

ARTS • GALLERIES

Painter Xiyao Wang Opens Up About Finding Her Way and Following Her Vision

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By [Dan Duray](#) • 06/20/24 11:34am



The artist Xiyao Wang chatted with Observer about her new works, her inspirations and her process. [MASSIMODECARLO](#)

Next week, the artist Xiyao Wang opens a major solo exhibition at MASSIMODECARLO's flagship space in Milan, offering new paintings inspired by abstraction like that seen in Cy Twombly's work and by Wang hometown surrounded by mountains on the Yangtze River. Wang (b. 1992) offers works that focus on movement and feel like whole meals despite their large white spaces. There's something of calligraphy about them, too, which brings a human element back to the grand stories they seem to be telling. We caught up with the artist to hear about her new works and the process by which they were made.

What unites the works in this show? What was your life like during the period in which they were made?

The works in my show represent the different series I created in 2023 and 2024. There are three overlapping series of work in this show that correspond to different life experiences. My art always grows and develops organically, and there are no hard boundaries between the series.

The earliest painting, *Zhuangzi Dreaming of Becoming a Butterfly No.3*, was completed towards the end of last summer. *Adagio* and *The Blue Hour* were completed this spring. In spring I always started my day with reading, a tea ceremony and playing the Guqin (Guqin is a traditional Chinese plucked seven-string instrument with thousands of years of history) in front of the window of my studio so that I could see the spring at any time. These things are an important daily routine for me, they are all part of the preparation for my painting. After five to eight hours of preparation until late afternoon or night, I would begin to paint. In these spring months, my painting time usually begins during the blue hour. This special light and atmosphere flowed directly into my art.

How do you achieve such unique marks?

I studied for more than ten years in China, Germany and the U.S. During these years of academic life, I studied Eastern and Western art history, from antiquity to the present, not only painting but also, when possible, various media. I experimented and analyzed, and learned to sharpen my artistic expression. As the years went by, it became clearer and clearer to me what I wanted.



Zhuangzi Dreaming of Becoming a Butterfly No. 3, 2023, 250 x 450 cm. Courtesy the artist and MASSIMODECARLO

Your works combine diverse influences like Taoism, dance and martial arts. What do these diverse influences have in common, in your mind?

In my mind, the carefree, natural and ethereal state without boundaries is actually what I like the most and have always been exploring, seeking, and creating. When I paint, I feel this way, and sometimes even when I'm not painting, I can occasionally find this feeling elsewhere, but it's not exactly the same. For example, in the moments of practicing ballet, Kung Fu and Guqin (also played by Taoists as a method of meditation). These diverse experiences are related, even if they are unique in themselves. They, along with many other elements, have become integral parts of my life, influencing and shaping my creative process.

One idea of Taoism is the deep connection with nature and the universe. My exhibition in Milan is very much inspired by spring and how quickly it passes—like our lives. I watch the flowers bloom and fade. When I walk through the forest, I feel like I have missed so many moments of growth. Most Chinese poems are spring poems with a similar flow of thought. The Chinese title of my exhibition “阳春召我以烟景 (Spring call me with its airy scenery)” cannot really be translated into English. It is taken from the poem “春夜宴从弟桃花园序 (Spring Night Gathering with Friends in

a Blossoming Garden)” by Li Bai—one of my favorite poets—where he celebrates and lives in the fleeting moment.

Which abstract artists did you admire growing up? Are they the same ones who influence you now?

There were a lot. I tried to study artists who were relevant to me as much as possible. For example, Cy Twombly, Günther Förg and Albert Oehlen were the artists who inspired me a lot during my time as an art student. Now I have found my own way and follow my own vision.

It’s my understanding that your studio is near the great Katharina Grosse’s and that you two are friendly! What’s that relationship like?

Yes, that’s true, we are neighbors—nice coincidence, right? There are many great internationally known artists in Berlin and some have their studios in the same complex. Katharina Grosse and I are both very busy; she is even busier than me, of course. We talked twice, but we couldn’t find the right time for a studio tour.

Once I started a new series of charcoal paintings, I was working on a very large format and was a bit uncertain. At that moment I happened to see Katharina Grosse from my window in the courtyard, so I invited her into my studio and questioned her about what she thought of my new painting. She gave me her approval, which was very helpful to me.

I caught your recent show in New York, where people were taking tons of selfies. How are audiences in New York and Milan different?

I will be able to answer your question after the opening in Milan, which will be my first solo show in Italy. But I think I have a relatively large international base of art enthusiasts and usually a lot of people are attracted to the shows.

What do you hope people feel upon leaving your show?

I hope they feel as if they have just finished a walk in the spring forest with me.