

SPERONE WESTWATER
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Liu Ye

Leave Me in the Dark

7 November – 19 December 2009

Sperone Westwater is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings by Liu Ye. This is the artist's second solo show at Sperone Westwater in New York. For this new body of work, Liu Ye continues to engage the history of Modernism in Western art.

The focus of these compositions is a singular young woman, depicted either reading or embarking on a journey. As in *Banned Book 2* (2008), *Reading Girl* (2008) and *Ballet Lesson* (2009), she is centrally placed against a saturated and mostly monochromatic background comprised of shades of grey, slate blue and black. Covered with layers of sheer glazes, these compositions have a contemplative and somewhat solemn tone. Although clearly figurative, the outline of the protagonist's body and the features of her face have been optimally simplified. Furthermore, in works like *Miss* (2008) and *Leave me in the Dark* (2008), her body is concealed behind a sharply outlined trench coat, skirt, blouse or pair of pants. Positioned next to a square suitcase, rectangular book, or set of wooden toys, the composition is reduced to blocks of color, and geometric abstraction is achieved. Liu Ye suggests a somewhat narrative composition, but he also generates a nearly abstract arrangement that defies simplistic interpretation. In speaking about this development in the catalogue that accompanies this exhibition, the Chinese poet Zhu Zhu writes:

Once your gaze passes through surface boundaries, you can discover what is consistent [...]: timelessness, tranquility, and purity – to an extent we could characterize it as a personal mysticism. It resists disorderly representations and the tug of literalism; it attempts to dance in unison with inherent rhythms of the cosmos, to pursue an ultimate spiritual order. [...] the abstract has been internalized: it imbues the images that flow from his brush – bamboo, wooden blocks, toys, books, little girls, musicians – with a solidity and distinctness of structure, a melodic contour, which means he has gone past the stage of setting up fairy tale scenarios as a way of dissolving an oppressive reality.

Since Liu Ye's student days, the work of Vermeer has also influenced his painting. Like many of Vermeer's famous paintings of women in domestic scenes of middle class life, Liu Ye's paintings evoke empathy for his female protagonist by reducing the backgrounds to the simplest of forms, with light falling on the figure from an unseen source. Liu Ye's compositions are portraits in which the subject is depicted as contemplative and intelligent, but like Vermeer, they are also quiet statements of longing, love and admiration.

Born in Beijing in 1964, Liu Ye came of age during the Cultural Revolution, a period between 1966 and 1976 when all art was at the service of the state and individual expression was explicitly forbidden. His father was a children's book author, and one afternoon, Liu Ye discovered a collection of Western literature— books by Lewis Carroll, Hans Christian Andersen, Tolstoy, Petrus Christus and many others—hidden in a black chest beneath his parents' bed. Although these books were banned at the time, Liu Ye nonetheless studied their illustrations intensely. As a young adult, the artist went on to study industrial design and mural painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts before moving to Germany to pursue an MFA at the Hochschule der Kunst in Berlin from 1990 to 1994. He later spent time in Amsterdam as an artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie, where he first encountered works of art by Mondrian, Vermeer, Klee, and Dick Bruna. His work has been exhibited extensively in China and Germany. His last major solo museum exhibition took place at the Kunstmuseum in Bern, Switzerland in 2007. Most recently, Liu Ye's work was included in a major group exhibition, "Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection", which opened at the Kunstmuseum in Bern, Switzerland in 2005, and traveled to the Hamburger Kunsthalle in Hamburg, Germany, the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, Austria, and ended at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2005-2009).

There will be an opening reception for the artist on Saturday 7 November from 6-8 pm. A catalogue with color reproductions, including essays by critic Barbara Pollack and poet Zhu Zhu, accompanies the exhibition. For more information as well as photographic images, please contact Maryse Brand at Sperone Westwater at (212) 999-7337, or maryse@speronewestwater.com. Please find further information on our website: www.speronewestwater.com.