

FAMILY STYLE

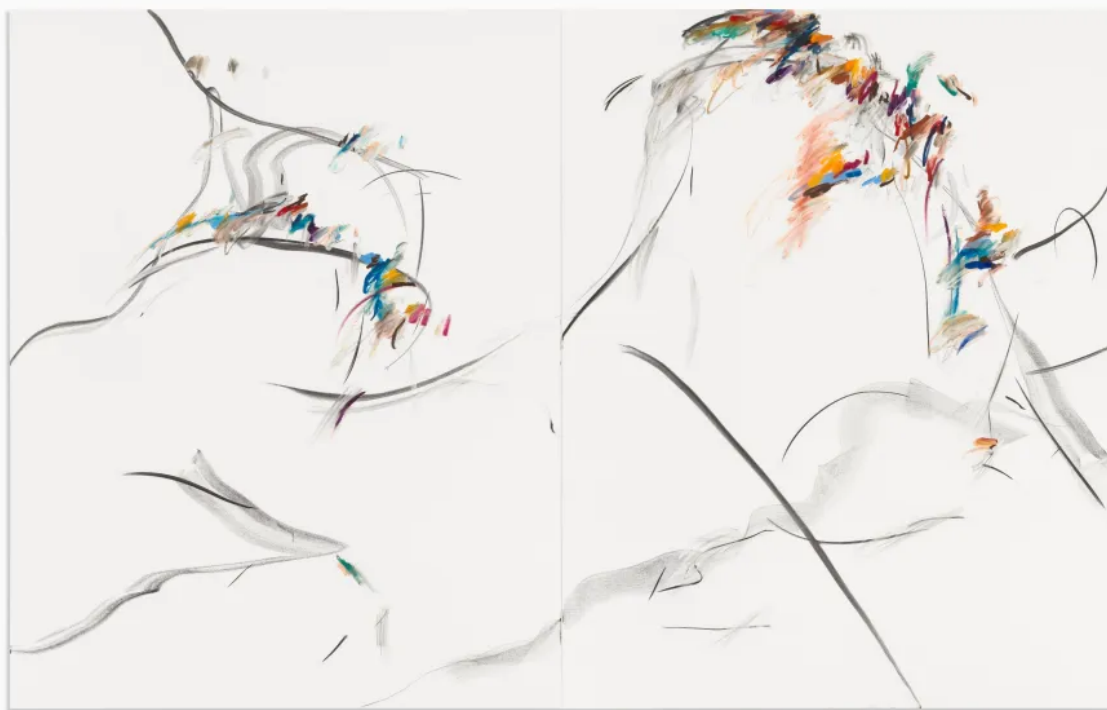
FINGER FOOD

XIYAO WANG DREAMS IN CHARCOAL

by
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Xiyao Wang, *The Butterfly Dreaming of Becoming Zhuangzi No. 1*, 2023. Photography by Roman März. Image courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Xiyao Wang's forthcoming exhibition "[Do You Hear the Waterfall?](#)" at Perrotin's New York gallery is a series of firsts for the young artist who is set on breaking free from whatever constraints that are left around her freewheeling, frenetic style. Opening this week, it's her first solo show in the United States, a long overdue moment following recent international exhibitions in Shanghai, Seoul, Berlin, London, Paris, and Milan. It's also the abstract painter's first time exhibiting works on canvas made entirely with charcoal, a material she first used on paper when she was 17 and beginning to draw. Even more, the debut follows two notable milestones:

this past October, the artist sold out her solo presentation at Massimo De Carlo at Frieze London. The year prior, her inaugural show at Perrotin's Paris location saw an equally buzzy reception, and every work was purchased on opening night.

"My understanding of painting is ever-evolving," Wang acknowledges, fresh from Beijing where she just opened two concurrent solo shows at Song Art Museum and Tang Contemporary. Still, she has no doubts: "I'm ready to set the whole place on fire."

A trained dancer who also practices meditation, yoga, and kickboxing, Wang understands the paradoxical nature of spontaneity: the discipline and rigor in painting that, much like in dance, must first be channeled through technique in order to reach true improvisation. "Practicing ballet is like trying to fly, being light, and the feeling of infinite expansion," she explains. Thus her works are boundless, effervescent, and evocative of many things at once. In "Do You Hear the Waterfall?," black carbon dances across white negative space in continuity with the energetic marks of color that have come to define her large-scale canvases. Her practice is a cyclical process of addition and subtraction; currently, she is exploring the latter: honing in on lines, extracting and exposing them with nimble, fluid brush strokes.



Xiyao Wang, *Zhuangzi Dreaming of Becoming a Butterfly No. 1*, 2023. Photography by Roman März. Image courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

"Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man," goes the Taoist parable of the butterfly, which Wang heard as a young child in Chongqing, China nestled between mountains along the Yangtze River, and which she returned to in Berlin, where she has lived for the past nine years, to prepare for her new body of work. Its words reverberate across her sweeping canvases, settling on paintings such as two aptly titled *The Butterfly Dreaming of Becoming Zhuangzi No. 1* and *Zhuangzi Dreaming of Becoming a Butterfly No. 1*.

Wang's choreography of structure, composition, and materials set a foundation for her stream-of-consciousness-like approach. As she prepares for her opening night in New York, she reflects on her recent time at her family's home in Chongqing: "I played Guqin on the balcony while the winter sun was shining on my face. My father was making tea for us, and my mother was listening to the melody." The artist's connection to her homeland and her awareness of art history bounces off into many directions—from the Buddhist frescoes of the Mogao Caves along the Silk Road to traditional Chinese mountain-and-sea scrolls to the works of abstract trailblazers like Albert Oehlen, Cy Twombly, and Julie Mehretu—before landing with a pirouette in new terrain.

"Xiyao Wang: Do You Hear the Waterfall?" is on view January 12 – February 17, 2024 at Galerie Perrotin at 130 Orchard Street, New York, NY.