

LISSON GALLERY

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Press Release

Liu Xiaodong

Weight of Insomnia

25 January – 2 March 2019

27 Bell Street, London

Opening: 24 January, 6 – 8pm

Lisson Gallery is pleased to welcome Liu Xiaodong's second exhibition, which is the culmination of a number of years spent developing a technologically radical project to create 21st-century landscape paintings using robotic arms and surveillance cameras. Taking a live feed, streaming data and imagery from an iconic London location above Trafalgar Square, Liu has created a painting machine to process this rolling image feed and transcribe the ever-changing flow of people into a complex network of abstract marks on canvas – resulting in a machine-manufactured painting at the exhibition's finissage.

Since 2015, Liu has been working on this series, collectively entitled *Weight of Insomnia*, produced with the expertise of (among others) Fito Segrera, an artist, technologist and Head of Research/Creation at the Chronus Art Center in Shanghai, where the first paintings appeared in a show curated by Liu's long-time collaborator and friend, Zhang Ga – after which it toured to ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe (2016) and the Nam June Paik Art Center in Seoul (2018). There they built a scaffolding tower on to which is mounted a plain canvas and a robotic brush held aloft by a network of wires that pull and push the pigment across the surface, dependent on the images being fed through the computers and screens stationed below. Far from a jerky, machinic gesture, Liu sought a painterly sensibility in his digital proxy, albeit one he has no further control over apart from choosing the location and paint colour. So far the painting machine has been trained on intersections and busy byways, capturing vehicles, pedestrians and changing weather conditions in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Jincheng, Gwangju, Berlin, Karlsruhe, Sydney and now, London.

Liu has always been acutely aware of his own position and collaborative responsibility as a painter, positioning himself in front of his subjects or groups of sitters like a documentary maker, even taking this self surveillance to the extremes of making revelatory diaries and films about all the processes involved, including sections of intense, performative live painting. This exhibition also includes Liu's multi-panel work, *Time* (2014), depicting the South Korean student uprising of 1980 through portraits of the children of protestors, some 165 of whom were massacred where they stood. The site, now known as the 18 May Democracy Square, was also the location for one of Liu's *Weight of Insomnia* paintings, testing whether this cold, observing eye could capture anything approaching the intense emotional heft of the traffic through this politically-charged space.

The insomnia of the title also refers to the machine's ability to work constantly and silently, without tiring or despairing. This dispassionate producer will mechanically complete the artist's bidding throughout the duration of the show, day and night, resulting in a futuristic vision of a time when artificial intelligence and automated computer-learning will overtake time-consuming labour, perhaps allowing artists to focus more on what keeps them awake at night.

About Liu Xiaodong

Liu Xiaodong is a painter of modern life, whose large-scale works serve as a kind of history painting for the emerging world. Liu locates the human dimension to such global issues as population displacement, environmental crisis and economic upheaval, but through carefully orchestrated compositions, he walks the line between artifice and reality. A leading figure among the Chinese Neo-Realist painters to emerge in the 1990s, his adherence to figurative painting amounts to a conceptual stance within a contemporary art context where photographic media dominate. His undertaking 'to see people as they really are' was galvanised in the aftermath of 1989 events and, alert to the legacy of Chinese Socialist Realism, his compositions are painted with loose, casual brushstrokes and layered with meaning. While he works from life and often *en plein air*, he chooses sitters to supply ancillary narratives to landscapes or situations. From recent location-specific series, such as *Transgender/Gay* in Berlin, featuring portraits of the transgender woman Sasha Maria which were featured in Liu's first comprehensive retrospective 'Slow Homecoming' in Düsseldorf, to his London series *Half Street* (2013), as well as *The Hotan Project* (2012-13) in the Xinjiang province of China, Liu has also created an automated painting machine entitled *Weight of Insomnia* (2016), which translates a digital video feed of traffic streams and human movement in real time into a new body of paintings tracing time, memory and behaviour. In so doing, Liu re-assesses painting in the age of internet and algorithm and implicitly invokes the present condition, in which humans and other objects reciprocally co-create the world as we know it.

Liu Xiaodong lives and works in Beijing but has undertaken projects in Tibet, Japan, Italy, the UK, Cuba and Austria, and closer to home, in Jincheng, in the north-eastern province of Liaoning, China, where he was born in 1963. He has a BFA and an MFA in painting from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing (1988, 1995), where he now holds tenure as professor. He continued his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Complutense, Madrid, Spain (1998–99). His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at venues including the NRW-Forum & Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany (2018); Chronus Art Centre, Shanghai, China (2016); Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy (2016); Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, Italy (2015); Shao Zhong Foundation Art Museum, Guangzhou, China (2014); Minsheng Museum, Shanghai, China (2014); Seattle Art Museum, WA, USA (2013); Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2013); Kunsthaus Graz, Austria (2012); Xinjiang Arts Centre, Urumqi, China (2012); and Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China (2010). His work has also been included in numerous group exhibitions including Qatar Museums Gallery, Doha (2016), Gwangju Biennale (2014), Shanghai Biennale (2000, 2010), the 15th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2006) and the Venice Biennale, Italy (2013, 1997).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 61 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the public for the first time. In addition to a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation, the gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller and Tatsuo Miyajima. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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