

Art Basel in Basel 2018

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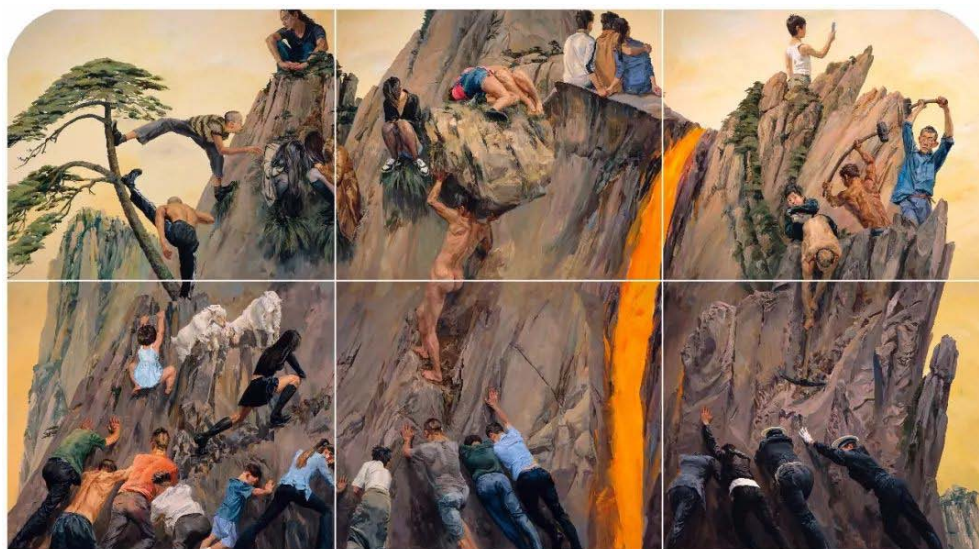
Galleries | S24

INGA SVALA THORSOTTIR & WU SHANZHUAN

Unlimited | U9

Yu Hong, *Old Man Yu Gong is Still Moving Away Mountains*

Long March Space is proud to announce *Old Man Yu Gong is Still Moving Away Mountains*, a 5x9(m) large painting by Yu Hong will be featured at Unlimited sector, Art Basel in Basel.



Yu Hong
Old Man Yu Gong is Still Moving Away Mountains, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
500 x 900 cm

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Old Man Yu Gong Is Still Moving Away Mountains

The story “The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains” (“Yugong Yishan”) from the chapter “Questions of the Tang” of Daoist text Liezi, recounts an ancient Chinese tale of an old man who vowed to remove two tall mountains blocking his path. His steadfast commitment to his plan eventually inspired the gods to help him, separating the mountains and opening up a path. This parable of man triumphing over nature has in different eras been put to the service of countless cultural metaphors. During the War of Resistance against Japan (World War II) in order to encourage people many newspaper articles compared resistance against the Japanese to the old man’s efforts. During the same period, “Yugong Yishan” also frequently appeared as a historical theme in artistic works, the most famous of which was Xu Beihong’s “Yugong Yishan”, painted around 1940. Creating a classic artwork from the Resistance War period, Xu realized his plans for the reform of Chinese painting by utilizing realist techniques and compositional influence from mural painting. In the political arena, in Mao Zedong’s closing comments to the first plenary of the Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1945, he compared imperialism and feudalism to two mountains pressing down on the bodies of the Chinese people. From this point on, “Yugong Yishan” became part of the vocabulary of political propaganda.

A member of the “New Generation” group of painters that emerged in 1990s Beijing, Yu Hong combines strands of Chinese art history, from the traditional to the socialist realist, together with a sophisticated eye for the monumental absurdity of everyday life. At the core of her artistic practice is an investigation into the existential nature of humanity in a rapidly changing society. Yu Hong had always been interested in “Yugong Yishan” as a historical theme, to the point of going to visit Huangshan in central China, where the scenery is defined by steep, severe, and high granite massifs, seen in overlapping layer

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after layer of mountain ridges. The landscape there has had a profound impact on the culture of the surrounding Huizhou region and Chinese art history as a whole. Deeply influenced by both Chinese and Western traditions in mural painting, Yu Hong also integrates these elements into *Old Man Yu Gong is Still Moving Mountains*. She depicts a serrated rocky mountain following the model of Huangshan, its surface occupied by people from all walks of life, each of them minding their own business. Yu Hong takes inspiration from Chinese and Western classical paintings, the image of warriors cutting into the rock with their tools in Xu Beihong's painting reappearing in altered form, while the naked figure carrying a rock in the center of the painting originates from the figure of Sisyphus in Greek mythology. The figures sitting on top of the mountain also bear influence from Vrubel and Caspar David Friedrich, amongst others. In *Old Man Yu Gong is Still Moving Mountains* the artist is reflecting on how the concept of man's perseverance and eventual triumph over nature has shaped people's lives and China's visual culture.

Yu Hong

Yu Hong was born in 1966 in Xi'an, China. In the 1980s she studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing and graduated with a post-graduate degree from the oil painting department in 1996. Since 1988 she has been a teacher in CAFA's oil painting department. From the start, Yu Hong received training in realist painting, which over time would translate into her own individual aesthetic language. The core subject of Yu Hong's paintings has always been human nature, and how human beings grow and exist in this society, in this world. Those figures, painted down by her brush, express the feelings and self-analysis of people thrown into the reality of society.

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