

Last Night's Fortune Teller

Third part of an exhibition series with new acquisitions of Chinese and international contemporary art

Daimler Contemporary Berlin

November 25, 2017 – May 13, 2018

Opening on Saturday, November 25, 2017, 1.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Since 2013 the Daimler Art Collection has enhanced its international profile by acquiring more than 40 artworks by around 20 Chinese artists that represent an important perspective on global contemporary art. The forthcoming event is the continuation of a series of exhibitions presenting new acquisitions of Chinese and international art at the Daimler Contemporary Berlin.

Participating artists

Guillaume Bijl (B), Monika Brandmeier (D), Ding Yi (CHN), Haris Epaminonda (CY), Ulrich Erben (D), Fang Lu (CHN), Sylvie Fleury (CH), Marius Glauer (D), José Heerkens (NL), Bethan Huws (GB), Iman Issa (EG), Patrick Fabian Panetta (D), Michael Sayles (GB), Dayanita Singh (IND), Anita Stöhr Weber (D), Deng Dafei and He Hai Utopia Group (CHN), Simone Westerwinter (D), Yang Fudong (CHN), Yu Honglei (CHN), Zhang Ding (CHN)

'Last Night's Fortune Teller' is the final part of a three-part exhibition series organized by the Daimler Art Collection to show its new acquisitions of contemporary Chinese and international art. The newly acquired artworks have been presented to the public in Berlin and Stuttgart. During the course of the exhibitions it has become clear that the works by the Chinese artists relate to a number of key themes in the Daimler Art Collection, including trends in abstract and conceptual art and new media forms. However, at the same time these artworks represent an entirely new and distinctive mix within the organic structure of the collection in both cultural and aesthetic terms. The Daimler Art Collection's acquisition policy has focused on artists from centers such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong province, and Hong Kong. The collection's forward-looking acquisition strategy, accompanied by in-depth local research, has enabled it to purchase key works by well-known international artists, but

also pieces by members of the younger generation of artists (born around 1980) who are not yet widely known in Germany. Overall the works provide insight into a nation which is the subject of enthralling and controversial debates and which will play a critical role on the global stage in the 21st century, not only because of its classical traditions, but also because of its rapid economic and cultural growth.

Like its predecessors, the current exhibition 'Last Night's Fortune Teller' presents different aspects of German, Chinese, and international art. The exhibition has deliberately distanced itself from an interpretation of the works based only on the country or cultural group from which they originate, with the aim of focusing visitors' attention on the questions inherent in the pieces. The first part of the exhibition series 'From a Poem to the Sunset' (Daimler Contemporary, Berlin, 2015) focused primarily on installations and video artworks and presented the conceptual approaches of contemporary Chinese art. In the second part 'On Curbstone Jewels and Cobblestones' (Daimler Contemporary, Berlin, 2015/16), the overall theme was photographic and sculptural works. 'Last Night's Fortune Teller' returns to the dialogs and contrasts between the pieces on show. The focus in this latest exhibition is on sculptures and installations, together with works at the intersections between painting, photography, and video art. There is no overall thematic grouping.

At the entrance to 'Last Night's Fortune Teller', a smiling Humphrey Bogart welcomes visitors. This is a readymade sculpture from the group of 'contemporary archaeological still-life' works by the Belgian artist Guillaume Bijl (born 1946, B). Recalling his *Casablanca* role, the figure of Bogart is displayed as if in an antiques store. Since the 1970s, Bijl has been investigating the relationship between art and social reality in his tragicomic *Compositions trouvées [found compositions]*. This sets the tone for the first room of the exhibition where visitors will find a tête-à-tête between Yang Fudong (born 1971, CHN) and Dayanita Singh (born 1961, IND). Both artists use a visual language that opens up narrative horizons. The black-and-white photos can be seen as narrative fragments that can be "edited" by visitors and developed imaginatively into their own "stories."

Dayanita Singh's series *Go Away Closer*, 2001 – 2006, is a photographic "novel without words." The small format black-and-white photographs show locations and events in India. They report on the loss of traditions and call to mind times that are now apparently past. Multiple emotional layers and chronological disjunctions also characterize the work of Yang Fudong, which is represented by pieces from two groups. In the classic monochrome

photographs (*Fifth Night*, 2010, and *Ms. Huang at M last Night*, 2006) and in the two colored large-format images from the series *The Colored Sky: New Women II*, 2014, young Chinese women turn towards the observer and are shown in scenes of disturbing solitude. The works of Yang Fudong are positioned between film, photo, and installation and have an impact that is simultaneously real and unreal, nostalgic and futuristic. They describe in a poetic way the role of women in present-day China, but cannot be clearly interpreted or assigned to a particular category. Nearby the sculptures of Simone Westerwinter (born 1960, D) and Sylvie Fleury (born 1961, CH) are on display. These works blend references to art history and aspects of consumption. Both artists refer to fetishized goods and luxury objects from spheres of mass and high culture that have been defined as feminine in order to call into question socially assigned gender roles.

