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## Spots, Dust, Renderings, Picabia, Case Notes, Flavour, Light, Sound, and More: Xie Nanxing's Creations

To the audience that has followed his creations, Xie Nanxing's works have undergone significant changes since 2011. The most visible change relates to the problem that his new paintings pose, namely, how should they be viewed? Perhaps the problem can be expressed like this: How should the irregular "stains" of paint that appear on his canvases be understood? How can this artist's decision be accepted when he lays bare an effect within the artwork but refuses to provide its source or origin? Xie Nanxing began to explore and design a number of methods of what he calls "camouflage paintings" or "escape-from-painting paintings" as early as 2005. What he did was take all of the skills and techniques that he had mastered and hid them, leaving behind only vestiges for the world to see. This strategy was not, however, one of lazy arrogance in assuming that mere remnants of his painting were enough to constitute a finished work. Instead, it came from an earnest belief that these residual marks truly constituted the work he was interested in making.

Left: Xie Nanxing, *Triangle Relations Gradually Changing No. 2*, 2013, oil on canvas, 220 x 220 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

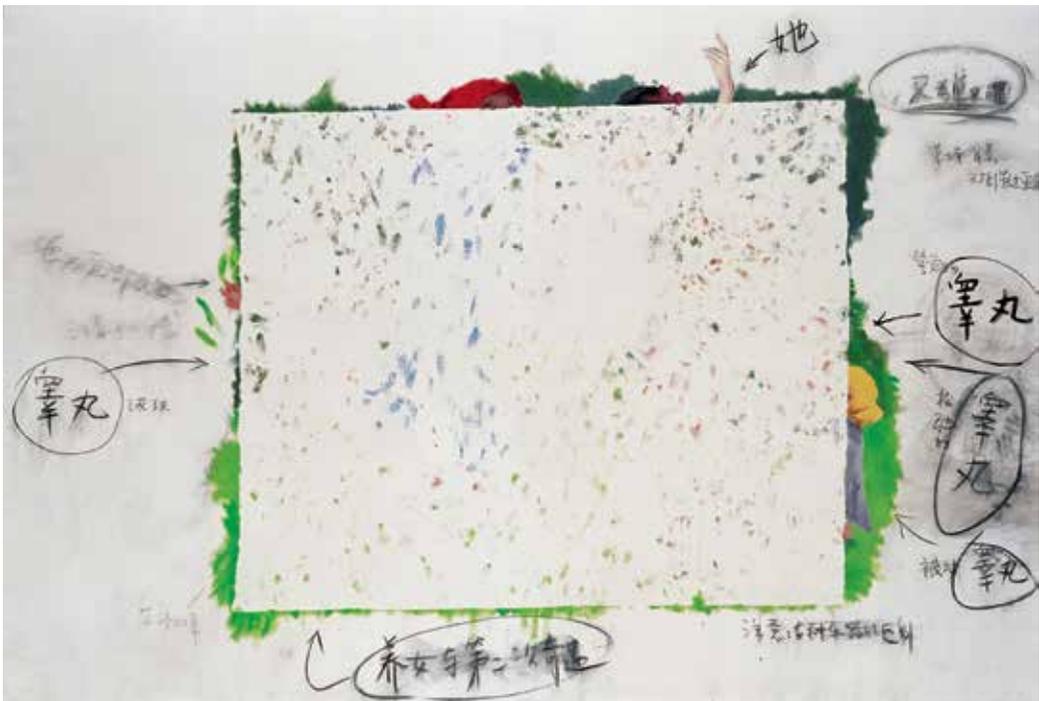
Right: Xie Nanxing, *Triangle Relations Gradually Changing No. 5*, 2013, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



In *From the Issue of Art to the Issue of Position: Echoes of Socialist Realism* at OCAT Shenzhen from January 19 to April 12, 2014, I included three pieces from a group of paintings that Xie Nanxing was working on called *Triangle Relations Gradually Changing* (2013). This group of works consists of five pieces in total. The process of creating them involved taking one canvas and covering it with another. He applied paint on the top canvas and allowed it to seep through onto the canvas underneath, creating a different image altogether. When he exhibits them, much as he has done with other paintings made in a similar manner, Xie Nanxing displays only the canvases placed beneath the ones that he actually painted upon. We see only traces of the painting process that the artist used on the top canvas, resulting in a kind of common "by-product." To emphasize this effect, the artist adds not

a single brush stroke to the final printed image that is the outcome of the paint bleeding through from the first canvas.

