "non-self," and the "fleeting" and the "eternal." Ultimately, Weaver's works prompt us to contemplate a profound question: instead of fixating on the concrete identity of the "self," perhaps we should redirect our attention to what remains once the "self" vanishes. Her painterly surfaces create a medium for such contemplation. This journey of exploration and introspection, akin to the concealed windows high above the frame or the enigmatic gazes of the girls, carries an air of enormity due to their elusive nature. This embodies the distinct allure and philosophical depth intrinsic to the art of painting. In Grace Weaver's work, the painterly is always given primacy: no matter the subject matter, there is always an insistence on the expressive and immediate surface. Consequently, this quest leads us back to the core of painting and how it serves simultaneously as a mirror, a window, and a painted object, enabling us to peer into the interplay of self and the world.

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[3] Weaver, Grace, interview on the occasion of her solo exhibition *Painters & Potraits* at Yuz Museum Shanghai, 2023, see page 29 in this brochure.

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余德耀美术馆: 本次展览的主题是"画家画像",你如何定义自己为"画家"或者"画者"? "画像"或"肖像"又是如何在这一系列作品中体现的?

格蕾丝·韦弗:"像画家一样愚蠢",我想杜尚曾说过这样一句广为人知的话。积极的"愚蠢"概念在绘画中非常有用,因为绘画是一种直接、本能和诚实表达的媒介。如果一个人可以做到最"愚蠢"的自己,也许他就能在绘画中实现更大的诚实,从而真正深入事物的核心。保罗·麦卡锡 (Paul McCarthy) 的影像作品《画家》(*Painter*, 1995 年) 中的模仿威廉·德·库宁 (Willem de Kooning) 的形象是这一刻板印象最卡通化的版本,我在画室里经常想起他。

对我来说,绘画是一个人相对于世界总体状态的隐喻和浓缩版本: 一种尴尬、格格不入的状态,一种步履蹒跚、努力不懈的状态,一种既悲怆又幽默的状态。绘画提炼并澄清了这种相对于世界的状况——在绘画中,一个人的自我被缩减为几个基本要素: 一个人的身体、一些用于标记的彩色工具以及一个可以工作的表面。最简单地说,绘画就是通过最简单的方式——自己的眼睛、头脑和双手——来理解世界的一个缩影。它可以是笨拙的,也可以是超凡脱俗的。

画家是在淤泥中跋涉的人,她用双手寻找正确的形式、正确的构图。她有些笨拙和茫然,试图抓住湿答答、不听话的画笔。我自己的画作非常大,用的画笔也很大,没有润色和细腻的空间。一切都要用很大的精力,一气呵成地完成。正如许多人所说,绘画有点可笑——用棍子在布料表面涂上"彩色泥浆",但通过它的局限性,它创造了一种非常特别的可能性,那就是创造尚未见过的新形象,纯粹而直接地来自自己的想象力。

历史上,许多画家也曾画过"画家"这一主题。有阿尔伯特·厄伦 (Albert Oehlen) 早期的自画像,比如我经常想到他 1984 年的作品《穿着脏衣裤的自画像和蓝色毛里求斯》(*Self-Portrait with Soiled Underpants and Blue Mauritius*),画中的画家既可悲又肮脏,但也许,仍旧充满希望;还有乔治·巴塞利兹 (Georg Baselitz) 画的双手沾满泥巴的英雄,菲利普·古斯顿 (Philip Guston) 晚年的自画像《绘画、吸烟、进食》(*Painting, Smoking, Eating*, 1973 年),梵高的《去往塔拉斯孔路上的画家》(*The Painter on the Road to Tarascon*, 1888 年) 中那种无助的画家形象,以及中世纪描绘画家绘画的作品 (尤其是俄罗斯和波斯的画家)。

我的画作中的画家不完全是自画像,她更像是一种隐喻的、典型的、刻意精简的人物。她不是我,她是一个笼统的画家女孩的概念,有点卡通和简单。我希望她不一定像我格蕾丝·韦弗,而是面对观众传递出一种"这就是我自己 (me-ness)"的感觉,因为我希望当观众看到我的作品时,能从画中人里看到他们的"我"自己。

在这次展览中,那些作为肖像的作品 (这里我特别指的是最小的白底头像系列) 也并不完全是我自己,也不完全是别人,我把它们想象成前面提到的这位隐喻画家的作品,也许这些是她的自画像,也许是她的二重身、姐妹、双胞胎或理想的肖像。它们是"他人"的松散概念。它们与历史意义上捕捉高度特定个人肖像的那些肖像画关系不大,而更多的是去创造情绪的小快照,或更类似于那种 emoji 表情符号。

本次展览的作品中,画面的主人公更多处在一种"中间态 (liminal state)": 她们既没有全情投入在特定的事件当中,但又不是完全地无所事事。你是如何选择这些生活碎片入画的? 可以说一说你的灵感来源吗?

