



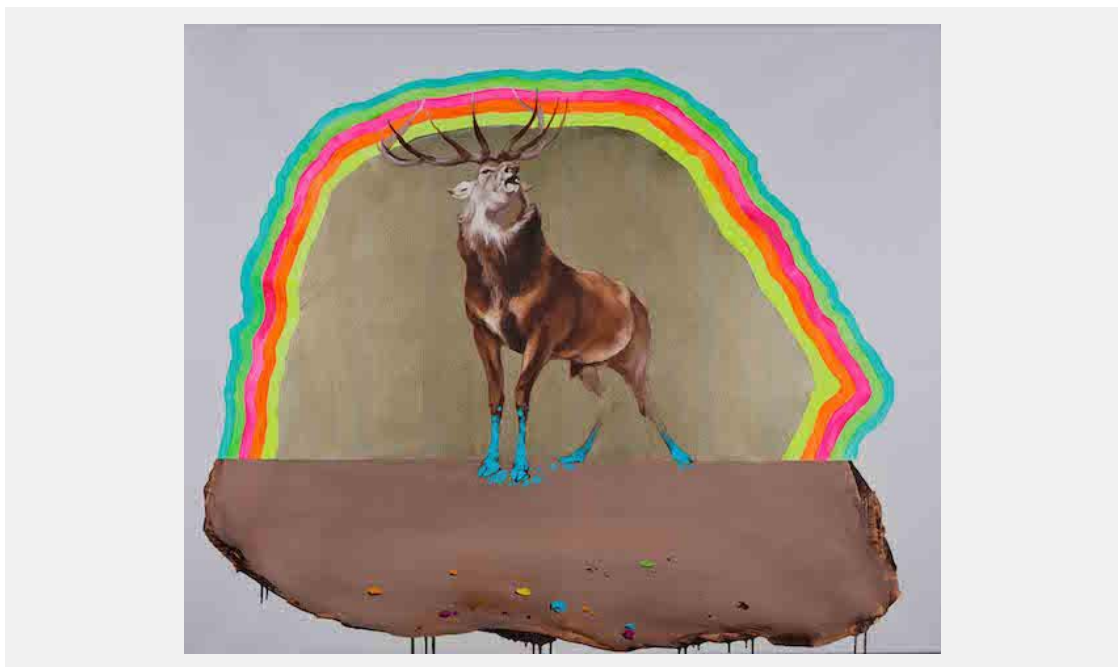
Art Radar

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

“Fata Morgana”: Inner Mongolian artist GAMA’s fantastical creatures – in conversation

Art Radar speaks with Inner Mongolian artist GAMA, whose fantastical creatures are on show at Chambers Fine Art, Beijing, until 15 April 2017.

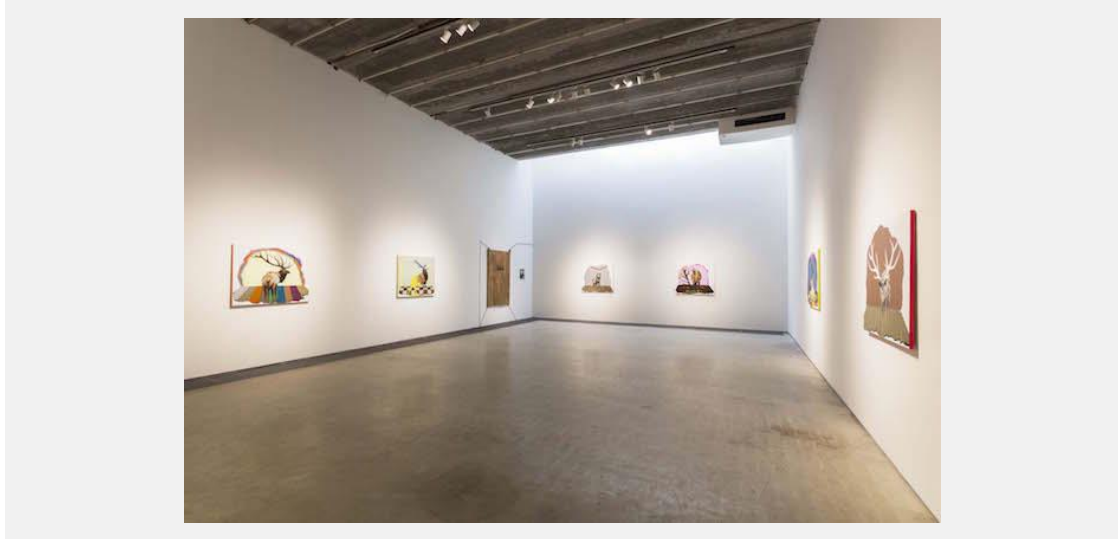
GAMA continues his artistic journey exploring the space between the material world and the spiritual world. His imaginative paintings are informed both by his nomadic upbringing in Inner Mongolia, where shamanism is still part of everyday life, and his academic training and life in Germany.