Unless one visits his studio, we can only occasionally see—through photographs—the paintings that were placed on top and that left behind these stains and markings, and even in this context, the images tend to be small in scale, like when an illustration is published within an article. Because there are no exceptions to this pattern, not adding anything to the bottom canvas, the finished work, can be considered his general working principle. In his approach to this kind of stubborn economy in the making of his work, the artist takes no uncertain position: “I don’t want to draw a single stroke on the inner canvas, because if I were to make just one stroke or dot, it would be unable to escape its relationship with the context of art history. I also don’t want anyone who studied art theory or any kind of curator to say anything. No one can escape the web of art history. This is a really scary thing. Theorists and curators can put these connections together at any time. Therefore, I don’t apply a single stroke on the canvas.”<sup>1</sup> Regardless of whether or not it is intentional, then, there is a strong sense that the artist is rejecting our desire to experience the full narrative of the canvas. On the one hand, these explorations are based on deep faith in and a dependence on the medium of painting, but, on the other hand, the artist regards the propagation of painting methods and the spreading of general painting awareness with suspicion.



Xie Nanxing has been using this method of creation for some time. The earliest piece in which you can see an inkling of painting a canvas placed on top of another canvas is his 2009 *untitled (No. 2)*, part of a three-piece series of paintings in which the iconography is derived from the narrative of Snow White and Seven Dwarves. This narrative serves, however, as a guise for the artist’s personal expression. Two of the paintings, *untitled (No. 1)* (2009) and

Xie Nanxing, *untitled (No. 2)*, 2009, charcoal and oil on canvas, 220 x 325 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

*untitled (No. 3)* (2009), take the fairy tale of Snow White in order to sketch an outline for a murder scene's original case notes. The artist uses nicknames, casual banter, humour, and profanity along with solid and dotted lines to connect a web of reasonable connections that reinvent this classic children's tale. In *untitled (No. 2)* (2009) he placed over the centre of the bottom canvas another canvas roughly half its size. He then painted a portrait of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves on the smaller canvas and then removed it. Only that which went outside the edges of the smaller canvas or penetrated through it are the remains of the original image. These traces, along with the words written around the centre—"Her" (with an arrow pointing to what was Snow White), "Adopted Daughter and Second Miracle," "Note: the differences between different kinds of musical instruments," etc.—form the body of the picture. These symbols seem related but don't tell too much; the vague text is not intended to explain the story. It is instead intended to prevent too detailed of an investigation into the narrative, thus channeling our imagination toward the actual painting itself.

Once, in a lecture, Xie Nanxing described his motive: "Since 2005, I've been thinking a lot about how to pay more attention to painting's language problem. Instead of static representational objects like before, I've discussed more the scene and object's feeling of space. Actually, strictly speaking, that kind of picture still belongs to figurative painting. It is a question that is difficult to avoid in the field of painting. It is the starting point of painting, and it is a thread that has run unbroken."<sup>2</sup> For the past ten years, then, the artist's conception of his work has, in this respect, been the same. By increasingly making his own practice more and more extreme, he is shouting himself hoarse about the value of painting itself. It is a kind of value that does not rely solely on the experience of art history or the inertia of viewers' and critics' common reality. Artists who have faith in this kind of value ascribed to painting hope that by blocking all of those channels that have already been part of general experience, a deeper gaze into painting can be achieved. Of course, Xie Nanxing quickly became aware that these attempts to expand our experience of seeing and understanding paintings are part of a never-ending battle that could not be won at any time. The barriers Xie Nanxing faces perhaps come from a rejection by some of his artistic peers or from within the art itself. After all, shared experience is often a kind of common language or currency and is perhaps both the starting point and destination of an artist's work. Of course, the audience has even less of an ability to understand his sources than the art professionals. As he moves forward with his efforts, Xie Nanxing must be constantly wary about falling into another trap: that of being included in the camp of "abstract painters."

