



Being more interested in why people make art than how they do it, Tan Mu today opens her second solo exhibition at Peres Projects and her first at the Berlin gallery. Her new work called DAWN can be visited until October 7, and consists of works from the past three years being a continuation of her first solo exhibition SIGNAL in Milan. It includes a total of thirteen pieces on display including two stunning group paintings and aims to generate a subtle dialogue among all those who come to the gallery to see this latest project in the first person.

Because, as the Chinese-born artist who currently lives and works in Florida says, “we are living in the most dynamic period of art history.” An era in which more and more creatives dare to delve into topics little explored until now, or bet on creative synergies in which there is no place for labels or restrictive terms. We caught up with her to find out all about DAWN, how she channels her thoughts through art, and what topics she’d like to explore in her work in the coming months.

Could you briefly introduce yourself to our readers? Where do you answer us from?

My name is Tan Mu and I am an artist, currently living and working in Florida. I’m originally from a northern seaside city in China called Yantai. I studied Expanded Media in Fine Arts at Alfred University. I started painting at a very early age and I feel blessed to keep doing so.

You now live and work in the United States, but graduated in Beijing in 2011. How do you remember this stage in your life?

When I was 15 years old, I left home and went to Beijing alone to study at the Central Academy of Fine Arts

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High School for 4 years, and I found it to be one of the most memorable times of my life. I was surrounded by talented classmates who all dreamed of becoming artists or having creative careers in the future. The 4 years at CAFA built a solid foundation for me as an artist. It was extensive training in techniques, observations, and the history of art. Now I can still clearly recall the smell of turpentine oil in the painting studio, the skylight shining down on the still life, when we were all teenagers and wouldn't think too much about the future, but focused more on the painting in front of us.



Do you think academic training is essential for all artists? I guess there is also an important self-taught component based on experimentation and trial and error, right?

As an artist, I think there is a constant learning process, whether it be through academy training or self-introspection and trial and error. It takes time and effort for an artist to refine and explore any medium they choose to use. Each artist has unique senses and expressions, and they are inspired at various stages of their lives. It may be important to consider materials and mediums, but I believe what matters most is the artist's attitude towards thinking and observing the world, and then how they are able to turn their observations into art. I'm more interested in why people make art than how they do it. Even though I wrote down my dream of becoming an artist when I was only a child, I believe it will be a lifetime's journey.

The visual and spiritual potency of technology, combined with philosophical and sociohistorical approaches, is one of the pillars on which your artistic practice is built. Have you always been interested in these topics?

I view my practice process as more of a question-and-answer session with myself. The whole process starts with trying to understand who I am, what's around me and the causation of this. This requires me to investigate our collective culture and history, like finding and solving the puzzles of our society. I think it's very obvious for anyone to realise how profoundly different the world has become. I try tirelessly to decipher living in a world propagated by atom bombs and the internet. The reexamination of science and technology is a major subject of our time, and one of the most critical aspects of my practice is to document it.

We are in an era of dramatic social change. Science and technology play a significant role in driving the changes, which are also causing a new world order to emerge. The advancements in space exploration, quantum computing, nuclear energy, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and the massive development of social media are changing some of the most basic aspects of human existence, including work, friendships, love, ageing, disease, parenting, learning, and community formation. As I contemplate the tech-enhanced new order, I wonder how it will address issues. As a response to this fast-evolving civilisation, I am painting, trying to make sense of myself and slow down. In a similar way to the ancient murals, it is the process of asking myself whether such events and objects are worth documenting that allows me to evaluate their spiritual validity.

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What interests you most, the past, the present or the future? Or is time an illusion and they all converge into a common reality?

I found the linear concept of time to be a bit unconvincing. As I become increasingly interested in what people hope for in the future at each stage of history, and as I become convinced that different scenarios of reality are being entered, I am becoming more convinced that we are entering these scenarios as we speak. A civilisation that cannot remember its past will not be able to progress. It is for this reason that museums are still around today. 2 years ago, I painted a tektite called Moldavite, a projectile rock formed as a result of a meteorite impact in southern Germany approximately 15 million years ago. My interest was piqued by an object that had been around for a long time.

As I have become more aware of the vastness and diversity of the world, as well as my own limitations and narrowness, my practice has become more akin to an emotional gaze disguised as rationality. The latest state telescope has captured the oldest light from the universe, and now a thumb-sized chip can store billions of years' worth of information from all libraries worldwide. Our civilisation is striving to break time's definition in order to transmit information, which I consider to be the most poetic exploration of technology. It is fascinating to think about how art reflects the changes in our history. Over the course of history, humans have constantly wondered and achieved their goals. Faith and love are transmitted through art. Love, health, happiness, and companionship remain people's basic needs in such an evolutionary context.



Now you present your second solo exhibition, DAWN, at Peres Projects. How do you feel?

The exhibition DAWN consists of works from the past three years and is a continuation of my first solo exhibition SIGNAL in Milan. I am grateful to Peres Projects for giving me the opportunity to present this body of work in Berlin. The exhibition brings attention to some issues that may have been overlooked or underestimated, but are also important to address. The exhibition for me serves as a review and conclusion, as

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well as a stepping stone for new work. I was both excited and nervous because painting has always been a very private activity for me. My exhibition is more like a subtle dialogue with the audience, showing the questions I wonder about and observe every day as I live my life.

What does this new project mean to you? Would you say that it is a turning point in your artistic career or a continuation of the work you have been doing?

