

Press Release

Li Ran *Beyond Silence*

June 29 – August 5, 2022
508 West 24th Street, New York

Lisson Gallery is pleased to present the debut of works by Shanghai-based, multimedia artist Li Ran. *Beyond Silence* is the gallery's first solo presentation with Li Ran, following the recent announcement of worldwide representation. While the artist has gained renown for his performances and pseudo-documentaries, his practice also encompasses painting, installation and writing. His work explores the history of art, using mimicry and satire to question the role of the institutions and narratives that define it. In recent years, Li Ran has been surveying antagonist roles in theatre, stage art, make-up design and the production of foreign and espionage films created in China since the 1950s. He uses painting to present the transformations associated with character scene posing and voiceover monologues.

For his first exhibition in New York, Li Ran reflects on the complex, internal factors within the context of modern Chinese history, focusing on the role of young intellectuals in the region. He unfolds, restructures and re-edits the dark corners of Chinese society that are obscured by a national, historical perspective and the context of globalization. The 6 paintings and dual-channel video that make up *Beyond Silence* highlight Li Ran's notably romantic and theatrical approach.

Li Ran's specific painting vocabulary, a combination he describes as "Socialist Realism and Impressionism", renders subjects onto a closed background to mimic watching actors on a stage. In this series, the artist adopts a narrative similar to the vitriol of contemporary caricatures. In *Orphan's Struggle* (2021), Chinese youth float in a desolate, drifting scene. Tones of pink and grey partially conceal an internal despair. The politics of contemporary China are probed throughout the exhibition. *Returning to The Crossroad* (2022) blur the lines between perceptions of political extremists and progressives, concluding at the same time that all are haunted by melancholy and sadness. Li Ran notes, "everyone feels like they are on the more progressive side of the historical flood."

Alongside this series of paintings, Li Ran presents *Persona Swap* (2019), a dual-screen video work, allowing the artist to interrogate the stage through a new medium. The recordings are a theatrical dimension that run parallel to the history of art, through stage design, make-up, costume and performance. Created from reconstructed photo archives, *Persona Swap* includes three chapters: 'Thinking in front of the mirror', 'The fox and the grizzly bear, the vulture and the crocodile', and 'Besides the indistinguishable illusion, who the hell are you?'. The film is interlaced throughout with a bevy of historical archival material referring to early Chinese socialist choreography and makeup, providing further glimpses into the artist's reflections on this period of history. The archival material is abstracted through the adjacency of characters and scenes, soundtrack and voice-over monologues. "Archives require us to engage and experience the art physically and experientially, not only as a thing in and of itself", explains Li Ran.

About the artist

Li Ran's practice ranges across multiple media from video, performance and painting, to installation and writing, using techniques such as mimicry, repetition and satire to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. In recent years, he has been researching antagonist roles in theatre, stage art, make-up design, the production of foreign films and espionage films produced in China since the 1950s. Based on archival photos, character scenes and dubbed monologues, Li develops subjective and personalised narratives

and expands upon themes including politics, ideology and performativity, as well as notions of time and space, through his writing painting, sound, and installation.

Li Ran was born in Hubei, China in 1986. He currently lives and works in Shanghai. He graduated with a BFA from the Oil Painting Department from the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in 2009. In 2015, Li held a solo exhibition at OCAT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT), Xi'an, China. His single-channel video work was screened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London and The Jewish Museum, New York. He has exhibited in group shows at the Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea (2022); He Art Museum, Shunde, China (2022); Sifang Museum, Nanjing, China (2021); OCAT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shanghai, China (2021, 2019, 2014, 2013); Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing, China (2020); HOW Museum, Shanghai, China (2019); Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing, China (2017); Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD), Manila, Philippines (2016); OCAT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shenzhen, China (2016, 2013, 2012, 2011); NTU Center For Contemporary Art Singapore (CCA), Singapore (2015); Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, USA (2014); Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin, Germany (2013); basis door actuele kunst (BAK), Utrecht, Netherlands (2013); Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), Houston, USA (2012) and other venues. His works were featured in Montreal Biennale (2014); Biennale of Moving Images, Geneva (2014); 4th Moscow International Biennale for Young Art (2014); 2nd CAFAM Biennial, Beijing (2014), 4th 'Former West' Project, Berlin (2013), 9th Gwangju Biennial (2012), and 7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2012). Li was awarded the 'Best Artist Award' at the Moscow International Youth Art Biennial in 2014 and was nominated for the 'Future Generation Award' by the Pinchuk Arts Center in 2017.

Li Ran's work is held in numerous public and private collections including The Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL, USA; Daimler Art Collection, Berlin, Germany; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France and San Francisco, CA, USA; M+ Collection, Hong Kong; New Century Art Foundation, Beijing, China; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, USA; Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing, China; X Museum, Beijing, China; DSL Collection, Paris, France; Domus Collection, Beijing, China and New York, USA; Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA.

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 promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, three in New York, and one in Shanghai, as well as forthcoming galleries in Beijing and Los Angeles. 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, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith.

In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima, Sean Scully and Stanley Whitney. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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