To a large extent, much of what Xie Nanxing has rejected is actually the object of his work's dialogue: the dualism between theory and practice, and the dogma of China's art historical discourse. It is difficult to escape the inertia of attaching names to things, but even stronger is another kind of reality—that the basis of naming things is built on a very limited theoretical experience and consciousness. This is something that an artist

whose individual experience is always wrapped in the cultural context often cannot be fully aware of or play on. If Xie Nanxing had read Geng Jianyi's 1988 article entitled "On Works and Audience," he would know that this effort in which the artist/creator grapples with "theoretical frameworks" and "audiences" has been long underway in China, and that he is far from alone in the struggle. The artist must decide whether to become a revolutionary and bring a revolution in language to popular attention or take the narcissistic route of being self-obsessed with visual language, and alienate sympathizers who might become less and less interested in the artist's increasingly personalized subtle gambits and begin to love only the artist's aesthetic style. What the artist faces is that he or she is unable to control the way their creations are seen. In his article, Geng Jianyi repeatedly affirms this kind of dilemma: "The field for the personalization of language and the news-worthy development of language is no longer one full of plants or lush forests. The trees of form have been felled for the most part, but so far people are still reluctant to part with the land."<sup>3</sup>

After the mid 1980s, the diffusion of thought and discourse around "language purification," a proposal among mostly academic artists in China calling for artistic creation to be confined to a consideration of stylistic concerns in opposition to previous experiments where concerns with social issues were present, had far-reaching effects. The '85 New Wave Movement saw an over-dependence on philosophical theories as the starting point and meaning for artistic practice. Then in the late 1980s, in response to the '85 New Wave Movement, there emerged an oversimplified understanding to position theory as absolutely oppositional to artistic practice and language. As a result, artists chose to distance themselves from theory, which previously was considered a legitimate starting point and basis for creation. In the meantime, many artists also tended to overstress the singular relevance of sensation and intuition towards artistic creation. In 1988, under the pen name Hu Cun, Li Xianting wrote that "the artists . . . have realized what the most unbearable aspect of New Wave Art is: having too many concepts and rough language, for which they blame the form of a raucous movement, and its strong political and philosophical inclination."<sup>4</sup> Driven by this understanding, artists were keen to purify their exploration of language. He noted, "When all of the relatively separate parts come together, what shows before us is the great contrarian mindset of New Wave Art. Compared to the quick movements, they emphasize calming down; compared to all kinds of relatively new theories with new concepts coming and going, they emphasize the value of the work itself. Instead of intense passion and aesthetic connotation, they emphasize the purification of language."<sup>5</sup> When this kind of deliberately antagonistic mindset becomes a tendency in exhibitions, seminars, and media outlets, he argued, "[I]t deviates from the purpose of emphasizing artistic discipline and becomes a kind of social trend."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as a social trend, it does not provide artists with too many choices. Geng Jianyi said that "The path of being narcissistic about language and the one that promotes the news-worthy nature of language are frustrating to all artists. The restaurant of style is already full. Latecomers arriving at this point can only linger outside the door."<sup>7</sup>

Xie Nanxing, *Ten Self-Portraits (No. 3)*, 1997, oil on canvas, 150 x 130 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



Xie Nanxing, *untitled (No. 2)*, 1999, oil on canvas, 190 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



As a result of the self-discipline of his artistic nature, Xie Nanxing was unwilling to subject himself to this kind of trap in being confined by such limited choices. He was also unwilling to continue benefiting from an already widely accepted image of his artwork—that it had style and class—even though those definitions and interpretations had already brought him dazzling success. Xie Nanxing, who graduated in 1996 from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts Printmaking department, made a name for himself shortly after graduation with a series of painted portraits of young people, including self-portraits. This series of paintings used bloodied young men's bodies and visual drama to convey a sense of psychological oppression and victimization. Before 1998, young people's bodies and scenes of their daily lives were often grouped under the moniker "Youth Cruelty Painting." Although the artist agreed that the purpose of these works was related to drama and tragedy, he also never agreed that his intention was to make a link between youth and cruelty: "Actually 'Youth Cruelty Painting' is just something put forward by the critics. To be so quickly lumped together like this is actually pretty unfair to the artists. When I first started to paint this kind of thing, I wanted to communicate and participate with the viewer. I wanted to see if I could paint something that made the viewer feel uncomfortable, upset psychologically, and shaken."<sup>8</sup>



By the end of 1999, Xie Nanxing ceased creating this series and started thinking about how the picture could avoid using figurative images—like a naked body, blood flowing from wounds, symbols like blood stained sheets—and instead express a kind of psychological experience or feeling by depicting everyday objects. From 2000 to 2001, the artist turned his focus to depicting liquids, the flame on a stove, a bit of light cast onto the wall, the end of a corridor, chandeliers, etc. to try to find basic objects that could connect with a dramatic psychological experience. From this stage onward, Xie Nanxing had already begun to plot his course to “escape from painting,” or, more perhaps more accurately, “escape from the image.”

