

DECEMBER 7, 2022 - JANUARY 14, 2023

Kaifan Wang
whistling dune

OPENING: DECEMBER 7, 2022, 5-8 PM



Installation shot of Kaifan Wang's solo exhibition *whistling dune* at GNYP Gallery in 2022



Kaifan Wang

I sneezed on the grass

2022

oil, oil stick, acrylic on canvas

160 x 120 cm

63 x 47 1/4 in

Kaifan Wang

Axillary bud

2022

2022

oil, oil stick, acrylic on canvas

160 x 120 cm

63 x 47 1/4 in





Kaifan Wang, *M. Butterfly IV*, 2022, oil, oil stick, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 280 cm.

Kaifan Wang

whistling dune

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KAIFAN WANG

in conversation with Dominic Eichler

Artist **Kaifan Wang** (b.1996) grew up in Hohhot, a predominantly Chinese city of around four million people and for millennia a gateway to the grasslands of inner Mongolia and beyond them, the fabled Gobi desert. Like other cities on trading routes, Hohhot still bears traces of cultural exchange and flows across ethnicities and religions. From a young age, Wang studied traditional Chinese painting before moving to Beijing, where he encountered contemporary art. In 2016, he moved to Berlin to further his studies and was at first unable to paint anything. But during the pandemic, he started painting anew. This time his head was full of questions and a new understanding of himself and the possibilities of the medium. In the led up to his debut solo exhibition 'Whistling Dune' (2022) at Gnyp Galerie, Berlin, the following exchange ensued.

Dominic Eichler: 'Whistling Dune' is a great title. It has a mystic ring to it. I am reminded tangentially of writer Paul Bowles' text 'The Baptism of Solitude' (1957) about experiencing the dunes of the Sahara. He wrote: "Here, in this wholly mineral landscape lighted by stars like flares, even memory disappears; nothing is left but your own breathing and the sound of your heart beating. A strange, and by no means pleasant, process of reintegration begins inside you, and you have the choice of fighting against it, and insisting on remaining the person you have always been, or letting it take its course." Does your title have to do with where you are from?

Kaifan Wang: I'm glad you like it. One day, when I was walking along the streets of Berlin, a gust of wind blew sand in my eyes. It was only slightly irritating, but it reminded me of uncomfortable childhood memories of sandstorms in my hometown. The oil painting *The Sand Blew Into My Eyes I* (2022), was inspired by these memories. Hohhot is a city with a long history, but you can hardly find traces of it now as urban development and new buildings undermine old legends and stories. I didn't realise that the dust storms were natural disasters. I was just drawn to haze and the unknown.

DE: Have you ever been to the interior grasslands or the desert?

KW: I prefer the idea of deserts to grasslands. But actually I have always felt alienated from the natural environment, not only because I grew up in the city but also because I have allergies and dislike bugs. This also made me realise I am not a real Mongolian. I think that's also why I like abstraction, because lot of things that I can't experience or wish to talk about directly can be embodied in an abstract way.

DE: Do you have any views about how much or how little you wish your biography to be part of the understanding of your art? Some artists prefer to leave their biography to one side or even make up stories and identities.

KW: My works relate to my memories and life experiences. I hope to express a kind of struggle, reconciliation, and self-created sense of security through painting. My paintings often start with violent collisions, but are slowly covered and summarised by careful lines and moods. Some of the abstract figures in my paintings resemble the shape of dunes. The rhythm in my pictures is also often reminiscent of the wind, and the sound of the sand caused by the wind. I don't want to presume to describe the wind; it has its own secret existence. When people ask me about my

work, I feel like a cloud of dust. It is the wind that takes away the dust. The dust itself is passive. My work is inspired by where I grew up, the people I meet, and the books I read. They are the wind and I am the sand.

DE: Can you describe your process to me?

KW: To make the paintings in the exhibition, I used sponges as a painting tool. In the beginning, I cut up old mattresses. Some were left behind by other Chinese students who went home because of the pandemic. I also made some soft sculpture using these mattresses as material inscribed by the weight of their bodies (Wall Woodpecker series, 2022). Later I just used dishwashing sponges. I love the texture of sponges and the effect they produce. When they are full of water, they are soft and flow like painting with ink, and when they are dry, they can express the strength. I like vibrant colours like in Hindu imagery. For Mongolians, blue and white represent purity and holiness. Red, for me, represents a force. For scale, I choose a size that fits my work space and my body. I often combine different images on my iPad to test different colours before starting. I believe that art is created in a fragile balance between the spirit of the Dionysus, the God of wine and Dance, and the Apollo, the God of the sun. A painting itself is a crisis and uncertainty, so I have to first determine some objective conditions, such as size, colour, composition.

DE: How do your studies in traditional Chinese painting relate to what you do today?

KW: Learning traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy is a process of imitation and repetition. I once studied Jackson Pollock and Cy Twombly's work and compared it with the modern calligrapher Wang Dongling. Chinese and Western

abstract paintings are completely different. The rational spirit of Western abstract art is to rebel against tradition, while Chinese art is always been passed down first and then developed. I find myself somewhere in the middle ground in terms of culture and identity. I have been thinking about simplicity and brutality as the most effective qualities to express this. Art is a great tool and channel for me to do this. I think the rebellious spirit of abstract art is necessary. My real distaste is anything that makes it too easy to get pleasure and satisfaction. Perhaps my latest work maybe isn't as visually aggressive as other young painters like Daisy Parris or as provocative as Andi Fischer, but it has its own undercurrents. The act of painting carries resonances for me, including muscle memory.

