

**Furen Dai x Tiger Cai x Emily Cheng | Artist Talk**

July 15, 2022

**Matter Matters: Tiger Cai, Shuyi Cao, Emily Cheng, Furen Dai, Antonia Kuo  
Curated by Eva Ren**

Exhibition Dates: June 15 – August 26, 2022

Opening Reception: Wednesday, June 15, 2022, 5 – 7 pm

Address: 55 E 11<sup>th</sup> St, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, New York, NY 10003

**Dan Chen:** I'm Dan the director of Chambers Fine Art. We're happy to gather a few of the artists in our current show for an artist talk. Eva, the curator, who works here at chambers curated this show for us this summer. The title of the exhibition is matter matters. During these last couple of years, when so much of our daily interactions turned virtual, technology has been in the forefront of all of our lives and seeped into the art world. All of a sudden, every gallery website had a virtual gallery space or viewing room. Eva gathered this group of artists who across their work looking at humanity and life at this world. I'll let the artist explain more about this. Today, we have Tiger Cai, Emily Cheng, Furen Dai here. Thanks for joining us.

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**Eva:** Tiger, could you tell us your current series? What is the topic, theme, and where do you find your inspirations?

**Tiger:** When I was creating this body of works, I was more interested in objects in space or in a vast empty dimension, which is outer space. I choose to paint asteroids and comets all these like objects floating in the space, because I believe, as human, we can find similarity in these objecting space. I'm not really painting a piece of rock but a portrait of human being, because what happened in our life is kind of like similar to what happens to this objecting space. Most of us are alone and floating by ourselves until we meet each other, across each other. And then, we leave each other again. I know it's very depressing, but that's what I was thinking at that time.

**Eva:** Whenever you talk about the floating in the universe, it reminds me of the recent photography, sending from thousand light-years ago by Astronomical Telescope. It is very romantic in a way that we can not only see it as the rock, the material and matter itself, but also can reflect the human nature in a way. Also, I see that the fish could be one of the major subject matters in your painting. Could you like to explain us a little bit more about this? Is it mean something to you specifically?

**Tiger:** In *the Journey*, the large painting in this exhibition, I painted a giant dark black goldfish with a cargo ship. The cargo ship is carrying a piece of asteroid. They are like a recurring motif

in my artworks. The reason I do that is because I have an early piece of memory in my mind. When I was a child, I once had a goldfish as a gift from my parents. It's my first pet. When the goldfish died, I was shocked and couldn't understand how that happened. At that time, I have no idea about death. That's my first encounter to death. I use it as a motif frequently in my artwork to represent the idea of death and my personal relationship with death. The cargo ship part is more like my imagination relating to afterlife.

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**Eva:** Let's pass the conversation to Furen. We can see that the pedestal is the essential part in your paintings. Could you tell us a little bit more about what is like? and what does it represent?

**Furen:** Yes, I could start with the whole body of this work. Basically, I started these series since 2019. In China and we don't really have encyclopedia museum to visit and also don't have the habit to go to the museum. Once I relocate to United States and then I constantly visiting the culture institutions, then I really started to thinking how the first and where the objects come from. And at the same time, how they make the decision to divide the gallery space. I started to look into this since 2019. And of course, then very early in the 2020, when the pandemic hit as both, a lot of cultural institutions shifted into a 3D space. I just started wondering around these cultural spaces and then looking at the 3d rendering of the spaces, that's my first impression, but at the same time I was being constantly hit it with the new cultural institution first to laid off their art workers. I think it talks about the dual-identity as an artist where a lot of artists are based in New York has a part-time job working as something else.

I think about art workers' identity, both as an artist, but also their laborers while working on other jobs. Where the value for art come from? I think about the conservator's actions, and fabricators making a pedestal. When does it consider as an object? And when does it consider as artwork? This is the line where I start thinking where shifted into this body work, which are all the pedestal form I took from encyclopedia museum, like metropolitan museum of art. I am looking at the form of these sculptures and then trying to recreate this form through a 3d rendering and then reapply these by Fresco painting.

**Eva:** So, could you tell us a little bit more about fresco paintings?

**Furen:** When I started this series, my question is where it would be the status for encyclopedia museum from hundreds of years later. Will it still stand as a culture institution? When I go to encyclopedia museum, I asked myself can I readapt these 3d image through this medium (pedestal)? Which is like one of the oldest medium in art form. When we are looking at this piece from like several hundred years later, how does that feel?