Xie Nanxing, *untitled (liquid)*, 2000, oil on canvas, 220 x 380 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

Xie Nanxing, *untitled (Flame)*, 2000, oil on canvas, 220 x 380 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/ Lucerne.



The body, allusion to its harm, and efforts to make the audience uncomfortable were trends that permeated the Chinese art world in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They included performance art exhibitions that took “human and animal” as their theme and appeared in nationwide tours, Post-Sensibility performance art, and examples of performance art that were featured in the exhibition *Fuck Off*, which took place during the 2000 Shanghai Biennale. These movements and reactions, on the one hand, came from the uncertainties of artists regarding the increasing industrialization, marketization, and domestication of art. On the other, they echoed similar creative trends coming from Europe, like London’s 1997 Royal Academy exhibition *Sensation*, which featured many of what was known as the Young British Artists. Xie Nanxing came to realize that although his own works were also reflective of the human and animal trend of the early 2000s, he was unwilling to allow the sensational or narrative dimension of the images and the results they achieved stop him. What he hoped for was a step-by-step approach to a more profound intent within the process of painting and creation. In the artist’s own words, his paintings had something special from the beginning: “Although I am expressing through the visual, what I actually hope is for my visual language to extend into other areas, like with sound or things happening in other dimensions. (This does not mean I want to make video art.)”<sup>9</sup>

However, at this stage, his works are known mainly through what has been described by art historian Lu Peng as a part of the “video painting” wave that emerged in the new century. Lu Peng wrote:

In the new century, artists have received a cue from those like Gerhard Richter: Even if it’s a photographic image, it can still stimulate the motifs, materials, or meanings of a painting. So-called photo-based paintings are conceptual paintings from the first decade of the twenty-first century. Many artists enjoy working in this style, and it has already led to a long list of works from artists like Li Songsong, Li Dafang, Xie Nanxing, and Yin Chaoyang. Indeed, painting that pulls its conceptual motivation from photography is a sea change as it is a shift from symbolic painting to narrative painting. It shows that people are attached to all kinds of



past experiences and can't rid themselves of the spiritual influence that today's life has on us. However, these kinds of artists' images, even borrowing from historical photographs, have also been modified or adapted so that they are difficult to identify, and are actually a kind of reconstruction of the borrowed image. They are a kind of fictional narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Xie Nanxing, *untitled (picture of voice I)*, 2001, oil on canvas, triptych, 220 x 380 cm each. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



Starting in 2001, Xie Nanxing created two groups of triptychs, entitled *untitled (Picture of Voice I)* and *(Picture of Voice II)*, that let the audience, through pictorial language, sense other content like the surface of a lake, a whooshing sound, the effect of cars passing at speed, or the sound of a car in the distance. The first of these series' three paintings are differentiated by their portrayal of rain falling upon glass at three different speeds. The same year he also painted three portraits, *untitled (Ear)*, *Untitled (Portrait No. 1)*, and *Untitled (Portrait No. 2)*. Each are derived from the same video and are of the same specific woman but concentrate on three different parts

Xie Nanxing, *untitled (picture of voice II)*, 2002, oil on canvas, triptych, 220 x 380 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



of her head. In this way of limiting his choice of images to the same source of image, the artist created constraints on his iconography; it could even be said that he was hard on himself by strictly forcing himself to excavate all of painting's possibilities. At this stage, the question of what to paint was

Xie Nanxing, *untitled (Ear)*, 2001, oil on canvas, 150 x 300 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/ Lucerne.



Xie Nanxing, *untitled (Portrait No. 1)*, 2001, oil on canvas, 150 x 298 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/ Lucerne.