我画作中的人物经常处于中间或边缘状态的情境中,可以说是陷入了夹缝之中。我认为这与我对绘画的总体理念以及绘画最适合捕捉什么有关。与戏剧、音乐、电影等其他形式相比,我认为绘画最能够瞥见行动之间的瞬间,而不是行动本身。比起历史画,我更喜欢小型风俗画。我最喜欢的绘画并不试图进行任何形式的叙事宣泄 (catharsis),因为要成功实现这一点,需要将时间和行动高度人为地压缩到二维空间中 (显然这可能极具吸引力,但这不在我的计划之中)。在光谱的另一端,摄影提供了将

一瞬间永远冻结的能力。我喜欢绘画处于这两者间的中间地带,那里瞬息万变与永恒相互重叠,如同电影和摄影之间的那种缺口。人们会想到马蒂斯和他对俄罗斯圣像的兴趣,贯穿始终的或许是因为绘画可以无比静止和永恒,同时也能捕捉到人性的灵光一闪以及短暂的姿态和眼神。

我在日常生活的微小时刻中找到了我的图像和概念: 漫步纽约街头,观察人们在人群中的尴尬情态;在工作室里,观察我自己在绘画过程中间的停顿;人们拿起智能手机时那种开心或不快的情绪,以及弯下身子来操作笔记本电脑的状态。我在寻找这些微小瞬间的诗意,正是这些构成了现代生活。我被这种中间态(in-between)所吸引——某人处于分心或不确定的状态,这些时刻似乎微不足道,不值得大书特书,但它们却是现代经验中不可或缺的一部分。

是什么促使你在这一系列作品中突出电子产品的意象? 你如何看待在社交媒体无处不在的当下,人与人之间的联系,以及个人空间的边界问题?

我在画作中描绘 iPhone 手机和笔记本电脑,是在创造一种现代的"画中画 (mise en abyme)",我指的是在画中的 iPhone 和笔记本电脑的屏幕上都有一个图像。这些图像模棱两可,可能暗示这是之前拍摄的自拍照,前置摄像头的视角,或 FaceTime 屏幕上主人公正与一个类似双胞胎的同伴视频聊天。

我对维克多·斯托伊奇塔 (Victor Stoichita) 在《自我意识图像》(*The Self-Aware Image*) 一书中描述的现代"元绘画 (meta-painting)"的可能性感兴趣,更具体地说,我对洛可可绘画 (以及许多其他流派的绘画) 中的"画中画"感兴趣: 女人和她的镜子在其闺房中反复出现的主题,还有让–安托万·华托 (Jean-Antoine Watteau) 的"图画店"主题等。

我对"画中画"的兴趣可能来源于一个更大的母题,即"自觉的绘画 (self-conscious painting)"——一种具有表演性、对观众的存在和自身性质有所觉察的绘画。我认为一幅画作是一个自包含的系统,它创造了自己的世界。那些看着 iPhone 的女孩们创造了凝视的循环,两张相似的脸庞之间形成了双向交流路径——自我和自我的图像,而后者也许具有同等的主体性。它们也作为一种绘画的替身——对我来说,通常介于镜子和塑像之间——是一种同时应对自我和某种他者的方式。我经常想到福柯 (Michel Foucault) 的一句话,也在凯特·赞布雷诺 (Kate Zambreno) 的某本书中提到过: 一个人写作可能是"为了没有面孔 (in order to have no face)"。在某种意义上,我绘画是为了没有面孔。有时我想,我在绘画中如此表达面孔和外表,也许是想要抹去我自己具象的面孔,而更多地站在一幅画的背后,向世界展示具有自我意识的面孔和姿态。

在画中描绘 iPhone、笔记本电脑、充电线和耳机这些科技产品的另一个原因,在于它们是 21 世纪生活中不可分割的一部分,而且我也认为,如果在 21 世纪的绘画中避免对它们的描绘,而坚持使用从 19 世纪和 20 世纪静物画中继承下来的物品词汇 (花朵、早餐场景等),会很奇怪,也是不必要的保守。

至于社交媒体,我认为这些画作与其说是在呈现我们与他人的关系,不如说是呈现我们与自己形象的关系。我画作中的人物都试图在她们的 iPhone 屏幕上,在这些被脸谱化、扭曲的自我外貌的回望中,寻求一种自我认知。对我来说,这是一种熟悉的体验,或许对别人来说也是如此。

这些画作还涉及个人空间的概念。尽管画布和画纸的尺寸各不相同,但此次展览中的所有作品都呈现出非常紧凑的人物体态,被画幅的边界紧紧围住。我认为这种构图方式具有隐喻的作用,可以代表多种感受: 被包围、自我控制和节制、对外界社会期望的认识以及自我批判。这些画作基本上都描绘了一个人物和他们自己独立的个人界限——他们身体和思想的私人领域。从某种意义上说,他们是自己领域的创造者,画作的边界是人物自身运动和感知范围的代名词,每个人都是其私人情感的纯净容器。

你认为这些画中的人物意识到她们正被观看着吗? 她们如何回应这种观看?

我画作中的人物意识到自己被观看着; 从某种意义上说, 她们是在表演, 但不仅仅是为了观众, 还为了自我的认知。即使在独自一人沉思的时候, 她们也是自觉的, 时刻注意着自己可能在他人眼中呈现的姿态。这些是我在自己生活中非常熟悉且感受强烈的现象, 因此我感到有理由在画作中记录它们。我认为对于大多数人来说, 无论是在物理领域还是在电子设备中, 现代生活无法摆脱来自人群的凝视感。

在 2020 年的一些早期作品中, 你笔下的人物肢体的表演性和面部的模糊表情并置, 似乎在反叛一种来自外界的凝视; 在此次展出的系列作品中, 这部分表达是否依然存在?