GAMA, 'Deer of Nine Colours 11', 2016, mixed media, 100 x 120 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

Fantastical deer, headless figures, skulls, mushrooms growing in unexpected places, incongruent perspectives and little fantastical creatures disappearing between the spaces he creates: these are some of the themes that are ever present in **GAMA**'s oeuvre. Almost all of his works are concerned

with the spaces and the doors that separate or connect the actual world with the spirit world. This means that most of GAMA's work can be summed up by these apt words composed by Chambers Fine Art: "[m]emories of shamanism coexist with figures that seem to have stepped out of Grimm's fairy tales." And while he continues in his current show with many of the themes he has touched upon previously, he presents in this latest exhibition, new visual ideas, experiments with new colours as well as new materials.



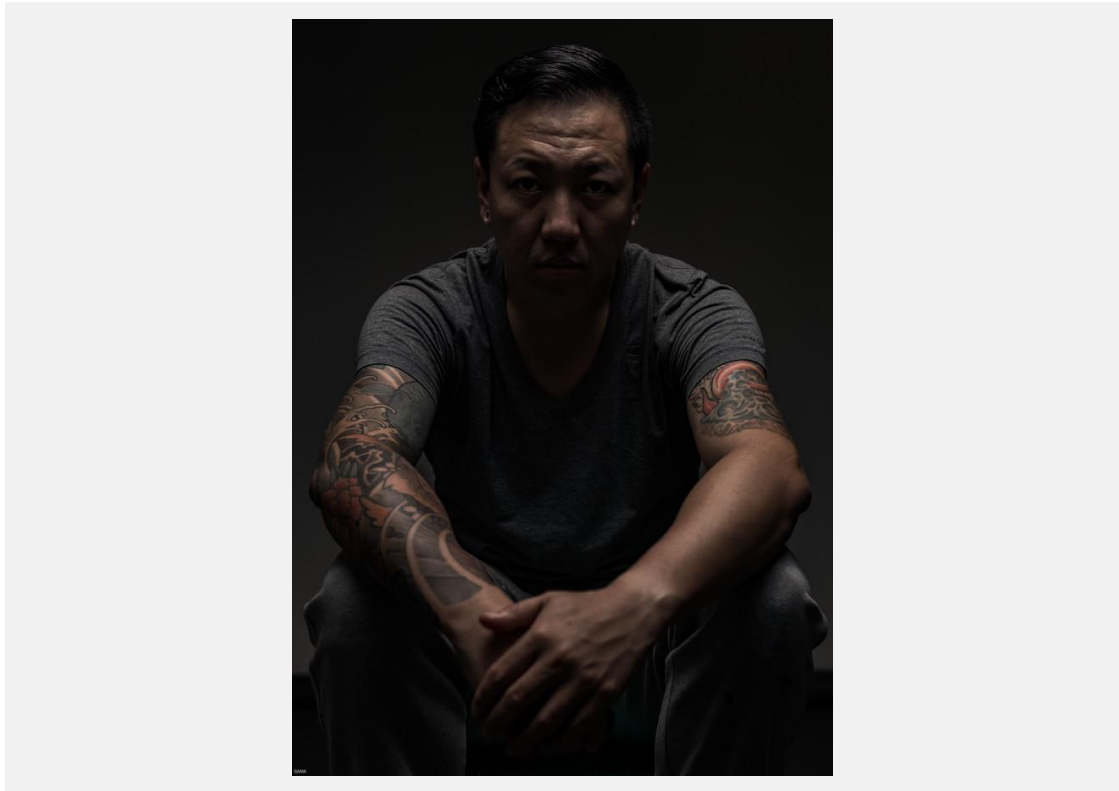
"Fata Morgana: New Works by GAMA", 18 February – 4 May 2017 at Chambers Fine Art, Beijing.
Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

Gama also introduces the medium of installation in this show entitled "**Fata Morgana: New Works by GAMA**", his second solo at **Chambers Fine Art** in Beijing, running from 18 February until 15 April 2017. In order to create continuity between his works displayed in two separate gallery spaces, which are connected via a narrow hallway, the artist used actual old doors to visually and mentally connect these two spaces. In the first gallery he places a set of traditional old Chinese doors on the wall and in a surprising turn, in the next gallery we find a second set of doors, as if fallen from another dimension, on the gallery floor surrounded by earth, mirror shards and with mushrooms growing amongst them.