As the exhibition continues, visitors encounter five large-format paintings that have been systematically reduced in size by the Dutch artist José Heerkens (born 1950, NL). In her group of works entitled *Evensong* (ongoing since 2015), Heerkens reflects the sensual experience of local colors and the perception of neighboring colors which can be seen in a horizontal, rhythmic sequence. The German painter Ulrich Erben (born 1940, D) also makes distinctive use of colors and shades of brightness and contrast in his works. However, as demonstrated by *Lichtraum (Halogenobjekt) [Light space (Halogen object)]* from 1972, the work exhibited here, Erben almost moved away from the panel picture in the "white on white" pieces painted in the early phase of his work. In *Halogenobjekt*, he creates what would otherwise be painted color effects using two light sources: a suspended reflective surface and stretched, transparent pieces of fabric. These produce an almost intangible illusion of painting.

Ding Yi (born 1959, CHN) is currently one of the most important representatives of abstract painting in China. In his work group *Appearance of Crosses*, which was started in the late 1980s, he places lines of crosses over and next to one another, with serial repetitions and overlaps. Using elements that are both abstract and culturally significant, Ding Yi develops a visual system that combines text, architectonics, ancient symbols, and landscape associations. An example of the intermingling of reduction and complexity can be seen in compressed form in the drawing *Geometric Grid*, 2011, which makes reference to the traditional use of scrolls for Chinese calligraphy and painting in both its technique and its format.

Opposite Ding Yi's works are two sculptural, graphic translations of abstract forms and processes at the interfaces between the second and third dimensions, between wall and room. *Spule* (Reel), 2015, by Monika Brandmeier (born 1959, D) and her sculpture *ohne Titel (Papierwagen) [Untitled (paper trolley)]*, 1995, demonstrate her interest in "making connections" between materials and their individual, psychological, and social use. While Brandmeier's reduced poetic works are positioned in the transition zone between drawing and sculpture, Marius Glauer (born 1983, D) explores the boundaries between sculpture and photography. His works, which are no less precise, but more opulent and colorful, should be seen as prototypes, each of which determines the method of production and materiality of its successors. His photographs are moments captured from his carefully planned, sculptural installations in which he investigates the materiality of mass-produced ready-mades and the way in which they can be translated into two-dimensional photographic form.

Around 1990, Anita Stöhr Weber (born 1958, D) began to become well-known for her conceptual groups of works based on elementary colors, linguistic symbols, and abstract artistic processes, combined with elements of sound and text. In her group of *Leinwandscans [Canvas scans]*, she takes as her theme the most common medium for pictures in the history of Western painting: the canvas. By minutely examining the canvas with a high-resolution scanner, the artist makes reference to the materiality (and function) of the omnipresent support medium. As a result, she also directly calls into question our perception of concrete reality and asks us to consider the invisibility of what is present (the canvas in painting) and the visibility of what is absent (the canvas in her works).

The sculpture ensemble by Yu Honglei (born 1984, CHN) from the group entitled *Everything is extremely important. Here is nothing that will not come back again*, 2013, which also includes a video, shows everyday objects from the personal surroundings of the artist, who lives in Beijing. Yu Honglei works here with the principle of duplication, which is used to simultaneously present and remove (individual/cultural) meaning and to express the fragmented nature of personal memories. His installation settings give shape to the "evaporation of the object into the infinitely subjective" (Roland Barthes) and open up individual narrative spaces for the observer.

From here it is only a short leap in intellectual terms to the *Heritage Studies* (ongoing since 2015) of Iman Issa (born 1979, EG), which are represented here by *HS 20. Compass*, 2015. Issa's sculptures are minimalist studies of the form and materiality of ancient artworks,

monuments, and memorials that make only linguistic references to them. These are not visual copies, but rather "mental prints" (Iman Issa) which bring to life the immanent responses to the reference objects. Keywords include transmissions, translations, referentiality, and the dissonance between definitions of language and pictures. These are also important concepts for the Egyptian artist's other multiple displays. In her artistic practice, Issa understands the arbitrary nature of language. Her works revolve around the paradox that linguistic and artistic forms produce their own individual content.

