

Chen Dongfan's new exhibition: Long Past Dawn, Pirates and Poets Whistle in the Dark, at the Fou Gallery in New York is an extremely topical artistic event.

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In fact, the artist's works were created during the period of the LockDown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **This solo show displays more than 50 artworks** with bright colors, where the tones evoke strong emotional responses. Through his direct and abstract style, active sensations are perceived relating to feelings and personal reflections arising from the social limits due to the spread of the epidemic.

The exhibit features two new series of Chen oil paintings: **Poster** and **Story** and one last major oil painting "Rise From The Ashes". Curator **Lynn Hai** explains that **the title of the exhibition is a combination of the titles of three main works of his series**. Chen Dongfan, who lives and works in New York, has decided to undergo self-quarantine and had to give up making his paintings in his studio. So from his apartment, he focused his new artistic creation on small works of the size similar to an open book.



Chen Dongfan in his studio Photo by Inna Xu ©Chen Dongfan

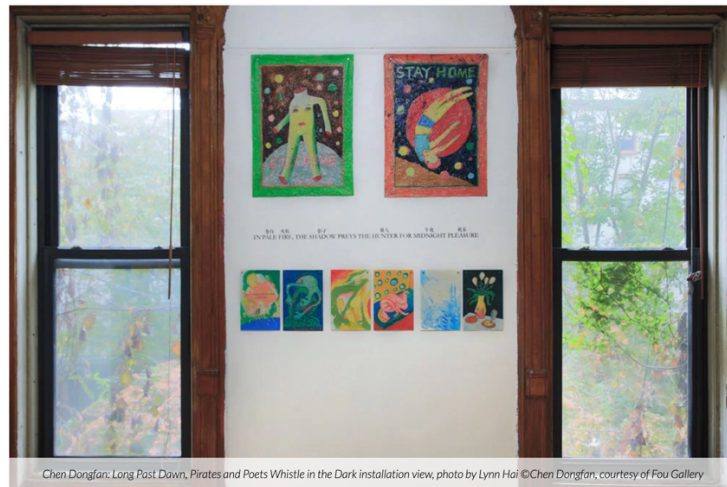
The Poster series, made on rice paper and plastic wrapping paper, highlights the artist's feelings about confinement in the home due to the pandemic. The works are made with strong and vigorous colors. The energy of color outlines distorted figures that accentuate the state of confusion, suffering, trauma, and inner struggle, created by fragility and insecurity. The spaces of the pandemic and isolation may be too rigid or too small. But the deafening silence allows the artist to find his own voice and allows mastery of his mind. The fragility that Chen encounters brings out the small nuances and brings greater self-awareness. Focus, listen to his own feelings and re-elaborate them in dynamics and gestures. Pain takes shape in color.

“ *In pale fire the shadow preys the hunter for midnight pleasure.* ”



Chen Dongfan: Long Past Dawn, Pirates and Poets Whistle in the Dark installation view, photo by Lynn Hai ©Chen Dongfan, courtesy of Fou Gallery

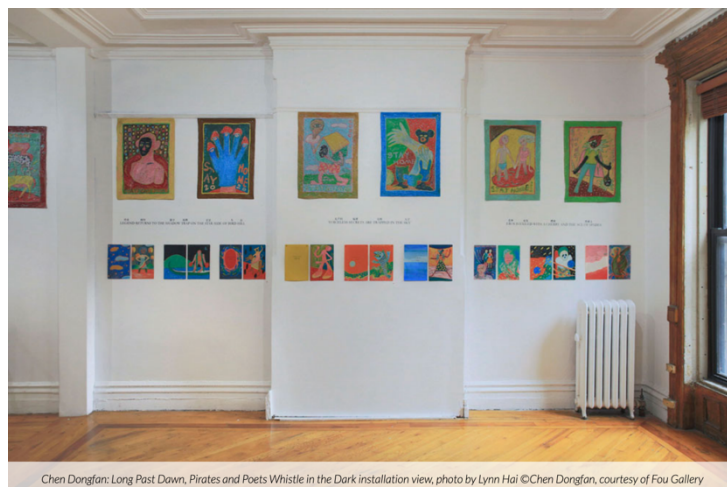
The artist in his artworks invites us and urges us to stay at home, a conscious and generous choice to actively contribute to slowing the spread of the virus. From home, as curator Hai told, Chen began to draw inspired by online information, reading book, and literature. He has focused his attention on mental and cultural growth, on the study and deepening of myths, legends, and stories. He re-elaborates everything in the realm of his imagination and, passing from the visualization of the brain, materializes the collection of concepts on paper.



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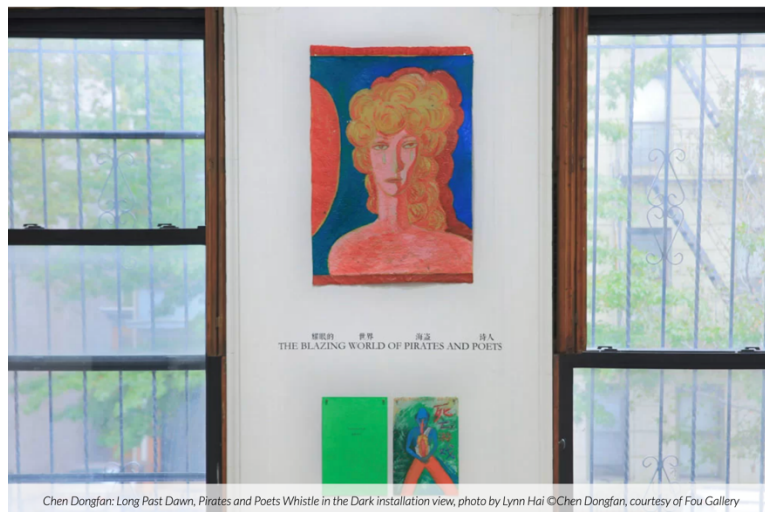
Chen, who has been confined for a long time to creating works on a small desk, makes this limitation a starting point to free the mind, search, learn new information, make it his own and undertake a personal creative process. The artist navigating, imagining, finds, and decides the route to his destination. He land and sow on a fertile ground the ideas and visions for his new series "Story" in the form of a diptych: on the left side there is a line of a literary text in the center of the sheet; on the right side, his impressions are abstractly captured.

