

Digital Narrative, Everyday Jokes

Ziping Wang's Solo Exhibition October 2 – December 15, 2022, Peres Projects, Seoul

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The advent of the internet, which enabled people worldwide to share information instantly, can be attributed to the establishment of the World Wide Web (WWW) at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research. In 1990, as the web began, the first image uploaded by CERN was a photo of the parody pop group “Les Horribles Cernettes,” created by CERN employee Michele de Gennaro. It was a poster with crude fonts and a poorly synthesized gradient background. If the power of the web had been anticipated, would the image that adorned the first page of internet history have been somewhat different?

Phenomenological Transparency

In the early 2000s, the proliferation of low-resolution images within cutting-edge media was not only a subject of critique for artists, but also served as a defining criterion for distinguishing eras and generations. It functioned as an experimental medium of shocking proportions. However, contemporary artists who lived alongside the

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development of the internet saw it as part of their everyday lives. Ziping Wang, an artist of Chinese origin active in New York, is one such individual who embraced the web as an integral part of her daily existence. As the artist herself defines it, being born into a generation that encountered digital media from the very beginning meant that the rapid growth of the internet, the inundation of images, and the chaotic blending of high and low cultures were all perceived as “natural phenomena” for artists born in the 1990s.

Ziping Wang observes the reality of digitalization in everyday life from a distance. The artist’s works, depicted with vibrant colors and in various sizes, appear to deal with universal subjects. The individual images, extracted from supermarket shelves and reproduced on the canvas, represent the perceived abundance of the digital age: “I prepared everything because I don’t know what you will like.” Commercial product fonts, video game pixel graphics, fine art, and grid patterns are confusingly mixed together. There is no clear hierarchy of themes, and the artist’s perspective is absent. Unlike architectural perspective drawings that create depth, perplexing elements are placed within a virtual, planar scheme. In *Dalalala* (2022), images of grocery packaging, including the Bongbong beverage can, are scattered as fragments throughout the visual plane. Cut or erased fragments, following strokes that are reminiscent of the artist’s brushwork, create phenomenological transparency, floating in the air. As viewers discover familiar images in unfamiliar backgrounds and connect them, their gaze also moves. Viewers can create a complete image through their gaze, or convincingly overlay individual images.

Ziping Wang’s artwork is a captivating fusion of classical and contemporary elements, creating a collage where vibrant images from consumer culture and commercial brands intermingle. The canvas itself represents a digitalized realm, where game graphics and emoticons coexist, defying conventional measurements of depth. This composition provokes paradoxical responses in viewers, as they delve into the relationships between fragments, forging connections between politics, identity, and history within the virtual space through their unique perspectives. For one thing, viewers well versed in the digital world effortlessly navigate the canvas, perceiving the overlapping fragments as representations of the virtual domain without the need for interpretation. The grid pattern embedded within Wang’s compositions symbolizes the transparency associated with digital tools, reflecting the experiences of those who have grown up as digital natives. These formalities serve as lighthearted anecdotes in the realm of everyday life, where irresponsible imagery floods the information age and everything can be replicated through digital graphics. Yet, in this era of overwhelming imagery, Ziping Wang’s paintings may seem somewhat anachronistic. However, by intentionally positioning those outside the confines of the grid pattern and skillfully layering symbolic opacity, the artist invites the audience to embrace multiple perspectives in the context of contemporary society.