I see these works as an extension of the body of work, with each painting offering a clue or posing a question. With the advancement of technology, we live in an increasingly complex social environment, information exchange has become more rapid, and our world has long since become inseparable. We are experiencing a state of change as a collective and I am more concerned with the overall process and state of that change. I often approach a topic from a variety of angles, which results in a diverse visual presentation as well. My creation is still in the early stages of its development and can be characterised as an interlaced net. When you combine two paintings, there are some stories to be told. If you put them all together, it's more like what we live in right now. It is particularly important to me that paintings serve as means of documenting. The process of inquiry, which allows me to view the entire body of work as a narrative structure, is very fulfilling to me, and I am eager to see the big picture as it develops.



In this new exhibition, you explore the cycles and pursuit of incremental developments in the lives of humans. Could you tell us a little more about the research and development process of this latest work?

I have always been fascinated by everything that sweeps and splashes through the world, by events, and by objects brought by human wisdom or ignorance. I work from the phenomena toward knowledge about the nature of things, or *Gewu Zhizhi*, a concept central in Chinese philosophy since around the 5th-century B.C.E. I look at the sea, the television as an apparatus, the movement of atoms, and the invention of photography. Between the microscopic and the utmost macroscopic, I observe different scales. Observation is essential;

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painting, then, resembles a continuous refinement of mapping and surveying. Through newspapers, scientific archives, and the internet, I created works of art that act as an archive for our information-overloaded contemporary life.

In DAWN, I explore five recurring themes in my practice: the Anthropocene, the Silicon Age, energy and landform changes, painting as a medium, and my own perspective. Every time I do research and development for each work, I find myself fascinated by the subtle appearance of a link between the feeling of thriving and wonder, reaching higher, and becoming stronger. With the creation of new, more efficient energy sources, the constant alteration of the landscape, the advancement of computing power and information processing speed, the improvement of living and working conditions, the construction of megacities, and the exploration of new frontiers, humans slowly modify their traits and features in pursuit of health, happiness, and strength. Due to this stage of thriving and wonder, we have entered an era of information explosion. It is a time of change and explosion for everyone at present. Throughout technology history, we have been prone to obsessing over one thing while neglecting another.

The developing process for DAWN is filled with new discoveries and inventions that were unique or groundbreaking and sometimes tragic. There may have been some consideration of how this would affect the day to come, but the adjustment may take time, and the next day will bring different challenges. Therefore, it's like hoping for the dawn and the future without knowing whether to be optimistic or pessimistic. In an era when tools are constantly advancing, humans are constantly setting new goals and taking on new challenges. Even though some of the subjects of the works can be seen from an almost apocalyptic angle, I want to focus on the idea of reaching, a sense of hope. When researching and developing DAWN, these thoughts provided me with a lot of guidance and reflection.

How many pieces are part of DAWN? Are there any that are especially important or significant?

In this exhibition dawn has a total of thirteen works on display, two of which are group paintings.

For me, *The Splash of a Drop* (2022) is one of the most memorable works. In his 1895 photographic series of the same title, Arthur Mason Worthington, an English physicist known for his high-speed photography discoveries, explored the physics and aesthetics of splashing drops.

Presented in a book, the images show the drop at different stages of dissolution. Three photographs are displayed on the frontispiece, but the technology then was not able to capture the splash's descent in more detail. In order to document the various stages of a movement, the rest of the images in the book rely on drawings. My paintings explore the time when painting, as a media, was under threat due to the invention of photography. As technology progressed, photography changed how reality was documented.

The Splash of a Drop celebrates the handmade qualities of painting techniques, re-recording the process as a nostalgic expression in a time over-saturated with images. *Silicon* (2021), a painting that is centred on a purified silicon stone, is another work of significance to me. Because of the significant impact that silicon has had on the global economy during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, this period has been referred to as the Silicon Age. Most current technology, such as smartphones and computers, rely on a small amount of highly purified silicon to make transistors and integrated circuit chips. As we move into the Silicon Age, silicon increasingly influences our work, entertainment, and communication. We have created an endless information system, and sensory experience, reality, and memory are becoming increasingly silicon-based. As I contemplate the transformation of consciousness and data, the coexistence of human brain and chip, I find myself in a state of endless reverie.

What emotions and sensations will those who come to see the exhibition in the first person at Peres Projects experience from today to October 7?

In terms of the viewer's experience, it's more like being invited into a subtle dialogue, observing the images of the works, generating curiosity about their events, and gaining an understanding of the exhibition and the

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information about some of the works. This exhibition unfolds objectively and rationally, and it leaves a lot of room for viewers to interact. This dialogue allows the viewers to share memories, opinions, and perspectives related to these works and topics, resulting in a relatively open and dynamic exhibition. The works in the show may resonate with Winckelmann's aesthetic of "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur."

I am very interested in your vision of current art. Do you think that more and more creatives dare to think outside the box, addressing issues that until now were silenced or invisible?

I believe we are living in the most dynamic period of art history. It is not only the new approaches and techniques that are emerging but also the complex social environment that has stimulated more questions. Today, art's role is being redefined by a more interdisciplinary approach. Exhibits and dialogues around art are constantly evolving, which provides a broader audience. Many new areas and modalities have not even developed modalities or vocabulary to evaluate them. We judge an era based on the development of art, literature, and technology during that period. As a result, I hope to see current art carry a broader meaning of our times.



And what can you tell us about your next projects?

In my new works, I will continue to examine aspects of the Anthropocene, such as technology development, the formative systems of media society, and the feedback perspective of a human-centred approach. Those projects will include quantum computer, chip, and human brain neurons, as well as new energy and space exploration. There will also be a series of large-scale projects to follow.

- David Alarcón