我认为这部分表达依然存在, 这与我最亲近和珍视的一些艺术史内容有关——拜占庭艺术、俄罗斯圣像、波斯和印度微型绘画、马蒂斯、乔托 (Giotto di Bondone)、皮耶罗·德拉·弗朗切斯科 (Piero della Francesco)、费尔南·莱热 (Fernand Léger)、奥斯卡·施莱默 (Oskar Schlemmer) 等。在这些领域以及我的作品中, 人物的形象语言与视觉感知 (比如人们如何在街上看到另一个人) 的关系不大, 而更像是多种元素的综合体——非特定的、弥漫着情绪的且在某种程度上隽永的面孔, 以及透过姿势和朝向为其补充叙事性的身体。

我们常常通过面部表情来理解彼此, 然而一旦某个瞬间的表情被绘画或图像固定下来, 那么它就成了时间轴上固定的一个点。相反, 在一些圣像画和中世纪艺术中 (通常也在我的画作中), 人物的面部表情是空洞的, 观看者可以用自己的投射和想象加工它们。当人物的姿态提供叙事性的同时, 其面部则几乎成为观看者进入作品的入口。在本次展览系列中, 人物的面部表情依旧难以捉摸, 但她们的姿势揭示了他们正在做什么——抬起手拿着手机, 头靠在手上沉思, 身体弯曲着笨拙地清理工作室地板。所以我想, 可能我又回到了此次采访中早些时候提到的一个主题——在绘画中有可能同时存在瞬时行动和永恒。

你最喜欢, 或认为最能代表这一系列的作品是哪一件? 可以分享一下原因吗?

我个人最喜欢的画作之一是那幅红色背景中有个坐在奶箱上的女孩的画作, 名为《无题 (画家)》。这幅画包含了本次展览的许多主题: 她 (画家) 被工作室杂乱的事物围着, 但她并没有陷入绘画活动的瞬间, 而是被困在一个无为无感的非行动时刻。对我来说, 这幅画很特别, 因为它捕捉到了一个微不足道但又熟悉的时刻——中断手头工作后坐下来看看手机, 一个存在于时间之外的时刻。工作室的杂物——蓝色的抹布、瓶子、颜料管和蓝色画家胶带——似乎围绕着中央人物旋转, 她仿佛身处漩涡之中。而此时, 她完全沉浸在手机中——至于在看什么, 我们不得而知。

红色背景是对马蒂斯的《红色工作室》(*The Red Studio*, 1911 年) 以及古斯顿的画作中在红色上使用粉色这一特点的致敬。与其说这是用逼真的红色来表达红色的地板, 不如说这是一种通过温暖来传达空间本身的实体感的尝试——她被围在中间, 也许有点热, 有点沮丧, 有点被束缚。

这幅作品还与我最近阅读的一本书《现代艺术与人类性格的重塑》(*Modern Art and the Remaking of Human Disposition*) 有关。作者埃梅琳·巴特菲尔德 – 罗森 (Emmelyn Butterfield–Rosen) 描述了前现代艺术中对人物形象的两种特殊处理方式: 描绘人物在沉思 (ponderation) 和扭动 (torsion) 的瞬间, 都是为了强调她们的人性。《无题 (画家)》中的这个人物也正处于思考和身体扭曲的时刻。

能否用三个词描绘你在创作过程中的状态?

直觉, 粗野, 好玩。

无题 (画家)
Untitled (Painter)

布面油画
Oil on canvas
185.4 × 185.4 cm
2022

手机绘画
iPhone–painting

布面油画
Oil on canvas
140 × 129.5 cm
2023

在创作这一系列作品时，有哪些艺术家、作家或音乐影响了你的创作？

近几年来，阅读贝克特 (Samuel Beckett) 对我的创作帮助很大，因为他的写作使我有勇气变得直接和简单，同时也接纳了在创作中产生那些细碎、幽默、丑陋甚至可怕的元素。他的角色在文本中是一种唯我的存在，莫洛伊 (Molloy) 肯定如此，甚至墨菲 (Murphy) 也是——他们在自己的头脑中创造了自己的世界，而那些世界就是书中的世界，同义且同时存在。主人公拥有自己的逻辑，这就决定了文本中诸如重力和地理等功能的重要性。

在本次展览的作品中，画中人物虽然不像莫洛伊那样混乱古怪，但她们仍然以某种方式创造了自己的世界。如果她们盘腿坐在地板上用笔记本电脑，我们就会看到她们头朝下颠倒着。画面近似与表现这样坐着的感觉，试图传达出这种姿势坐起来的感觉，而不是看起来的样子。当她们使用手机时，人物的世界缩小到只剩她们周围的一小片区域。这样一来，她们就呈现出一种贝克特式的唯我主义。