Xie Nanxing, *untitled (Portrait No. 2)*, 2001, oil on canvas, 150 x 300 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/ Lucerne.



nowhere near as important to the artist as how to paint. It could be said that the act of painting itself could generate additional sensations. Of course, the questions of how to paint and what might be achieved through painting also determine how the artist chooses subject matter. Attempts in this manner were also made by Xie Nanxing in 2003, in which six painted compositions, all of them *untitled*, were taken from the same photograph. However, the different characters depicted in each painting, or in those without a person, the subtle changes of space constituted the differences between these works. The artist has said, “The content of each piece is different, but they all present the same picture. You would think that the film was taken at random, but actually they are the same picture. This way offers more space, time, and psychological aspects than a single image, and it extends further in a way. This is unrelated to the series having six different paintings but instead is more indebted to their continuity.”<sup>11</sup>

This strategy of continuously repeating the visual description of an object appeared again in 2005 with a series of four paintings, also *untitled*. What



Xie Nanxing, *untitled (No. 4)*, 2003, oil on canvas, 150 x 360 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



Xie Nanxing, *untitled (No. 6)*, 2003, oil on canvas, 150 x 360 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

this particular series showed was the same billiard table viewed from different angles. For the artist, the billiard table is a familiar object, its main role a source of youthful night entertainment. However, that is not the subject of these four pictures. The real protagonist is light or experience that emerges related to light. “Light, in my works, is like a medium,” the artist says. “In the 2005 works, I used light’s penetrative properties. For example, when you paint a portrait looking towards the light, you almost can’t make out the person’s figure, because where the picture is thin, light extends, and in the thick places it will make everything black. I think that this is really interesting. It generates for me different expectations towards painting. It’s like a miracle. You can’t possibly imagine all of the shapes that light creates.”<sup>12</sup>



Left: Xie Nanxing, *untitled (No. 1)*, 2005, oil on canvas, 220 x 385 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

Right: Xie Nanxing, *untitled (No. 2)*, 2005, oil on canvas, 220 x 385 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

In the blue-coloured three-piece series *The First Round with a Whip No. 1*, *No. 2*, and *No. 3* (2008), the artist, fascinated by the shape of the light or attempting to veil the original image, calculated that by putting various Beijing billboards backwards, backlighting them, then capturing the scene with a video camera before playing the video back on a television and taking a photograph of the television screen to serve as the final reference for his painting, would deny us, the audience, the ability to trace what we were seeing to its original source. This decision puts the viewer in the same limited space as the artist—and again the focus was on the act of painting itself rather than the significance of the content.

Xie Nanxing, *The First Round with a Whip No. 3* (also known as *The Wave No. 3*), 2008, oil on canvas, 219 x 384 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



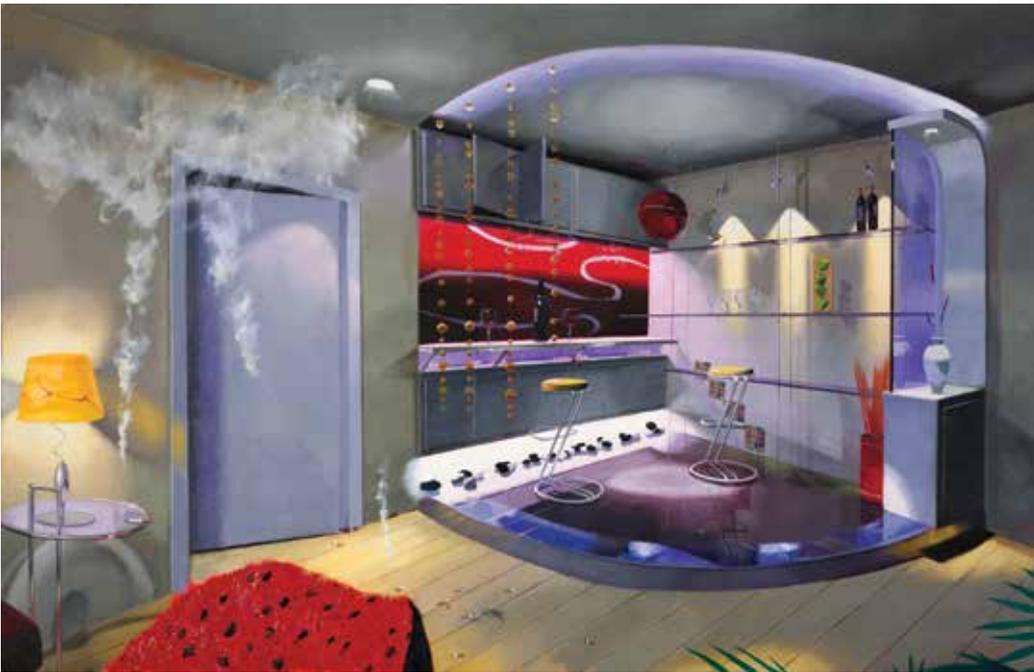
Left: Xie Nanxing, *We No. 1*, 2009, oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



