

Ren Han
The myth of the absurd

Opening: November 17. 2023 18:00 – 21:00

Exhibition: November 18 – December 16. 2023

Mariannenstrasse 33, 10999 Berlin

Curator: Caterina Angelucci

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is the king of Ephyra, modern-day Corinth, who is punished by Zeus for his audacious insolence. His fate is tied to a boulder that he must push from the base to the top of a mountain, but every time the summit is reached, the boulder rolls back to the base, and Sisyphus must start over, for eternity. The myth, at the core of Ren Han's poetics, is a metaphor for human existence: Sisyphus, as a human, spends his life striving for a goal, but once he reaches the top, all his efforts are in vain because death is inevitable.

In the ascent imagined by the artist within the spaces of Galerie Met, the audience is invited to immerse himself in a blend of reality and fiction, in an apocalyptic horizon. Reflecting on human actions of construction and deconstruction driven by desire and on the interferences between the new values conveyed by hyperconnected societies and the individual's civilizational heritage, Ren Han presents a short-circuit of images and visions. Through the translation of sublime views taken from the internet into graphite on paper, such as erupting volcanoes, snow-covered mountains, and menacing clouds, the artist stages a landscape of magnetic and magmatic forces that does not include human presence, except as a silent figure observing from behind.

As silent witnesses of climate change, the incessant succession of images depicting the crisis seems to almost legitimize these events. Overexposure numbs us to tragedy, and a nostalgic sentiment blurs and confuses research and reflections on visual culture born in the internet age: do we imagine according to our thoughts or imagine according to the images?

The delicacy of graphite on paper infiltrates the interstices of these reflections and returns sublime landscapes by playing between attraction and repulsion: as in a monochromatic dance, the rhythm is interrupted by the purple of volcanic visions in the first room. Not the real, but the plausible leads the narrative, passing through the snow-covered mountains where perspective is barely hinted at, and then freeing the stroke, which has been terrain until now, in the study of birds in flight. These, called "rollers", are a species of pigeon that are born with a genetic defect that prevents them from flying normally, causing a rotational movement in the air. Disoriented and in descent, these birds serve as a prelude to the last image offered by the artist, where in an ascending motion, the gaze is invited to lose itself upwards, unable to find an escape route.

Between architecture and painting, Ren Han chooses to designate the point of arrival on a folding screen on which he paints nebulous suggestions that simultaneously seem to approach and withdraw from the gaze. Unlike Western visual art, in Asian painting, clouds are considered "blank space," substances that do not conform to the principles of Renaissance perspective but rather constitute a blind spot in it. In their unexpected and scenic movement, clouds are considered by the artist as an incessant natural performance: from a threat to a fascinating presence, they suggest a transcendent existence whose form resides in the feeling they evoke.

In *"The Myth of Sisyphus: An Essay on the Absurd,"* Albert Camus provides an existentialist interpretation of Sisyphus' experience, recognizing that the character, in accepting his "absurd" destiny, devoid of meaning, finds the only possible meaning.

Text by Caterina Angelucci.

Artist: Ren Han

Ren Han (b. 1984, Tianjin) currently lives and works in Paris. In 2006, he obtained a bachelor's degree in oil painting from Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. In 2011, he earned a master's degree in art (DNSEP) from École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Nice – Villa Arson.

Born in the year coinciding with the title of George Orwell's dystopian novel "1984," Ren Han's formative years unfolded amidst the explosive urbanization in China and the rapid global proliferation of the internet. He incorporates images from mythology, nature, and the digital realm into his works, leading a series of research and reflections on the consumption of visual culture in the Internet age, using techniques such as drawing, installations, and site-specific works. He once said, "I question the meaning of humans continually constructing and deconstructing under the impetus of desire," and his work is a Sisyphean response to the world.

Ren Han's works have been widely featured in international exhibitions, including venues such as Monnaie de Paris; Jeune Création, Centquatre, Paris; Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris; Salon de Montrouge, Le Beffroi, Montrouge; Asian Art Museum, Nice; Jimei x Arles International Photo Festival, Xiamen; Today Art Museum, Beijing; Times Museum, Beijing; Taikang Space, Beijing; Nanjing Art Academy Art Museum; OCAT, Xi'an; Moscow Museum of Modern Art, etc. In addition, he has held solo exhibitions at institutions like the Musée du Nouvel Institut Franco-Chinois, Lyon; Zeto Art, Paris; Yishu 8, Paris; C-Space, Beijing; Qimu Space, Beijing, etc.

Curator: Caterina Angelucci

Caterina Angelucci is a researcher and curator. She holds a bachelor's and master's degree in Archaeology and Art History from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milano, Italy. Since 2018 she has been responsible for the content of the art section and marketing section in ArtsLife newspaper. Since 2021, she curates and organizes Lido La Fortuna artist residency (Associazione Lido Contemporaneo, Fano, Italy) and is part of the Endless Residency research group (Italian Council X). Caterina has collaborated and written for Lampoon Magazine and L'Essenziale Studio. In 2023 she was selected by Artribune for the Curators Observatory section (No. 27, May-June, Year XIII) and published her thesis work on artist residencies through Postmedia Books.