

For immediate release

YAN PEI-MING

Black Paintings

May 4 – June 23, 2012

Opening reception: Friday, May 4, 6–8 PM

Press preview with the artist: 10:30 AM



Exécution, Après Goya, 2008.

Oil on canvas, 110 ¼ x 157 ¾ inches (280 x 400.7 cm).

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of recent work by Yan Pei-Ming, on view at the gallery's 519 West 19th Street space. Born in Shanghai in 1960 and based in Dijon, France, Ming has gained international recognition for his large-sized, monochromatic portraits. His subjects, which range from historical figures, political leaders, and celebrities to anonymous soldiers, serial killers, female prisoners, orphans, and the artist himself, are typically presented face-on, with bold and expressive brushwork. The artist's fluid yet precise technique and his use of shallow pictorial space combine to create iconic, monumental, and psychologically charged works.

The paintings in this exhibition, Ming's second at the gallery, relate to events in the recent and distant past. In a departure from previous work by the artist, they extend beyond the depiction of a singular subject to reference broad historical issues and, in the process, the gap that exists between the events and their visualization. Often taking a combination of mass media imagery and his own recollections of a motif as his starting point, Ming thus broadens a traditional understanding of the medium of painting: he refers to his large-scale canvases as "collages" of photographs and memories, while medium-specificity is further cast into question by the fluidity of the artist's painterly technique, which at times resembles watercolor.

Black Paintings is a title derived from a late series of wall paintings by Francisco Goya, since transferred to canvas. In these works, not originally intended for public view, the Spanish artist offers haunting visions of humanity's darker side.

Among the paintings on view in the present exhibition, one refers directly to a work by Goya. *Exécution, Après Goya* (2008) offers an interpretation of *The Third of May 1808* (1814), which depicts the execution by firing squad of Spanish civilians who had taken part in an uprising against the French occupation of their country. Using blood red paint and bold brushstrokes with visible drips, Ming's version of the subject matter dramatically isolates the figures from any background, thus separating the action from its historical context. The painting is the only one in the exhibition to use a color that is not black, white, or gray.

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Also on view is *Pablo* (2011), which shows a young Pablo Picasso kneeling before an unknown object or presence. The background is indeterminate and dark, and again provides no contextual setting. A somber, if ambiguous, mood is intensified by the boy's downward gaze and the impossibility of telling whether his awkward pose is indicative of a religious act or perhaps signifies a punitive measure about to take place. By depicting arguably the most famous painter of the modern era as a humbled adolescent, Ming's painting includes a reference to its own medium, while its black-and-white palette underscores a sense of nostalgia.

While the historical significance of Ming's chosen subjects is readily apparent, his works resist the traditional heroic connotations of history paintings. The artist's aforementioned reliance on often blurry mass media source material and personal memory combine to present a sense of elusiveness that is underscored by exaggerated brushwork. Rather than documenting separate events, the paintings suggest an ongoing history in flux.

Yan Pei-Ming joined David Zwirner in 2006 and had his first New York solo exhibition at the gallery the following year.

Over the past decade, the artist has had solo exhibitions at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing; Musée du Louvre, Paris; San Francisco Art Institute (all 2009); Musée d'art moderne de Saint-Étienne Métropole, Saint-Étienne, France (2006); Shanghai Art Museum; Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China (both 2005); Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany (2004); Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France; Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France; and the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva (all 2003).

Ming's work was featured in several group exhibitions in 2011, including the Fonds régional d'art contemporain Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, France; Musée Anne-de-Beaujeu, Moulins, France; and the Musée des beaux-arts de Dôle, Dôle, France. He participated in the French Pavilion for Expo 2010 in Shanghai and other international group exhibitions include the Istanbul Biennial (2007); 2nd Seville Biennale, Spain (2006); Venice Biennale (2003 and 1995); and the Lyon Biennale, France (2000 and 1997).

Work by the artist is represented in museum collections worldwide, including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; and the Shanghai Art Museum.

For all press inquiries and RSVP to the press preview on May 4 (10:30 AM), please contact

Ben Thornborough at David Zwirner 212-727-2070 bthornborough@davidzwirner.com