

Zhang Enli

Both Xavier Hufkens' locations are presenting the inaugural exhibition of Shanghai-based painter Zhang Enli (1965). In the gallery at Rue Saint-Georges 6, Enli has painted a large mural that demonstrates his masterful application of transparent, airy layers of pigments, which he manipulates with delicate brushstrokes. Inspired by ancient Chinese frescoes, he calls such murals 'space paintings', since they immerse spectators in site-specific installations. 'As I begin each *'Space Painting'*, I think about how it relates to the city I'm in... Cities in the world may be very similar in a lot of ways, but each has its own small differences. I think about the tiny details, and try to capture those.' Elsewhere he has enveloped visitors in site-specific murals the life-size Chinese and English trees of which come alive, or rooms densely painted floor to ceiling. Enli's energetic Brussels mural is accompanied by several solid oil paintings in adjacent galleries.

In Hufkens' second space, Enli has constructed a massive tower, assembled from painted cardboard boxes. Born from humble materials, this monumental three-dimensional painting suggests a 'shoutout' to the Shanghai skyline that sprung up following his arrival from the rural northeast in the early 1990s. Home to several of the world's tallest buildings, this futuristic city literally sprouted around him. Exemplary of Shanghai's evolution from an ancient city with old-world charm to a gleaming modern megapolis, are Enli's 'apartment' paintings. These spare apartment paintings refer to actual rooms that Enli has inhabited in various parts of the city in the course of his three-decade long urban

experiment. Fascinated by the way earlier memories merge with later ones, these serene paintings depict hybrid spaces, echoes of his own socio-economic development, as artistic success engendered improved living conditions. Their quietude veers towards dead pan humour, as is reflected in his age-old appreciation for 'poor materials', such as cardboard, wood, and duct tape. Enli first gained notoriety for his early series of paintings and drawing focused on ordinary containers, such as buckets (full of water), cardboard cartons, toilets, hoses, tin chests, plastic bags, ashtrays, etc. Over the years, his work has become increasingly abstract, as he has integrated traditional Chinese brushwork.

Enli graduated from the Arts & Design Institute of Wuxi Technical University. In addition to participating in both the Gwangju Biennale and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in Kerala, he has had solo exhibitions since 2010 at museums and prominent galleries in Bern, Birmingham, Genoa, Göteborg, London, New York City, Roma, Shanghai, Taipei, Vienna, Yokohama, and Zürich. Luc Tuymans included his work in *Sanguine/Bloedrood* (2018), which opened at M HKA and travelled to Prada Foundation in Milano. His work is in numerous museum collections such as Tate Modern and Centre Pompidou.

Zhang Enli, until 19 October, Xavier Hufkens, rue St-Georges 6 & 107, Brussels, open Tue-Sat 11 am-6 pm, www.xavierhufkens.com

Image: Zhang Enli, *Hair*, 2019, oil on canvas, 170 x 150 cm., courtesy the artist and Xavier Hufkens

