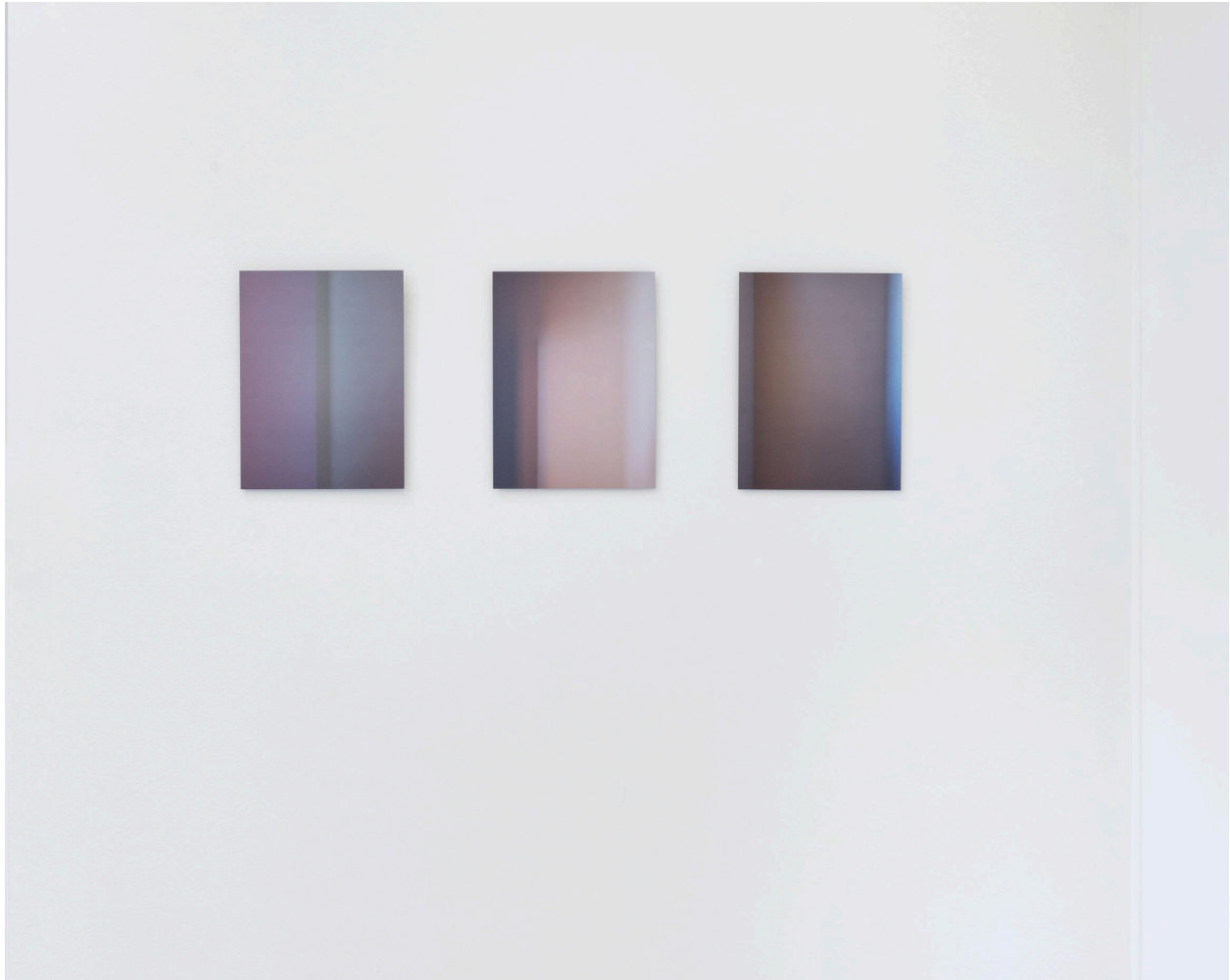


On the Mundane: Here, Before and After Me at Yi Gallery



Installation view. Courtesy of Yi Gallery and the artist.

By **YINDI CHEN** May 10, 2024

While first seeing a test print on paper of *Untitled (2 am, Dorset VT)* at Xingze Li's studio, I thought of volcanic rocks and the bumpy surface of the Moon. What Li captures in this photograph is vapor on glass—the image is finally printed on an oval aluminum, carrying a sense of depth and a mystical impression: the light source in the center is enclosed with water drops and becomes distant, like a star cluster that we can only stare at from afar.

To enchant the ordinary is a theme of the two-person show of Xingze Li and Sarah Pater, *Here, Before and After Me*, at Yi Gallery. Through photographs and paintings, the artists unfold barely noticed, dreamlike minutiae of life. The close-up views of everyday scenarios—flora and fauna on tables, reflections of light on walls and windows—are covered with misty hues, invoking a feeling that something extraneous is happening.

Li's photographs catch varying shades refracted from both artificial and natural lights, sometimes triggering false illusions of sight. In Li's *Untitled (round mirror)*, the mirror with its shadow resembles a black hole that goes through the wall. The image holds a soft and occult aura, revealing a place that we may escape to, or a space that seems to exist in another dimension.



Sarah Pater; Glass at night (work of the spider, relief), 2024. Oil and wax on linen, 18 x 14 in.

Courtesy of Yi Gallery and the artist.

We often refer to the state of abstaining from human voice as “silence.” This kind of silence is omnipresent in both artists’ works, which sets off possible sounds existing beyond the picture planes—nebulous birdsongs or buzz from fluorescent bulbs. Though the physical body is absent from the images, the artworks still remind us that there is a witness of these mundane things: Li’s series are named after places and times where he took the photos, leaving clues of being-in-the-world; in some of Pater’s works, a pair of symmetrical circles appear, as the paintings have their own eyes, looking back to the viewer.

Pater depicts objects that compose our daily life while leaving them in a liminal space between stillness and motion and evoking the corporeal experience of vision: the moon waxes and wanes, the paper starts to float, and perhaps the glass would move automatically as well, like the scene in Andrei Tarkovsky’s film. The casted reliefs on the surfaces bring a sculptural quality, and their indistinct silhouettes draw us to step closer and observe.

Works by both Pater and Li recall René Magritte’s paintings, which portray enigmas imbued in ordinary objects and present the threshold between the banal and the surreal. As a recurring element in Magritte’s images, the window makes us aware of our act of perception, questioning what can exist in sight. Windows also appear in Li’s photographs and Pater’s paintings, conjuring up peculiar, unnoticed details that transcend our humdrum routines and fixed view.



Xingze Li, Untitled (2am, Dorset VT), 2024. Dye sublimation on aluminum, 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Yi Gallery and the artist.

Alain Badiou has poetically written on fragments of mundane life that he saw from windows: “In the evenings, as I lost myself, I often imagined—through the bay windows of an apartment ... in the still clarity of the sky—that the cartography of stellar signs, whose earthly lineaments the city’s monuments seemed to trace, was telling me that I would be there forever. The bird stretched on the dry soil, the lunar lagoons, Niemeyer’s stylized cement ... opened up in this way and orienting me through the night, had incorporated me into the birth of a new world.”

Behind every desk and lamp, there is often a window—from where we see beyond the boredom of life, awaiting unknowable everyday mystery. **WM**



YINDI CHEN

Yindi Chen is a curator and writer based in New York. Her research focuses on art practices related to the Anthropocene and queer ecology. She has contributed writings to *The Art Newspaper China*, *C-print Journal*, and *Cultbytes*.

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