GAMA's ideology comes from many sources and is not exclusively informed by shamanism but also draws on Buddhism, Christianity and Daoism. His artistic influences span the European Old Masters as well as contemporary German artists.

Born in Baotua in Inner Mongolia, China in 1977, GAMA studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing from 1996 to 2000 and then moved to Karlsruhe, Germany where he studied painting at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste from 2002 to 2007 and was master student under Gustav Kluge from 2007 to 2008. His works are regularly exhibited in Europe, the US and China. He currently lives and works in Berlin.

Art Radar had the chance to walk with the artist through his new show before opening day and ask him a few questions, focusing mainly on the symbolism in his works and the ideas that inform his art.



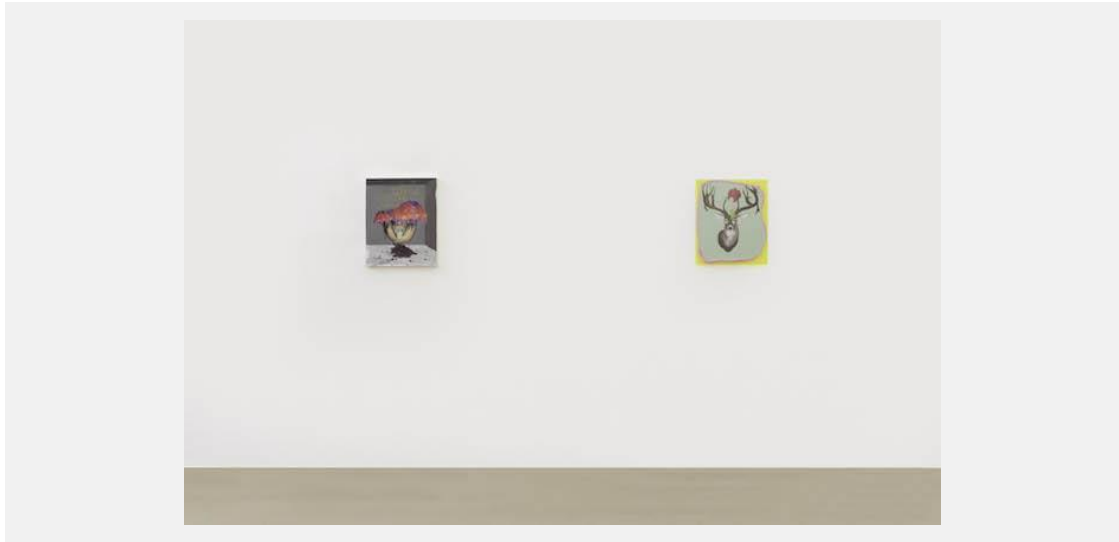
The artist GAMA. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

You are known for your images of deer. The first gallery space consists exclusively of paintings of deer. Why the continued fascination?

I consider deer to be sacred. In many cultures deer are considered sacred beings. Also on a copy of a Bible that I own there is a deer with a cross between his antlers. I use a lot of ideas and small elements in my art from various religions. Deer play a very special role in shamanism. My great aunt is a shaman who I would visit very often as a child and her ideas greatly influenced me. She explained to me that in shamanism there are two rooms or worlds, the physical world that we reside in and a spiritual world. Only shamans are able to travel back and forth between these two worlds. So there is a gate, a door through which they enter and exit but it keeps changing locations. In front of this door there is always a deer guarding it. In order to pass into the spiritual world the shaman has to answer in a special language a question posed by the deer. Once it is correctly answered, the shaman is given access by the deer to the spiritual world. So for me this became a starting point: What does this deer look like that guards the gate? How do the antlers look like? How does the face look like? Therefore you see there is no regular looking deer – they have added elements. It is painted in a fantasy style, not a realistic style.

So you believe in a spiritual world?

I very strongly believe that there is a spiritual world and that is why all my works show this space between these two rooms or two worlds. That is why all my exhibitions revolve around this theme of two rooms.



GAMA, "Fata Morgana: New Works by GAMA", 18 February – 4 May 2017 at Chambers Fine Art, Beijing. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

How many paintings of deer have you made?

There are 7 new deer paintings in this show but overall there must be 20 or 30 by now. The number seven is also very important.