近年来，对我影响很大的另一个人是凯特·赞布雷诺。她的许多文字都挖掘了"超日常"的事物——工作间隙那些微不足道的时刻，比如家务、电子邮件、教学工作，所有这些都支撑着她的写作实践。在德克萨斯州马尔法 (Marfa) 驻地创作的夜晚，我读到赞布雷诺于 2021 年出版的书籍《如已死般地写作》(*To Write As If Already Dead*)。这本书在某种意义上记录了她在写作有关埃尔韦·吉贝尔（Hervé Guibert）的另一篇文章《致没有拯救我生命的朋友》(*To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*) 时的艰辛和失败，所有这些最终都成为了文本本身。这个想法让我非常感动——创作的尝试（甚至是失败的尝试）可能成为最终作品的主题——赞布雷诺的作品是一篇文字，而我的作品就是一幅画。从平行意义而言，这些画作记录了绘画的失败——无论是拿着蘸满过多颜料正往下滴的画笔在不确定中停顿，还是在创作过程中被卷入自己的电子用品和／或社交媒体的漩涡里。

在创作期间，我很少听音乐，取而代之的是我半感兴趣的聊天播客作为环境声音。这是和当前流行文化的一种有益的联络，也是当我沉浸在一系列绘画创作而过着相当隐居的生活时，找到的一种近似社区的准社交关系。

对比过去 2020 年的作品，你选用了一种更具有自发性、物质性的笔刷方式，尤其在这一系列中，我们能够看到对比色混合在更为自由的笔触中。可以聊一聊这一系列作品的色彩选择和运笔技巧吗？

我一直在尝试用一种近乎雕塑的方式绘画。画笔都是来自宾夕法尼亚州一家五金公司的硬质特大毛刷，一般用混凝土砌筑时使用。当你拿走精致的画笔和稀薄的颜料，取而代之的是大笔刷和厚厚的颜料时，你就会被迫在某种程度上简化绘画。你迫使自己直奔主题，直奔感觉，直奔你想要表达的核心。

在刻意选择画笔的同时，所有颜色也都是我精挑细选的，为使它们相互交织——最初的底色通常是白色下的暖色调灰褐色，或红色下的洋红色，这样笔刷的每一次移动都会留下强烈的痕迹，每种颜色都会明显染上邻近的颜色，但又不会使表面完全浑浊（因为我避免使用任何一种颜色来压倒其他色彩）。粉色，我会选择艳丽洋红 (Radiant Magenta)，它色彩浓烈但也足够浅，很容易透出底层或相邻的颜色。因此，我很少使用酞菁蓝或酞菁绿 (Phthalo Blue or Green)。相反，经常出现的颜色有钛白 (Titanium White)、汉沙黄 (Hansa Yellow)、艳丽洋红、镉橙 (Cadmium Orange)，它们在强度和不透明度方面都比较接近，这样它们就能相互推挤，并保持足够的强度，从而在最终的画面中记录下制作画面的过程，这对我的这组作品来说至关重要。

对你来说，绘画意味着什么？在如今这个图像世界中，你如何看待绘画在其中的位置？

如果你愿意，绘画，可以说是时间演进和思维活动的绝佳记录者——记录了个体从 A 到 B 到 C 这一思考过程的尺幅和时长。当然，绘画也可以不具备这样的特点——只要你希望，你可以通过细腻的笔触、通过底层绘画和上光处理、通过抚平笔触，以及事前规划和事后清理，来掩盖绘画的过程、

失败和开端。在过去几年中，我的作品之所以发生变化，部分原因就在于此。我希望突显绘画的活动性，去展现一个想法从构思到完成的整个过程。为此，我不得不彻底改变我的材料——摒弃轻薄的颜料和小巧的软刷，转而使用直接从颜料管中挤出的浓稠颜料和硬毛石工刷。改用这些材料迫使我在创作时更加自发、更加直接，并通过笔触记录下最终构图中的每一笔动作 (也就是思考)。

没有几种图像——也许诗歌中的意识流或直抒胸臆是类似的——可以让人准确跟随着一个人的思想轨迹，就像一根线在延伸。我认为绘画的这个特点有一定的哲学价值——能够看到好的思想和坏的思想，能够探索和犯错。那么多其他类型的图像——广告、电影等——包含了许多人的思想、编辑和修饰，更不用说市场研究和测试放映了。这绝不是坏事，在我看来，多人经手甚至由委员会创造的艺术产品在某种意义上具有同等价值。这构成了我们在媒体和社交媒体上看到的大部分图像——几乎没有什么是由一个人的思想和一只手独立创造出来的。因此，作为一种相反的立场，在这样一个被构建的图像景观中，绘画提供了一些非常独特且生动鲜活的东西，展现了一个活生生的人的创造。伊莎贝尔·格劳 (Isabelle Graw) 曾在其著作《绘画的爱》(The Love of Painting) 中，将绘画描述为一种"成功的媒体"，因为它具有创造"生命力幻想 (vitalistic fantasies)"的能力：从本质上来看，绘画吸收并承载着创作者自身的生命状态，因此本身也充满了生命力。