Right: Xie Nanxing, *We No. 3*, 2009, oil on canvas, 210 x 160 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



After enacting these extreme practices by removing the picture's content and then employing symbolism in order to explore painting's possibilities, the artist seemed to briefly return to the track of the picture's narrative. This return also caused him to begin to prioritize art history as a point of inquiry. As usual, he asked questions, as well as took lessons from the remains of history as a starting point. The 2009 series *We* consists of three pictures on the subject of copying paintings. Xie Nanxing went online and downloaded a few works from one period by the French Dada artist Francis Picabia. The most representative works of Picabia's were paintings that represented dramatic colours with graphics of machine parts, but during his lifetime, the style of his creations evolved constantly, and he never focused on mastering the technique of drawing. He was not a traditional painter; he just wanted to express himself fearlessly by constantly changing content and styles. When Xie Nanxing read through Picabia's history and works, he realized that, at one point, Picabia had drawn a number of covers for erotic magazines. The drawings were not considered good, and people thought his abilities were perhaps in decline. Xie Nanxing copied three of his erotic magazine covers as a way to get to know Picabia better, and, to a certain extent, this series of works found Xie Nanxing initiating his own form of self-examination. The deeper story here is the anxiety and uncertainty in the heart of the creator: Should an artist continually change styles? Is change a symbol of fearless expression, like with Picabia, or is it the cause of failure? From researching and contemplating Picabia's life and working



process, Xie Nanxing seems to have come to this conclusion: Whether or not an artist paints well is related to his character and is not entirely tied up in creation itself.

Xie Nanxing, *Improvisation 500 (Oblivion)*, 2011, oil on canvas, 190 x 290 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

The careful study of people and events in art history at this stage of Xie Nanxing's artistic output is notable. After *We*, Xie Nanxing drew his content from an interior decorating reference book entitled *Dazzling Colorful Home Furnishings* and imitated through paint some of the renovation design drawings found within it. The original names of the design drawings, their composition and furniture, spoke to the artist of an obscure but necessary link with art history. The artist gave the works in this series the somewhat sensational names *Improvisation 500 (Oblivion)* (2011), *White Asses* (2011), and *Velásquez's Innocent X* (2010). On the topic of why he chose to depict renovation design drawings, the artist said:

[T]he foundation is rooted in the fact that I realized interior design drawings and designers are related to painters of the past. They know the history of the art of painting and its performance techniques. They pretty much know all of it. They probably studied fine arts and went through all of the training. Painters are faced with a white canvas while interior designers are confronted with a space. If you look at a magazine of renovation renderings, you can see European style. It will discuss size, colour, and light. It's a purely technical visual language, but painting uses that same language. For example, you are supposed to express luxury without being superficial. The lighting fixtures, the bedroom, the entrance, etc., are all supposed to achieve a kind of effect. In painting, how to use colour, composition, and proportions are similar to the way interior design discusses them. Both discuss how to approach a blank



Xie Nanxing, *White Asses*, 2011, oil on canvas, 220 x 325 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

canvas and an empty space. Both use symbolism, colour, light, and psychology, so, I thought, they really are not very far apart. Painting is a standard form of high art, while interior design is kind of cheap one-time-use aesthetics. The methods behind interior design drawings express that they have definitely been influenced by art history's technical progress. It's like a piece of dust on the table. How could it not be seen as coming from a piece of the Mogao Grottoes? Through this kind of obscure connection, I realized that design renderings are the same as this piece of dust, and pieces and parts of their methods still resemble painting. It's a microcosmic reflection of the larger world.<sup>13</sup>

Xie Nanxing, *untitled No. 2*, 2011, oil on canvas, 190 x 278 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



To Xie Nanxing, all of our experiences with painting are just a mote of art history's dust. Influences and relationships remain, but they are far from the entire picture. To the creator and the reader, confronting this dust is unavoidable, but one can also choose to refuse

it. In 2011, Xie Nanxing created another *untitled* series, again using one canvas to cover the other; on top, he completed a painting with a narrative structure. In Xie Nanxing's own words, this kind of painting technique "is a little bit like traditional rice paper painting. After you are finished with the drawing on top, the pattern that remains below is unrecognizable. However, the painter cannot paint the top layer without caring about the underlying layer. It doesn't matter if it's the top layer or bottom layer, both are you."<sup>14</sup> The content of these narrative paintings relates to classic novels and myths as well as to painters recorded in art history. These paintings tell the story of the relationship between painting, space, object, and the painter himself.



