

# ArtReview Asia

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## Michele Chu

Explorations of how we deal with loss Does Indonesia's new capital mean new gains?

## Xiyao Wang *A Carnival in the Forest*

Massimo De Carlo, London 9 February – 11 March

In his 1961 essay 'Eye and Mind', French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty observes how our vision is always intertwined with our bodily movements. Navigating and seeing space in corporeal form, we feel our immersion as a part of the world rather than as someone peeking through a static window. Chinese-born, Berlin-based Xiyao Wang's latest works depict colours and abstracted forms similarly, reminding us that both seeing and painting are embodied activities.

Wang's canvases are often composed of lightly tinted backgrounds, layered with vigorous, calligraphic brushwork that bespeaks her interests in dance and the martial arts. As the paint remains mostly undiluted, drips are kept to a minimum, and the resulting linear strokes directly remind us of her physical presence and

contact with the canvases. *The light that cannot be caught no.2* (2022) is, at 2.5 by 4.5m, the centre-piece of the exhibition. Colourful brushstrokes plummeting down from the top of the canvas appear to indicate the choreography of the artist's own body (as much as any attempt to capture light), while agitated clusters suggest both her assiduous labour and a sense of repeated action and reaction. Ultimately it recalls Eadweard Muybridge's photographic motion studies of the nineteenth century along with a Futurism-inspired penchant for speed, yet unlike those predecessors, the moving body Wang captures is formless, dispersed and ultimately absent as an image.

In fact, Wang's compositions, though frequently compared by her galleries both to Abstract Expressionism and to Cy Twombly

and his impetuous crayon lines, hover between abstraction and representation. Nested in a web of nostalgic poetics (as seen from the poem 'Elegy for the Summer', written by the artist and accompanying her exhibition text), both the paintings and the exhibition evoke narration and remembrance. Swirling wispy lines recall falling feathers, diagonal movements suggest a levitating breeze and Wang's brushwork reminds the viewer of ideals of Chinese ink painting, in which brushstrokes epitomise the artist's embodiment of the world's rhythms. In a way, this is brilliantly done as she summons different sentimental realms. Yet burdened with a desire for both imagery and an emotional essence, the gestural works at times risk calligraphic mannerism, as if a master martial artist has yet to relish the sweetness of an exhale. *Yuwen Jiang*



*The light that cannot be caught no. 2*, 2022,  
acrylic, oil stick on canvas, 250 x 450 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Massimo De Carlo, London