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.