DE: Isn't it true that everyone's subjectivity entails hybridisation, irreconcilable parts, and cross-cultural flows not of our making? I'm not sure we can control this even if we wanted to...

KW: I agree with what you said, we cannot determine cultural flows. Intercultural fusion and even cultural bullying are both inevitable. When I first came to Germany, I couldn't paint and focused on other mediums. I also tried to understand how to make a 'bad painting' and use 'dirty colours' and looked at Postwar German painting. The most subversive notion for me was to Kaputt Machen – smash it all up. But lately, I have been just trying to relax. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is ours and what is foreign.

DE: Can you tell me about your interest in words and slogans? I know you have made an abstract wall drawing and some paintings that grew out of words, and I see your notebook on your desk is in constant use. Why does it say your name and 'Friedhof' on it?

KW: I made it myself. I like to collect slogans, epitaphs, slogans and advertisements produced in different cultural and political eras with the same theme as the one I want to explore. In China, there are official slogans everywhere, declaring the core values proposed by the central government. In Berlin, instead we have graffiti, and handwritten venting on posters. I like the word Friedhof – cemetery. I was fascinated by Berlin's cemeteries with trees and flowers right in the middle of the city. We don't have this in China. I was scared of them. On the grave of a poet I found a sentence he wrote scribbled with a ball-point pen on the back of the tombstone 'Auch Worte haben ihre Zeit... zu wissen, dass sie ein Mal da Dein werden, ist viel – Even words have their time... to know that they will be yours one day is plenty.' I made a painting of it. Language and words can cause misunderstandings. I love the biblical description of the Tower of Babel. Even communication between people with the same mother tongue can lead to misunderstandings, let alone people of different languages. Amplifying this misunderstanding is like amplifying the differences between individuals. As William Kentridge said: 'Long live the misunderstanding.'

Dominic Eichler is a Berlin-based freelance writer and musician. Since 1995, he has written about contemporary art for numerous international magazines, museums, institutions and galleries. In the 2000s, he was a contributing editor of *frieze* magazine. In 2005, he was awarded the German AdKV prize for art criticism. He is currently working on a novel, and a book of collected writings about art.



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Kaifan Wang

M. Butterfly I

2022

oil, oil stick, acrylic on canvas

160 x 120 cm

63 x 47 1/4 in

Kaifan Wang
M. Butterfly III
2022

oil, oil stick, acrylic on canvas

160 x 120 cm
63 x 47 1/4 in





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Kaifan Wang was born in 1996 in Hohhot, China. Wang's work is informed by his childhood memories in his home city, which has a long cultural history whose traces are undermined by urban development and the alienation of natural environment. Drawing from his memories and life experiences, Wang expresses in his work a kind of struggle, which develops, also formally, into reconciliation and a self-created sense of security through painting: in Wang's paintings violent collisions are slowly covered and summarised by careful lines and moods. Acknowledging that Chinese and Western abstract paintings have completely different intellectual processes, Wang reflects on culture and identity, without offering easy answers that lead to immediate satisfaction.

From a young age, Wang studied traditional Chinese painting before moving to Beijing, where he encountered contemporary art. The artist studied in Shanghai and Florence, before completing his Fine Arts education at the Universität der Künste in Berlin. Kaifan Wang is currently based in Berlin.

Kaifan Wang

Solo Exhibitions

2022

whistling dune

GNYP Gallery, Berlin (Germany)

Mauerspechte

HVB KunstCUBE B2, Berlin (Germany)

Group Exhibitions

2022

Poppy and Recollection

Migrant Bird Space, Berlin (Germany)

A Light And A Heavy Body

Cao Chang Di International Art Village, Beijing (China)

Sleeping Promises

feldfünf Metropolenhaus, Berlin (Germany)

A Chinese Journey • Contemporary Ink

Löwenpalais, Berlin (Germany)

2021

Observation • Angle

FFA Art Center, Nanjing (China)

Kristallisierte Bewegung

KUB Galerie, Leipzig (Germany)

I'm an alien

Raum Für Sichtbarkeit Galerie, Berlin (Germany)

2020

Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition

KUB Galerie, Leipzig (Germany)

Abwehrmechanismen

Kunstraum, Berlin (Germany)

2019

Caused BY Hair

Performance Art, Himalaya Museum, Shanghai (China)

SACI Studio Arts College International Exhibition

Florence, Italien

LernLaden Pankow Gruppe Ausstellung

Berlin (Germany)

Linken am Schöneberg Gruppe Ausstellung

Berlin (Germany)

Fluxus+museum Gruppe Ausstellung

Potsdam (Germany)

ATALA Kunstsaal Gruppe Ausstellung

Berlin (Germany)

2018

Auslandschinesen Kunst Ausstellung

Nei Mongol Kunst Museum, Hohhot (China)

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