

Planet China

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Suyi Xu

Meditations on the Connection between
Emotions and Architecture



Suyi Xu at Studio in Brooklyn, August 2022 ©Suyi Xu,
Photograph by Xi Zhou, courtesy of Fou Gallery



Suyi Xu: All that is Solid Melts into Air installation view, photo by Zhou Xi ©Suyi Xu, Courtesy of Fou Gallery

Suyi Xu is a painter living and working in Brooklyn, New York. She received her B.A. in Art History and Visual Arts from Barnard College in New York and her M.F.A. in the Fine Arts Department of School of Visual Arts (New York) in 2022. Xu's paintings are meditations on space, interiors, and architecture that evolve into color field meditations. She paints through speculation and inward thinking rather than direct observation by incorporating historical references and idiosyncratic symbolic elements. The painter observes the nature of light and shadow and entrusts colour contrasts with the role of investigating and modelling everything, underlining with these the drama of reality. In her artworks, the strokes of colour evoke the accumulation over time, in its state of transitory but permanent moment. Furthermore, in her paintings, architecture has a bodily presence. Xu has participated in several exhibitions in commercial galleries and non-profit organizations in the U.S. and Europe, including group shows at New Collectors Gallery (London, 2021), Boomer Gallery (London, 2021) and A.I.R. Gallery (New York, 2021). Her first solo exhibition in New York was *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (Fou Gallery, New York, 2022).

Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself? How did you become interested in painting? Who have you looked up to as a person and an artist?

My art education was a mismatch of things. I was submerged in the language of historical painting but see through the eyes of a formalist. The most influential class in college was on Postmodernism. My work embraces these influences—the idealism of historical tradition, the formal consciousness of the pictorial plane, and the pastiche of contemporaneity. I do not have a certain artist that could be a staple for who I am now. There are a lot of past spirits that live inside of me. Everything I made is both a homage and a critique of the ones that came before. Occasionally I get excited by a contemporary painter and it drove me into the studio instantly.

When did you get started? What were the most difficult challenges?

I came to painting late in college, and started to take painting seriously during grad school. Painting is one of the rare things that comes naturally. The experience of painting itself is easy compared to everything else one has to deal with to be an artist.

In Suyi Xu's paintings punctual and intense attention to grasping the visible data and not trying to create idealisation or transfiguration of reality was highlighted. Her painting has an intimate adherence to the reality she interprets, without imposing her vision, since her creative energies are inclined to reveal the eternal that adapts: she realistically paints light, but directs it where she wants, on particulars or details.

What does being a painter mean to you?

Below is a list of persona I found in painters from experience and observation. A mystic. A cynic. A scientist. A poet. An exhibitionist. A hermit. A hedonist. A stoic. An egotist. A humanist.

How long does it take you to complete one of your paintings, from concept to finished canvas?

It varies from days to months. Every painting carries the memory and knowledge from the one before. I often start a new painting just to resolve the problems from the last one, instead of fixing them directly. Gradually my work become a algorithmic loop that present different solutions



Suyi Xu, *A Woman under the Influence*, 2021.
Oil on canvas, 72x48 inches ©Suyi Xu,
Photograph by Xi Zhou, courtesy of Fou Gallery



*Xu Suyi at Studio (New York),
photograph by Meiko Gao.*

to a recursive visual problem. The boundaries between concept and completion are often blurred. The initial idea could be simmering for months before I execute them in paint.

What, in your painting, best focuses your artistic personality? What messages would you like to be read? What impression do you try to arouse in those who look at your paintings?

Every picture has an internal distance from the audience. Some comes to you, some you have to go out of your way to meet it. Right

Her paintings lead the viewers in a recursive algorithm.

The repetitions evoke the cycles and loops of life, where there are elements of vulnerability, humanity, and universality. It creates new perspectives and energy by uniting disjointed realities in spaces, architectures, and interiors that deny time.



Suyi Xu, *Fidelio*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 64x48 inches ©Suyi Xu,
Photograph by Xi Zhou, courtesy of Fou Gallery



now I'm playing with this idea of distance. I have always believed in the power of absence over presence, like T.S. Eliot's darkened room (prepared for all the things said and left unsaid). I could never dictate the impression aroused in the viewers. I hope, when people stand in front of my painting, they can feel the density of my decisions and the passage of time summed up in one moment.

Suyi Xu: All that is Solid Melts into Air installation view, photo by Zhou Xi ©Suyi Xu, Courtesy of Fou Gallery

“My subjects are responses to the spiritual crisis of contemporary existence, and my method a visceral engagement with the painting medium driven by the idea of a sacred intent.”
- Suyi Xu

Some of the elements that enrich your paintings recall profound aspects of emotional reality set in precise architectural environments. Can you tell us how this combination was born and the idea behind it?

I paint architectures because they are more forgiving than people. The geometric form lends itself onto the canvas. They are also deceptively neutral and reserved, giving me more freedom to project myself onto them. Virginia Woolf observed in her diary that one can not write directly about the soul. “Look at, it vanished.” But look elsewhere—“the ceiling, the walkers in the park, the cheaper beats in the zoom, and the soul slips in.” The soul also slips in the afternoon, when I look at the ascending staircase, the arch of a hallway, and the grey area at a white wall struck by the sun.

What relationship do you have with the colors you use?

I am very attracted to Duchamp’s idea of “infrathin.” I understand it as a sensitivity to the most minute shades of difference. My colors operate within the language of infrathin. When I first started painting my instinct was to smooth every color to achieve an impeccable flat surface. I was criticized for over-blending colors by paint-

ing teachers. “You’re killing the paint.” It took me several false experiments to return to my voice. Now I’m not only killing the paint, but also drowning it, fainting it, thinning it into non-existence. The difference between color transitions are so sneakily faint that you almost need to hold your breath to see it. That’s how I feel when I paint it.

How much has New York changed since you first arrived? How has life changed for Asians since the pandemic’s outbreak? Did this affect your way of creating and working?

Among the cities I’ve lived in, no other place inspires the sentimentalization of experience more so than New York. The threats to day-to-day existence is glorified in the “spirit and “toughness” of the city. The persistent tension of race and class is veiled by the romanticism of narrative-making. Since the pandemic outbreak, waves of violence have been committed against people that look like me. To be in new york, one has to dissociate, compress pain. If all these things have warped my sense of being a human, I make up in the studio, where I practice paying attention, being present, giving shapes to thoughts and forms to feelings. My way of working and creating is my way of resistance.