城市生活似乎是你作品中很重要的一部分，而上海和纽约分别是横跨东西的两大国际都市。对于这次在中国上海的展出，结合这座城市本身的文化和地理背景，你有什么感受？

本次展览的许多绘画都是在我位于纽约的工作室创作的 (其他一些则在德克萨斯马尔法完成，一个非常不同的地方)。我在纽约的工作室像大多数纽约的个人工作室一样小，是这座大城市中的一个小盒子。虽然这些绘画不一定以这样的都市景观为主题，但我认为它们包含了这座城市的精神：一个在狭小隔间中工作的艺术家，一扇锁着的门，窗外永远是无尽的城市景观。尽管这些绘画中没有描绘窗户，但在我的想象里，窗户就高悬在画面之上。这些绘画都描绘了在繁忙的城市生活中闪现的片刻孤独。我发现将这些作品展示在上海这样一个大城市中是合适的，这个城市充满了这些沉思、专注，抑或走神、自我怀疑的微小时刻，也充满了与这些瞬间有共鸣的人。我想，这些作品中的一些元素——手机、笔记本电脑、一个女孩在她自己打造的小工作室里工作——对于上海和纽约来说都是可亲可近的。

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地板绘画
Floor–painting

布面油画
Oil on canvas
215.9 × 205.7 cm
2023

Yuz Museum: The theme of this exhibition is "Painters & Portraits". How do you perceive the identity of the "painter" and how does this perception manifest itself within the realm of portraiture in your body of work?

Grace Weaver: There is that oft–used phrase "dumb like a painter", which is attributed to Duchamp. The idea of a positive "dumbness" is pretty useful in painting, because painting is a medium well–suited for directness, instinct, and honesty. If one can be one's most "dumb" self — perhaps one can achieve a greater honesty in a painting… really get to the core of things, I mean. The most cartoonish version of this stereotype is the titular de Kooning–like character in Paul McCarthy's *Painter* (1995), which I think of often in the studio.

For me, painting exists as a metaphorical and condensed version of a person's general condition relative to the world: one of awkwardness, out–of–placeness, one of plodding and striving, one with both pathos and humor. Painting distills and clarifies this situation relative to the world — in painting, one's selfhood is pared back to a few essentials: one's body, some colored tools for mark–making, and a surface to work on. At its simplest, painting is a microcosm for what it is to try to make sense of the world through the simplest means: one's own eyes, mind, and hands. It can be both awkward and transcendental, in equal measure.

The painter is she who is wading through muck — feeling with her hands for the right forms, the right composition. She is a little clumsy and befuddled, grasping at brushes that drip and misbehave. My own paintings are very large and made with oversized brushes — there is no room for touch–ups and delicacy. Everything is done with a lot of energy, in one sweeping effort. As many others have said, painting is somewhat ludicrous — "colored mud" applied with sticks to a fabric surface — but through its limitations, it creates the possibility of something very special, which is the creation of new images yet unseen, coming purely and directly from one's own imagination.

Many other painters have painted painters. There are Albert Oehlen's early self–portraits (in this series I thought often of his painting *Self–Portrait with Soiled Underpants and Blue Mauritius* from 1984, in which the painter is both pathetic, dirty and yet still hopeful, perhaps), as well as Baselitz's heroes with their hands in the mud, Guston's late self–portraits (*Painting, Smoking, Eating* from 1973), the kind of hapless painter–figure in Van Gogh's *The Painter on the Road to Tarascon* (1888), as well as medieval depictions of painters painting paintings (Russian and Persian especially).

The painter in my paintings is not exactly a self–portrait, rather she is a metaphorical, archetypal, and deliberately streamlined character. She is not me, she is a more general idea of a painter–girl, a bit cartoonish and simple. I hope that she possesses a feeling of "me–ness" without necessarily resembling me, Grace Weaver, because I hope she feels like "me" to the viewer as well, insofar as that is possible.

In this show, the works that function as portraits (here I am especially referring to the smallest series of portrait heads on white grounds) are also not exactly me and not exactly someone else — I imagine them as the works that are made by this aforementioned metaphorical painter — perhaps they are her self–portraits, perhaps they are portraits of her doppelgängers, sisters, twins, or ideals. They are loose ideas of "other people". They have much less to do with the historical sense of portraiture as capturing the likeness of a highly specific individual, and more to do with creating small snapshots of emotions or types — something more akin to emojis.

In the works featured in this exhibition, the central figures often occupy a sort of "liminal state" where they seem neither fully engaged in specific events nor entirely disengaged from them. Could you elucidate your process of selecting and incorporating these fragments of life into your artworks? Would you be willing to discuss the sources of inspiration that inform these choices?

The figures in my paintings are very often in liminal states or limbo–esque situations — caught between things, so to speak. I think this relates to my general philosophy of painting, and what it is best suited to capture. Compared to other forms (theater, music, film, etc.), I think that painting at its best offers glimpses onto the moments between action, rather than action itself. I'd always prefer a small genre painting to a history painting. The paintings that I love most don't attempt any kind of narrative catharsis — which to succeed requires a highly artificial compression of time and activity into two–dimensional space (obviously this can be overwhelmingly compelling — it is just not my project). At the other end of the spectrum, photography offers the literal ability to freeze a split–second for eternity. I love the liminal zone of painting in which the fleeting and the eternal coincide — somewhere in that gap between film and photography. One thinks of Matisse and his interest in Russian icons — the through–line perhaps being the way a painting can be incredibly still and eternal while also capturing very human and temporary gestures and glances.