“ Legend returns to the shadow trap on the star side of bird hill.



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The mythical elements in his oil paintings are the result of a development path of the details of stories and symbols formulated over time, ancient beliefs that are transformed into universal when the artist paints a vision updated to the contemporary. He takes from the past to understand the present and manage the future. Mythology still plays a very important role in contemporary society, it can be found in different contexts, and in countless forms, quotes, interpretations. It's present through the small daily rituals that anchor people in time and shape a day. Routines, habits, traditions, and celebrations generate significant and precious experiences in the inner world, these are handed down from generation to generation transforming, adapting, changing, but always remaining themselves and bearers of the same hope and optimism. The exuberant colors outlining detailed shapes decline time, allowing at the same time to travel in time, escape from time, rewind the time, stop the time, live the time. The artworks painted and narrated in "Story" bring to light the constant component of the cyclical nature of life: each phase of transition and transformation, enhances and confirms the importance of each unique process and moment.



As curator Lynn Hai points out, **Chen's two most recent series show more figurative images, unlike the previous ones, mainly of abstract typology.** In fact, we can grasp the influence of the in-depth analyses carried out in recent months. Some have experienced the fear of being alone during this time, as isolation can be uncomfortable or even frightening. Social distancing seems brutal, as humans take comfort in each other's presence. Chen, on the other hand, has transformed isolation into a new possibility and opportunity to reflect on the relationship between art and society. His artistic meditation is captured in the changes in the narrative form of the stories, which allow to visualize a harmony that combines brush movements between pauses and slowdowns to focus on certain moments, of stories and myths that have settled over time. It shows us that being alone also means managing a skill. Loneliness has always been in human history the companion of hermits and religious, philosophers, researchers, scholars, and artists. However lonely one may feel, human beings have always experienced isolation to undertake a path of understanding. So this makes this experience a time of human

communion. Even Chen absorbed between poetry and literature has plunged into the sea of time, between mythology and narration in search of his own spiritual and universal vision to be expressed with his art. In this way, Chen invites us to accept isolation, to let it take us deeper into ourselves, into our subconscious, reminding every one of their own individual purpose.

“ *Voiceless secrets are trapped in the sky.*”



The balance that Chen reaches culminates in his oil painting “**Rise From The Ashes**”, the first work created after self-isolation, when he finally returns to his studio. The strong contrast of colors identifies a concrete and definitive point that coincides between an end and a new beginning of the life cycle. The intuitive and lively brushstrokes that envelop and the use of vibrant colors as well as evoke a rebirth appear as a celebratory dance, a feast to the new life, a ritual of thanksgiving, the image of a dancing fire. The color takes on folkloric characteristics, of celebration.

He infuses us with optimism, reminds us to pay attention to every single moment, live the present, the here, the now, the while, and appreciate the smallest things that bring well-being, calm, taking care of our memories, of our time. Simple joys are those that are worth being grateful for, as can the little daily

rituals that anchor us in time and shape us. Regain possession of those moments of negligible happiness, feel the lack of a habit and have the courage to face the unknown, choosing to be heroes, without pretensions of a great mission, but day by day in the little things of everyday life, in the choices every day.

“ *Eros is exiled with a cherry and the aced of spades.* ”



Chen helps us understand that colorful stories can be created from simple moments by bringing precious emotions to light. He reconciles his inner self with the surrounding world, his mind reaches a state of stillness, tranquility, and clarity. He doesn't leave the outside world and problems out, he is aware of what is happening around and within himself. Understanding leads to a reunion of many more dimensions. Through art and experience, Chen creates a whole, which is an integral part of the constant and continuous flow of life, reality, and what creates a bond with the spirit.

For several months now, the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent problems related to health, economic precariousness, and social justice have taken the daily anxiety levels of many people to the extreme. Even if "Nothing's sure about tomorrow" as Lorenzo de' Medici wrote in Canzona di Bacco, this doesn't mean we have to surrender. "Rise From The Ashes" thus becomes a message of good luck and hope. In this period, high-stress peaks are highly harmful, and therefore the ability to understand the situation, calm, and resilience become great allies in facing this difficult moment and approaching the solution. When things get difficult, art is that caress that calms the soul, the universal language that many can understand regardless of their cultural background. It connects the senses, penetrates the eyes, reaches the ears, opens the heart, and tunes the mind.



Since we have been in this pandemic world situation, the whole team of Fou Gallery in synergy and with a great sense of responsibility works with great commitment to making art accessible. Art is also a medicine capable of relieving the mind and soul and canceling that feeling of heaviness due to the fears that torment and grip, thanks to its relaxing and energizing ability. The dedication and optimism that spurs them to commit themselves in this period is an important sign of generosity, hope, and an example of resilience for all and reminds us of the importance of art in life and for life.

Photo Courtesy of Fou Gallery

Photographers: Lynn Hai, Inna Xu

<https://china-underground.com/2020/12/08/chen-dongfan-long-past-dawn-pirates-and-poets-whistle-in-the-dark/>