Xie Nanxing, *untitled No. 3*, 2012, oil on canvas, 220 x 325 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.

However, as mentioned earlier, Xie Nanxing exhibits only the underlying printed image. The splotches and ink traces, however, allow the viewer to still speculate on the composition of the top layer. Xie Nanxing calls these traces “ashes.” It is not abstraction, but also it is clearly not figurative in form. The artist’s true hope is that by using this kind of a painting method, he can break away from the trajectory of art history, enter into an isolated position, a void, and, in the end, finally redefine how he is identified in the context of art.

Among these “dust” or “shadow” or “ashes” paintings, as the artist calls them, a 2013 series entitled *Triangle Relations Gradually Changing* contains a painting whose source material is a 2005 work by Lucian Freud, *The Painter Surprised by a Naked Admirer*. In this painting, a female model sits next to the painter holding his leg, and the painter is some distance away from a half-painted canvas, unable to return to the easel. Xie Nanxing chose this painting because he believed that the question of authenticity the painting discusses—the model embodies reality itself and tries to drag the artist away from the canvas—is a metaphor for some of the problems regarding painting that he himself had been contemplating. Freud’s achievements lie in sketching, but in his later years he began to contemplate the issue of what is real when it comes to people. To Xie Nanxing, the model is clinging to the artist, preventing him from moving forward and continuing to paint the painting. In this painting, what Freud is saying is that what was real was the fact that the model was holding him tight, while the painting (of the model) itself was just an illusion.

Freud influenced many Chinese painters, as his skill was extraordinary, but his expressions were also unique. In Xie Nanxing’s painting, *Triangle Relations Gradually Changing, No. 3*, he replaced the image of Freud with one of his own. In his own painting, he was the very artist who was held by his pursuit for the real and thus was unable to reach the canvas and finish his own painting in a symbolic sense. Since Xie Nanxing’s painting practice is aimed at addressing the issues arising from figurative painting, the result would eventually be, as the artist has pointed out in conversation, a kind of disastrous representation. After all, what he was subject to and had

Xie Nanxing, *Triangle Relations Gradually Changing No. 3*, 2013, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne.



experienced was the same kind of training in technique, brushwork, and modeling, as well as in art history, as the other artists of figurative painting. It is only natural that Xie Nanxing would not reveal the top layer of canvas to us, as his real self was on the run, leaving behind a shell and a disguise for us to speculate. This attempt to escape the tradition of figurative painting has remained the core concern of Xie Nanxing's practice in recent years, but there is an uncertain future. Just as this painting was in essence something of a self-portrait, there always remains the possibility that the artist will end up being caught in-between.

*Translated by Michael Winkler*

#### Notes

1. Xie Nanxing, *After the Second Round with a Whip*, January 17, 2014, transcript of lecture given at Shenzhen's OCAT Library. Unpublished.
2. Ibid.
3. Geng Jianyi, "On Works and Audience," *Fine Arts in China* 22, (1988), 1.
4. Li Xianting, "The Era Awaits the Life Passion of Great Souls," *Fine Arts in China* 37 (1988), 1.
5. Ibid., 1.
6. Ibid., 1.
7. Geng Jianyi, "On Works and Audience," 1.
8. Xie Nanxing: *it's not interesting if I am the only one playing*, "AMNUA Sketch III" exhibition series interview at Xie Nanxing's studio in Caochangdi, Beijing, with Wang Yamin, March 2015, <http://www.nuamuseum.org/Detail.aspx?id=388/>.
9. Xie Nanxing, *After the Second Round with a Whip*.
10. Lu Peng, *Painting Theory: Hands and Concepts*. Artron, <http://review.artintern.net/html.php?id=60536/>.
11. Xie Nanxing, *After the Second Round with a Whip*.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.