I find my images and ideas in small moments of everyday life: walking through New York, observing the awkwardness of people in a crowd, working in the studio and observing myself pausing in moments between paintings, the curve of emotions when one picks up one's smartphone to either a happy or unhappy surprise, crouching over with contorted posture to work on one's laptop. I'm looking for the poetry of these tiny moments, the small increments that make up modern life. I'm compelled by the in–between — someone in a state of distraction or uncertainty — emotions that don't seem to deserve the space of a large painting and yet are so integral to modern experience.

What led you to incorporate the imagery of electronic devices prominently in this particular series of works? How do you perceive the dynamics of interpersonal connections in the ubiquitous realm of social media? Moreover, how do you explore the boundaries of personal space within your art?

I saw the possibility of depicting iPhones and laptops in my paintings as an opportunity to create a sort of modern *mise en abyme* — an image within an image. I mean this in reference to the paintings with iPhones and laptops that contain an image on their screens — ambiguously, these images could suggest a previously taken selfie, they could suggest a front–facing camera, or they could suggest a FaceTime screen showing the protagonist video–chatting with a twin–like companion.

I'm interested in the possibility of a kind of modern "meta–painting" in the sense described by Victor Stoichita in *The Self–Aware Image*, and more specifically the images–within–images in Rococo paintings (in addition to many other genres): the recurring motif of a woman and her mirror in her boudoir and the motif of the "picture shop" as seen in Watteau.

My interest in *mise en abyme* is perhaps part of a larger interest in the possibility of a "self–conscious painting" — a painting that performs, is aware of its viewer and its own painted–ness. I love the idea of a painting that is a self–contained system, that makes its own world. The girls looking at iPhones create loops of gazing, a two–way communication pathway between two faces — the self and the image of the self, which gazes back with

无题 (画家)
Untitled (Painter)

纸本油画棒
Oil stick on paper
每幅 Each: 61.1 × 61.8 × 3.8 cm
2022

perhaps equal autonomy. They also function as a stand–in for painting — which for me often functions as something in between a mirror and a golem — a way to simultaneously contend both with the self and some kind of other. I often think of a Foucault quote that is mentioned by Kate Zambreno in one of her books — the idea that one might write "in order to have no face." In a sense, I paint so as to have no face. At times I wonder if my preoccupation with faces and appearances descends from the desire to avoid my own appearance, and rather to stand behind a painting that presents a self–aware face and pose to the world.

Another reason for depicting technology (iPhones, laptops, charger cords, and earbuds) in the paintings is the simple fact that they are an inextricable part of our lives in the 21st century — and I think it would be strange and unnecessarily conservative for painting in the 21st century to avoid their depiction, and adhere rather to a vocabulary of objects (flowers, breakfast tableaux) that are inherited from 19th and 20th century painting.

With regard to social media, I think these paintings have less to do with our relationships to others, and more to do with our relationships to our own image. The figures in my paintings are all caught seeking self–knowledge in their iPhone screens, in the miniaturized, distorted version of their own appearance that gazes back. For me this is a familiar experience and I imagine it is for others as well.

The paintings also contend with the notion of personal space. Despite the varying sizes of canvases and paper, all of the works in *Painters & Portraits* present very compressed figures, hemmed in tight by the borders of their picture planes. I think this compositional aspect serves a metaphorical purpose, acting as a stand–in for a number of feelings: of being hemmed in, of self–control and moderation, of an awareness of outside societal expectations, and of self–critique. The paintings all essentially depict a figure and their own discrete personal boundaries — the private realms of their bodies and their thoughts. They are the creators of their own domains in a sense, the painting's border being synonymous with the figure's own range of motion and perception, each a tidy container for their private emotions.

Do you think that the figures in these paintings are aware of being observed and how do they respond to this gaze?

The figures in my paintings are aware of being perceived; they are performing, in a sense, not just for a viewer, but also for themselves and their own self–awareness. Even in moments of deep contemplation, they are self–conscious and self–aware. These are deeply familiar and intensely felt phenomena in my own life, and for that simple reason I feel justified in recording them in my paintings. I think the modern condition, for most people, is inextricable from the feeling of the gaze of the crowd, both in the physical realm and on our devices.

In some of your previous works in 2020, there seems to be a juxtaposition of performative bodily expressions and blurred facial features among the figures you depict, as if resisting an external gaze. Does this facet of expression still persist in your current series of works?

I think this remains true and relates to some of the art history that is nearest and dearest to me — Byzantine art, Russian icons, Persian and Indian miniature painting, Matisse, Giotto, Piero della Francesco, Fernand Léger, Oskar Schlemmer. In these realms as well as in my own work, the language of figures has less to do with visual perception (i.e. how one might see another person on the street) and acts more as a synthetic composite of many

elements — faces that are non–specific, emotionally permeable and somehow eternal, with bodies that progress a narrative in terms of pose and direction.

