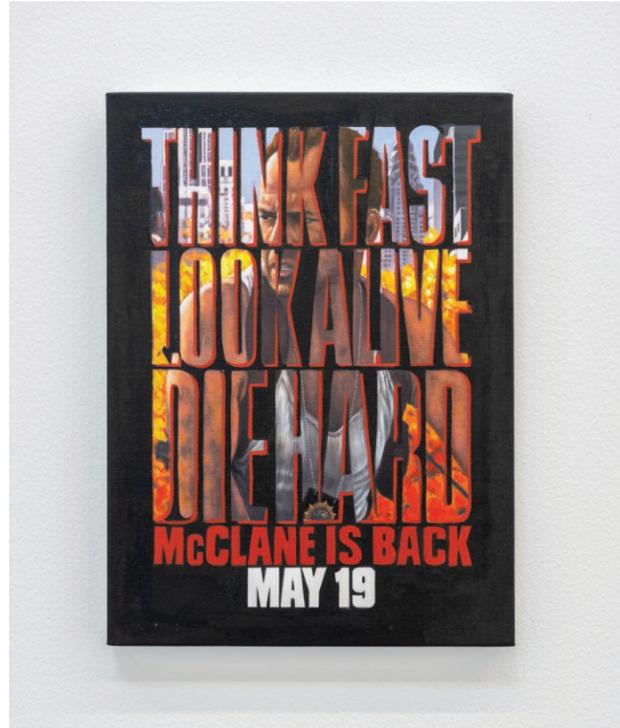


There is No Origin, Only Movement



Clockwise from left: Lantian Xie. *DAY TO DAY*. 2018. Oil on canvas, painting of a pair of arms holding up a square against a beam. 40.5 x 30.5 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Grey Noise; *THINK FAST, LOOK ALIVE*. 2018. Oil on canvas, painting of a movie poster found in a cinema in Singapore. 39.5 x 29.3 cm. Images courtesy of the artist and Grey Noise, Dubai; *SUNSHINE*. 2018. Water bottles, table, Al Ain Vitamin D water bottles on a plastic folding table. Dimensions variable. Photography by Hanna Orłowski

In a city that lays claim to superlatives, Dubai-raised Lantian Xie appropriates the language of excess in *FULL SPECIAL*, his latest exhibition at Grey Noise (17 September–1 November), revealing his fascination with images as forces of motion and mimicry. Of – and yet not from – Dubai, his insider-outsider perspective is tinged with an irony that problematizes provenance and speaks to our image-saturated moment.

Words by Isaac Sullivan

As I phoned Lantian Xie to discuss his latest show, synth pan flute was playing on the radio, bringing to mind the artist's love of the synthetic. The moon had an orange blush as it rose above a billboard advertising modular structures: Pyramid Hall, Dome Hall. A car drove past adorned with a candy bar image spanning two of its doors. In 1924, Breton speculated that Surrealism could radically transform human thinking. Now, in the vicinity of Sports City, "remove" has autocorrected to "me endive." An animated pizza gif skates across your feed, and you are going to die.



Lantian Xie. *WELCOME*. 2018. Oil on canvas, painting of an iPhone screencap displaying "WelcomePresChina" status bar. 32.2 x 19.8 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Grey Noise, Dubai



"You don't die, you die hard. It's in the vernacular," says Xie, referencing his painting of a *Die Hard* movie poster from Singapore. "I like the superlativeness of it." The exhibition title, another superlative, is the ubiquitous phrase one speaks when refuelling a vehicle in Dubai. "This utterance cuts across the city," he explains. "I like the idea that it's happening every day, all day and all night." Xie's work points from the gallery into the city, outsourcing or activating lyric repetitions. "Day to Day, Day to Night, Night to Night, Bay to Bay," he litanises, "this cascading happens. You can drive through neighbourhoods here and encounter these stores one after the next. It starts to produce a kind of melody as you move through the city. Movement produces extraordinary things to look at and think about."

As in past projects, Xie's team of mural painters and art forgers produced the paintings in the show. "I like making things happen, as opposed to making *things*. Everything's already there... I'm not trying to run some kind of farm-to-table enterprise," he quips. "The idea that the copy is not as much as the original is really outdated... With everything there are copies of copies. I like building recursive loops so you don't know where you are. The idea is to lose the origin."

Within the gallery, I encountered a material approximation of clickbait: *TOP 10 MIDDLE EASTERN ART*, paintings of crying memes, laid on the floor, bubble-wrapped as if arriving or departing. Xie emphasizes the temporality of memes while downplaying their content. "It's not about the image as much as it is about movement," he explains. "This can simultaneously be sincere and ironic. I like things that reveal themselves to be forces of motion."

The install, likewise, conveyed both sincerity and irony. Paintings were hung at different heights; tinny music bled in from an adjacent room (via Xie's CD, found in his secondhand Nissan

Above: Lantian Xie next to his work, *TOP 10 MIDDLE EASTERN ART*. 2018. Inkjet prints on Hahnemühle, wood, bubble wrap, tape, framed and bubble-wrapped prints of various crying memes. Dimensions variable. Photography by Hanna Orłowski
Right: Lantian Xie. *FULL SPECIAL*. 2018. Jpeg. 768 x 1024 pixels. Image courtesy of the artist and Grey Noise, Dubai



Patrol); a generic hospitality table with Al Ain Plus Vitamin D-infused bottled water on it (*SUNSHINE*) was mistaken by visitors to be a non-sculpture, and required periodic replenishment. Ironically, Xie's manner of speaking is as adroit as the work's installation was off-kilter. He seems, nevertheless, earnest about the exhibition's aesthetics – which presume the promotional material surrounding the show cannot be extricated from the artwork. "I wanted to play with forms of event production, and have them surround the show," he explains. "The idea is to present something that looks like a painting show and starts wobbling as you go through."

As in *WELCOME*, a painting of a screenshot of celebrity child North West, his meta-approach to events functions as a kind of temporal intervention: "In the way banality becomes a repetition of the everyday, I'm celebrating repetition, which speeds something up but also slows something down." Additionally, Xie venerates not only the copy, but also the highly processed. "The general conception of nature is not something that I think about very often. Plastic is something that I think about very often."

He articulates the synthetically malleable as a condition in which a clear line cannot be drawn between the imagistic and the corporeal. "I've never had Nesquik, but I know Nesquik," he explains. "When I experience a candy bar as a massive advertisement, that experience is not less than the experience of it in my mouth. It's so material, the phenomenological experience of a candy bar on a billboard. It does things to you, viscerally. Long before I went to America for the first time, I knew that Snapple tasted like America." Xie extrapolates this logic to characterise a sense of place: "I have a lot of conversations with people who are like, 'I really want to go to Dubai.' Or: 'Wow, I never wanna go to Dubai.' Both are already in Dubai. The image is upon you. You are already folded into it."

This simultaneity of sincerity and irony raises the question of whether pleasure can know irony. Descartes and Spinoza have asserted that pleasure and pain comprise a continuum. Per Aristotle, "We lay it down that Pleasure is a movement by which the soul is consciously brought into its normal state of being; and that Pain is the opposite." Xie lays down a Hardees bag on the floor of the new Jameel Arts Centre and sets aside a VIP parking space during the opening, as performative interventions.

Through some lithe quality, what initially seems like a superpower of snark generates a phenomenological approach to the image and a poetics of speed in which locations, events and objects are all understood as forms of movement. "I began to warm and chill to objects and their fields," confides Nick Cave's *Mercy Seat* narrator. In *FULL SPECIAL*, this sentiment found insouciant expression as Xie entertained the mediation of everyday objects as inseparable from the objects themselves.