

THE ARTIST ROOM

INSIDE OUT

10 March – 2 April 2022

Private View: Wednesday 9 March, 6–8pm

Opening times: Tuesday–Friday, 11am–6pm and Saturday, 12–4pm

Since the psychedelic experience has the structure of dreaming awake at the end of time – ungovernable, inviting diffusion and slanting articulations, and full of resemblances and chimeras – the question of how to tell the dream upon waking remains.

Sarah Shin and Ben Vickers, *Altered States*, 2021

The Artist Room is pleased to present Inside Out, a group exhibition including works by Sophie Mei Birkin, Max Boyla, Sonya Derviz, Antoine Leisure, Kin-Ting Li, Ding Shilun and Scott Young.

This exhibition explores how a dystopian consciousness permeates contemporary art. From subverting the so-called ‘natural’ to envisioning surreal cosmologies and carnal futures, this exhibition brings together a group of emerging artists that imagine life turned inside out. By rendering visible the imagined, unseen and yet felt, a new generation of artists are responding to our hyper-transient and image-centric age by building new visual languages to form alternative paths to perception.

‘When the difference between real and unreal is so blurred, where does that leave our sense of being in the world?’ asks Max Boyla (b.1991). Boyla’s evolving project – spanning painting, sculpture and installation – constructs speculative and supernatural worlds in which fiction and truth, the past and the future collide. Recurrent characters, both ambiguous and celestial, seek to imagine ‘how the human soul exists within concepts of infinity.’

Sculptor Sophie Mei Birkin (b.1995) explores the ‘generative potential in the transformation of matter.’ Working with diverse mediums such as jesmonite, acrylic, abalone shells, ceramic and glass, Birkin’s fragmentary installations investigate how material exploration can incite a psychophysical response. Appearing simultaneously futuristic and prehistoric, *Carcass Submerged [Whale Fall]* (2021–22) draws from an ‘interest in the seabed as a site of protean transformation.’ Whether in the context of post-apocalypse or environmental disaster, when one carcass falls, what new ecosystems are created?

Although recognisable, the figures present in Sonya Derviz’s (b.1994) works are mined from the subconscious. *Untitled* (2022), from the *Wise Young Girl* series, continues the artist’s investigations into unspoken behaviours and the human psyche. Beginning with a research

process involving the careful collection of source material, Derviz is interested in abstracting such information through the physical act of painting. 'There is a difference between conceiving and realising a painting, because in the end, a painting is not an *idea*,' she once noted, describing her intuitive approach. In this vein, her paintings – that evoke notions of isolation and abandonment – are worked and re-worked; their final appearance subliminally connecting images with sensations and memories.

Similarly, Kin-Ting Li's (b.1991) paintings traverse fiction and reality. The gestural and seemingly abstract shapes that are visible mimic organic structures; it is unclear whether they represent micro-scale workings internal to the body or astronomical happenings beyond our universe. Li employs a distinctive palette of chilling and otherworldly tones – charcoals, silvers, petrol blues and lime greens – and his works, which hold a distinctively rough surface texture, have been described as 'protean renderings'.

Synthesising aesthetics of abstraction, graffiti and illustration, Paris-based artist Antoine Leisure (b.1993) envisions dramatic vistas and vivid, entropic landscapes. Utilising acrylic and airbrush techniques gleaned from painting inside and outside the studio confines, Leisure's luminescent paintings, such as *Shinji* (2022), appear at once lucid and hazy. Functioning like worlds within worlds, Leisure's paintings read as transient non-spaces and somehow other: disturbing, incompatible, contradictory and transforming.

Scott Young (b.1988) is interested in the strange and uncanny relationships we project on objects and possessions. His hyperreal paintings are a contemporary re-envisioning of Dutch still life and vanitas painting, where objects and motifs with contentious social significance are carefully placed into coded dialogues. In *Still Life with California Corn* (2021), a genetically modified corn husk – the most produced crop in the USA – sits atop a faux Yellow Siena marble background, alluding to artificialities in our extractive relationship between nature and culture.

The fantastical – and somewhat paranormal – paintings of Ding Shilun (b.1998) imagine scenes that sit outside of any clear, linear history. *Chiron* (2021), for instance, voyeuristically depicts two mysterious figures intertwined in a carnal and intense embrace. Ding considers such characters to be an embodiment of the conflicting sensibilities and vulnerabilities we, as individuals, hold. Both captivating and beguiling, he has described his layered works as 'impossible miracles'.

Inside Out brings together strands of dystopian thinking; from the rendering of altered states and unsettling worlds to harnessing intuition and embracing the subconscious. Bringing together a new generation of artists whose work – in different ways – captures the pathos complexity of feelings that underlie our anxious time, Inside Out is an exhibition about the transformative potential of art; where ideas and aesthetics can both coalesce and rupture.

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