We connect so much to facial expressions, and the second they become fixed in a momentary wild expression, an image or painting is fixed in chronological time. Rather in icons and medieval art (and often, in my paintings), the faces are somewhat empty, ready for one's own projection and imagination to work upon them. While the poses tell stories, the faces are almost portals to enter the work. In my paintings in *Painters & Portraits*, faces remain a bit inscrutable, but the poses tell the stories — a hand lifted to hold a phone, a head rested on a hand in contemplation, a body bent over awkwardly to clean a studio floor. So I suppose again, I've returned to a theme from earlier in this interview — the idea that in painting there is the possibility for simultaneous action and timelessness.

Is there one particular piece that you believe best encapsulates the essence of the collection, or that you like the most? Could you elaborate on the reasons behind your choice?

One of my favorites is the reddish painting of the girl seated on a milk crate called *Untitled (Painter)*. This painting contains many of the themes of the show *Painters & Portraits*: she (the painter) is surrounded by the messy ephemera of the studio but is caught not in a moment of painterly activity but rather in a stoic moment of non–action. To me, this painting is special because it captures such an insignificant but familiar moment — the moment of pausing to sit and look at a phone, a break in the flow of work, a moment that exists outside of time. The detritus of the studio — a blue shop rag, a bottle, a paint tube, and blue painters' tape — all seem to swirl around the central figure as though she is in a vortex. All the while, she is totally absorbed in her phone — in what, we don't exactly know.

The red background is a nod to Matisse's *The Red Studio* (1911) and to Guston's use of pink on red. It's not so much a realistic red conveying a red floor, but rather an effort to convey a sense of corporeality to the space itself through warmth — she is hemmed in, maybe a bit hot, frustrated, contained.

This work also relates to a book I recently read called *Modern Art and the Remaking of Human Disposition* by Emmelyn Butterfield–Rosen and the author's description of two particular treatments of the human figure in pre–modern art which depicts figures in moments of ponderation and torsion as means of underscoring their humanness. This figure in *Untitled (Painter)* is caught in a moment of both ponderation and physical torsion.

Could you describe your state of mind during the creative process with just three words?

Intuitive, brute, playful.

During the creation of this series of works, which artists, writers or what kind of music have had an influence on your creative process?

Reading Beckett has helped me a lot in my work in the past couple of years — in that his writing gives me some courage to be direct and plain, but also to embrace the granular, the humorous, the abject, and even the dreadful. His characters (Molloy of course, but even Murphy) have a kind of solipsistic presence in the texts — they create their own worlds in their minds and those are the worlds of the books, synonymous and simultaneous. The protagonists have their own logics and that dictates things as fundamental as the function of gravity and geography in a text.

In the works in *Painters & Portraits*, the protagonists are not quite as addled and off–kilter as Molloy — but they still make their own worlds in some capacity. If they are sitting cross–legged on the floor on their laptops, we see them upside down. The painting approximates the feeling of sitting in such a way, in an effort to convey how the pose feels rather than how it appears. When they are on their phones, the figures' worlds often shrink to a small distance around them. There is a kind of Beckettian solipsism to them, in this way.

Another major influence for me in recent years has been Kate Zambreno's work. Many of her texts mine the ultra–mundane — the undignified moments between working… the housework, the emails, the teaching work, all of which sustain her writing practice. While I worked on a few of these paintings in Marfa, Texas, in the evenings I read Zambreno's 2021 book *To Write as if Already Dead*, which in a sense catalogs a slog and at many points a failure to write a text about Hervé Guibert's *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*, all of which eventually becomes the text itself. I was very moved by this idea — that an attempt (even a failed attempt) at making something might be the subject matter for an eventual work — in Zambreno's case a text, in mine, a painting. In a parallel sense, these paintings catalog the failure to paint — whether it is pausing in uncertainty holding overloaded dripping brushes, or getting drawn into the whirlpool of one's devices and/or social media.

During this time, I've listened to very little music, opting instead for the ambient background of chatty podcasts that I am half–interested in… a welcome tether to current pop culture and a para–social approximation of community that I find helpful when I am deep in a series of paintings and living a fairly hermetic existence.

In contrast to your earlier works from 2020, there's a noticeable shift in your choice of a more spontaneous and materialistic brushwork with a more liberated interplay of contrasting hues within your brushwork. Could you elaborate more on the choices you made in terms of color palettes and brushstroke techniques for this particular series of works?

I've been trying to paint in a way that is almost sculptural. The brushes are all stiff and oversized bristle brushes from a hardware company that makes them in Pennsylvania, for use in masonry and with concrete. When you take away delicate brushes and thin paint and replace them with large brushes and thick paint, you force a certain level of painterly simplification. You force yourself to get directly to the point, to the feeling, to the core of what you intend to say.

In conjunction with the very deliberate brush choices, the colors are all deliberately chosen to interplay with one another — the initial grounds are often warm–hued taupes under white, or magenta under red, so that the brushstrokes are strongly recorded with each motion of the brush, each color visibly tinting its neighbor, but without completely muddying the surface (because I am avoiding using any one color that overpowers the others). The pink, mostly Radiant Magenta, is strong while also being pale enough to easily take on the tints of underlying or neighboring colors. There is very little Phthalo Blue or Green for this reason — rather the recurring colors — Titanium White, Hansa Yellow, Radiant Magenta, Cadmium Orange — are all relatively similar in strength and opacity, so that they push against each other and hold their strength sufficiently enough so that the act of making the picture can be recorded in the final picture, which is of utmost importance to me in these works.