Why so?

Because in the Bible it says that God created the world in seven days. Also in medicine and in architecture the number seven is often used.... Seven is also a mystical number.

You also refer to the number 9 in your series *Deer of Nine Colours (Jiu Se Lu)*.

This is an old Chinese Buddhist story. I was very little when there was a TV series based on this story. It originated from a wall painting found at the [Magao Caves in] Dunhuang. There was a hunter who was badly wounded, almost dead. Then a white deer appears in front of him. But before he sees the deer he observes clouds in a multitude of colours. And the deer appears through these clouds. The deer saved the hunter... The deer said, you are never allowed to tell anyone about me or tell them where I live. The hunter promised that he wouldn't. Then the deer took the hunter home. One day the queen had a dream, in her dream she saw a white deer with nine different colours on its back. She told the king that she wanted this deer to make its pelt into a coat. The king searched the land to find this animal and promised a large reward for anyone who could find the deer. The greedy hunter decides to betray the trust of the deer in return for a large sum of money. So they found the deer and shot it and the queen made a coat out of the deer's pelt. Afterwards the hunter dies a mysterious death and the queen and king fall ill with an incurable illness. Nobody could heal them. In the woods there was another young white deer with nine colours on its back. And the story repeats itself again. ...It is a kind of Buddhist thinking, that if you do something bad then bad things will happen to you.



GAMA, "Fata Morgana: New Works by GAMA", 18 February – 4 May 2017 at Chambers Fine Art, Beijing. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.



GAMA, 'Deer of Nine Colours 7', 2016, mixed media, 100 x 120 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

Some of the deer look very feminine and others very masculine. Why is that?

There is only one deer that guards the gate to the next world. The different deer reflect my emotions and mood when I make the work. So depending on how I feel they might look more soft and feminine or more fierce and masculine.

Why are the feet of *Deer of Nine Colours 7* left unfinished?

The feet of the deer being half there and half not there means that it is half in this world and half in the spirit world. It is in an in-between state.



GAMA, 'Zucht (Thriving)', 2016, mixed media, 60 x 50 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

Mushrooms are often seen in your works both back in your show at Chambers in 2015 and again this time. What do mushrooms signify in your works such as in *Zucht (Thriving)* or *Waldboden (Forest Floor)* or on the back of the deer in *Deer of Nine Colours 8* all executed in 2016?

Yes, mushrooms appear a lot in my works. They symbolise for me the Buddhist idea of reincarnation. Mushrooms are inter-connected. There is no seed. So when you pick a mushroom another mushroom will grow elsewhere along this interconnected web.



GAMA, 'Das Tor III (The Door III)', 2016, mixed media, 60 x 50 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

We see a number of headless figures in your works such as in *Das Tor III (The Door III)*, *The King IV* and *Rückkehr II (Return II)*, all 2016. Can you tell us the symbolism behind that?

So the headless figures in my work represent the spiritual side of people. It is hard for us to imagine that all of us have in fact an identical looking skeleton. What distinguishes us as human beings are the muscles, tissue and fat. I have only painted the clothes, as the clothes identify the person. To paint this kind of figure for me is also to allow each individual viewer to come up with or imagine by themselves a fitting head for these bodies and clothes.

In *Valley III* we see a beautiful mountain landscape, a large hand being attacked by small toy-like soldiers and a lamp. Tell us what is going on here.

I sometimes like to include the hand of the artist in my works. For some unknown reason the small soldiers are attacking the hand. The lamp hanging in the middle of this vast landscape creates a visual inconsistency: are we in a landscape or are we inside a room?...



GAMA, "Fata Morgana: New Works by GAMA", 18 February – 4 May 2017 at Chambers Fine Art, Beijing. In the background, 'Rückkehr II (Return II)', 2016, mix media, 200 x 250 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Chambers Fine Art.

In your painting *Rückkehr II (Return II)* we see a headless horse rider in a landscape of fantastical colours. First of all, please tell us about the background poster and then about the work itself.

It is a photograph that shows the devastating results of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The main theme of *Rückkehr II (Return II)* deals with the spiritual world. So our soul returns to where it came from. To a time and place where everything is still in order. The vibrant colours symbolise purity.

What are some new projects and plans for the future?

To be honest, I do not have any grandiose plans. I just want to make sure that in my two upcoming shows the content also works well from a conceptual point of view and that I finish all my paintings on time. I definitely want to concentrate on the installation in the gallery space, such as I did this time at Chambers. I want the paintings and the space to work together in unison.

Nooshfar Afnan