This differentiated use of language is also a starting point for Welsh artist Bethan Huws (born 1961, GB), as well as being the stimulus for the dynamic quality of the process of considering, interpreting, and querying art as the creator of meaning. The four newly acquired sculptures by Huws in the Daimler Art Collection demonstrate how the concept and the sculptural gesture of the ready-made, as defined by Duchamp in 1916/1917, have irreversibly called into question the conception of work and the development of art in the 20th century with the role of the observer. Bethan Huws once again takes a new approach to the definition of art using the medium of language with a glowing reproduction of a bottle dryer, surrounded by its own aura, and its linguistic "repositioning" in the world of nature (in line with the title of the work: *L'Arbre [Tree]*).

In the cabinet space of the Daimler Contemporary, the Cypriot artist Haris Epaminonda (born 1980, CY) is represented by two sculptural works that have been placed in opposition to one another with spatial precision. Epaminonda's installations can be seen as pictures of memories in which moments from history have become deposited and associated with one another to form narrative strands. She arranges open installations using photographs, pictures, books, films, and sculptures, which make the act of remembering itself the subject and the content of her artistic thought. Epaminonda frequently works with found materials, including faded holiday photographs, pages from antiquarian natural history journals, ethnographic artifacts, classical sculptures, and clips from old television series. The radical subtraction involved, however, means that these connected meanings remain intentionally fragmentary, unstable, and imaginary. Instead, this very precise form of presentation transports the story into the distant realms of the imagination.

As the exhibition continues, we encounter two canvases showing arrow-shaped forms on a red background by the Chinese artist Zhang Ding (born 1980, CHN). *Venus 3/5* and *Venus 5/5* are part of a group of pictures and sculptures consisting of five paintings and two black

steel sculptures. The first version of this was put on display at the New York Armory Show in early 2014. The installation traced the pentagram created by the pairs of transits of Venus across the sun, which are eight years apart. The acrylic paintings of Zhang Ding are restricted to the colors black, red, and yellow. His graphical angled shapes attempt to represent the astronomical phases of Venus. The installation artist aims to take the scientific models a stage further, extending them to the fundamental aesthetic, symbolic, and spiritual dimensions and opening up abstract symbols in space.

The urban variety and abundance of a film festival created by the Utopia Group, which was founded in 2008, present a stark contrast to the ancient symbols in Zhang Ding's pictures. The two artists He Hai (born 1974, CHN) and Deng Dafei (born 1975, CHN) have always focused resolutely on the political situation in (post-)totalitarian societies, primarily in Asia. In 2013 they created the *North Korea International Microfilm Festival* as a satire of the *Pyongyang International Film Festival*. The Utopia Group then invited submissions from the international web community using a multi-page concept paper. The most exciting submissions in different categories, including music videos, cartoons, film scripts, and short films, were presented with trophies in the form of miniature statues of Kim Il Sung during the course of an awards ceremony.

The approach taken by Patrick Fabian Panetta (born 1977, D) is more prosaic and conceptual. In 2013, he offered his exhibition stand at the Art Berlin Contemporary (ABC) fair for sale in an advert in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. After a painter from Hamburg was awarded the exhibition stand, Panetta's concept *Booth for sale* was acquired by the Daimler Art Collection. This consisted of not only the intangible idea or the photographic documentation, but also the complete stand presentation consisting of the original stand wall, table, and chairs, together with the painting of Christine Zieron, which have now been adapted to the space available in the Daimler Contemporary. Panetta's *Booth for sale* not only turned upside down the rules that usually govern art fairs. The requirements for the presentation also took the collection and the display of his concept to the limits of absurdity.

The conclusion of the exhibition is a seven-channel video installation by Fang Lu (born 1981, CHN) that makes a major visual and audible impact. In the context of new Chinese art, it considers questions of the expansion of the categories of production and reception at the boundaries between theater, performance, and video art. The self-reflecting installation takes as its themes issues relating to identity and gender, self-censorship, and media reflection. In

Cinema, four cameras record the actions of a female protagonist (the artist), who simultaneously takes on the roles of producer and recipient. Zooming in slowly and sometimes jerkily she focuses on her own image, directing the observer's eyes and attention. The multiple screens of the presentation highlight the existential divide between the subject and the act of looking. By using zoom and cross fading and the discrepancies between the images and the sound, Fang Lu takes the sequence of images to the brink of dissolution and causes us to doubt the possibility of being able to reproduce reality in a reliable way.

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