What does painting mean to you? What makes painting stand out among other kinds of images in today's world?

Painting, if you let it, is an incredible recorder of time and thinking — the meter and duration of one individual's thought process from A to B to C. Of course, it is equally possible for this not to be a facet of painting — one can obscure the process, the failures, the beginnings of a painting if one wishes — through delicate brushwork, through a process of underpainting and glazing, through smoothing out brushstrokes, through pre–planning and after–the–fact clean up. Part of the reason that my work has changed over the past years relates to this very fact. I wanted to foreground the activity of painting and reveal the entire journey of an idea coming into being. To do so, I had to completely change my materials — disposing of thin paint and small soft brushes in favor of thick paint directly from the tube and heavy–bristled masonry brushes. Changing to these materials forced me to work more spontaneously, to be more direct and to leave a record (through the brushstrokes) of every move (and thus thought) that goes into a final composition.

There aren't many kinds of images — perhaps stream–of–consciousness or direct address in poetry is a parallel — in which one can follow another person's exact path of thought, like a thread unspooling. I think there is some philosophical value to this feature of painting — to seeing the flow of good ideas and bad ideas, discoveries and mistakes. So many other types of images — advertising, films, etc., contain the thoughts and editing and manicuring of dozens of people, not to mention market research and things like test screenings. This is by no means a bad thing — I see an equal value to an artistic product that is touched by many hands and is even engineered by committee, in a sense. That comprises most of what we see in the media and on social media — hardly anything is made by just one mind and one hand. So as a counter–position, in such a landscape of engineered images, painting offers something highly unique, vividly alive and the creation of one living person. In her book *The Love of Painting*, Isabelle Graw writes about a related idea in her description of painting as a "success medium" because of its ability to create "vitalistic fantasies": essentially, paintings absorb and contain the life of their creator and are thereby full of life themselves.

Urban life appears to be a significant motif in your body of work, and both Shanghai and New York represent major international metropolises respectively in the East and West. How do you feel about this exhibition in Shanghai, China, given the cultural and geographical context of the city?

I made many of the paintings in *Painters & Portraits* in my studio in New York (the others I made in Marfa, Texas — a very opposite place in many ways). Like most New York studios, my studio is small — a small box within the large city. Although the paintings don't necessarily depict the urban landscape as such, I think they contain the spirit of the city, of the artist at work in a small compartment, with a locked door and the city always out the window. Even though windows are not pictured in these paintings, they loom just outside or above the picture plane, at least in my imagination. These paintings all depict small moments of grasped solitude amidst a hectic life — the life of the city. I find it appropriate that these works are shown in such a major city, a city full of people who I hope also relate to these small moments of grasped–for contemplation and focus, as well as moments of distraction and self–doubt. Some of the elements in these works — phones, laptops, a girl at work in a small studio of her own making — I think are relatable and applicable to both Shanghai and New York.

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无题（画家）
Untitled (Painter)

布面油画
Oil on canvas
226 × 226 cm
2022

工作室地板绘画
Studio–floor–painting

布面油画
Oil on canvas
215.9 × 205.7 cm
2023

关于余德耀美术馆项目空间

余德耀美术馆项目空间是由余德耀基金会特别策划、独立于美术馆主展区的展览平台，于 2015 年 9 月对公众开放。作为一个公共项目，余德耀美术馆项目空间鼓励艺术家打破常规，探索当代艺术发展的更多可能，并根据机构特定的场域进行创作，突破性地与展区、周边地区及公众进行互动。

2023 年 4 月，余德耀美术馆项目空间与蟠龙天地启动全新展览合作，落址于历史保护建筑"雪竹轩"。该建筑为合院式木构建筑，以明代蟠龙诗人冯淮居所"雪竹轩"命名作为纪念。本次项目意图深化蟠龙天地与余德耀基金会收藏脉络中不谋而合的发展理念，以"文化唤醒 (Culture)、自然融合 (Nature)、城市焕新 (Future)"为锻造内核，借当代创作对冯淮书斋的再述及赋能，接续"历史"与"未来"、"地方"与"国际"的对话，讲述独属于上海前门院里的文化新事。

About Yuz Project Space of Art

Yuz Project Space of Art (PSA) is an independent program, curated by Yuz Foundation, in partnership with Yuz Museum in September 2015. As a public access project space, Yuz Project Space of Art has encouraged artists to break with their usual practices and explore all kinds of contemporary art possibilities, creating site–specific works and projects where they engage boldly with the museum, the surrounding area, and the public.

In 2023, Yuz Project Space of Art and Panlong Tiandi launched a collaborative exhibition project situated in the historical architecture "Xue Zhu Bower", which is a timber structure courtyard building. The name of the building is to commemorate Huai Feng who was a Ming Dynasty poet in Panlong. The project aims to deepen the development concept shared by Panlong Tiandi and Yuz Foundation, with the core philosophy of "Culture, Nature and Future", through the restatement and empowerment of Feng's residence by contemporary creation. It continues the dialogue between "history" and "future", "local" and "international", and tells a new cultural story unique to the front door courtyard in Shanghai.

余德耀美术馆项目空间
yuz project space of art