**Eva:** Are you continue working on the serious?

**Furen:** Yes, right now, I'm still continuing working on the fresco. I'm trying to figure out the whole process. I laid one layer and then I have to wait for several days to apply for another layer. And then once I apply the third layer on top, I need to paint very quickly before the plaster dry and absorb all the paint. For the first body of work, I'm mostly focusing on each individual pedestal form.

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**Eva:** Emily, can we discuss little bit about your theme and how you started this series? I know that it is an ongoing series that you keep working on.

**Emily:** It's an ongoing series. I'm also very interested in the space outside of the space that we know as surrounding the earth. The vastness of spaces really interests me and our relationship with that space, which also has a lot of implications of our existence and time into various dimensions. These are all kind of implied when we create these spaces. So, in my paintings, I always have a horizon line so that there is a relationship between the viewer who standing in a secure space of the gallery or museum, is looking into the painting like **window**.

**Eva:** I can see that in your work. There are always a lot of mysterious elements, abstract, and geometric forms, including the relationship between matters and the unknown force.

**Emily:** Yeah. I think it takes a lifetime to know what you want to do, to know yourself. I think it also takes more than a lifetime to find how everything is connected. What I really enjoy about the age is that I have really come to understand so many things that were earlier in my life—Fragments. All of a sudden, they've been fused together and you've seen those maps, that people who are connected. Everybody's connected. Right? And that's how I feel about the world. It goes on and on and on religion, institutions, medicine.

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**Eva:** Tiger just mentioned about that. Everybody in this world can feel that they're lonely and disconnected with each other, but then you're talking about a bigger perspective. There's somehow that everyone, it's not only human beings, but also everything else in this world are connected in a way. Tiger. Do you have anything want to say regard to this topic? What do you think about?

**Tiger:** I personally believe that every person is lonely, but it doesn't change the fact that we connect to each other from time to time. These are two parts of our lives. Even though we are lonely, we are all part of like a part of a bigger system such ecosystem, politic system, and social structure. So, I think Emily and I are trying to see the same thing in different angles.

**Eva:** And also, I can see that all three of you, as artists, are from totally different perspectives to discuss the same theme: From a very non-human centric point of view to see who we are and where are we at right now. When we think from like a human centric point of view, you can only see what's happening around us from a single player point of view in a huge system. But from three different point of views that we can see the whole pictures. Yeah. So, for Furen, do you have anything to say about the connections of human being?

**Furen:** I feel everything is connected and informing each other.

**Eva:** Is it the reason why you want to focus on the most basic thing, the essence of artwork?

**Furen:** Well, yes. Because when we talked about anchored, we talked about the present. But I feel where we are anchored is informed by history. At the same time, we are also projecting where we are going be in the future. Although we are different artists here, the theme of our artworks is deeply connected.

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**Eva:** Do you guys have any future plans for your work? What are you working on right now?

**Tiger:** At this moment, I'm more focused on digital arts, like NFT. It's a hot topic right now in the artworld. I'm working on a series called 'Wonderland and Funny Fouls'. I'm trying to build up a universe around these alien creatures who live on a dying planet, which is destroyed by themselves. Such as the natural disaster and overdevelopment of resource and blindly trusting their technology. So basically, an alternative version of us, as a metaphor of our current situation. I'm doing short stories and digital drawing and paintings around this topic. My goal is that couple years from now, I can present them as a whole. People can like wandering in this world of my wonder small creatures and explore their stories. While they are doing that, I wish they can think about ourselves. Maybe ask themselves is this our future? And what shall we do when this kind of disaster actually happen to us.

**Furen:** For all the various creatures you are creating, will you intersect them with each other in the future or?

**Tiger:** Yeah. I think so. I'm exploring how each of each of the artwork is going to talk to each other, but I think they will interact with each other someday in the future.

**Eva:** Emily, I know that you're continuing working on those paintings. Are you still focusing on the same thing or do you have any new experiment?

**Emily:** I'm doing something new. Before I left New York, I wanted to continue subjects I've been working on in the last five years. But something happened just before I left, I was lying in bed and I was looking at my bookcase. My bookcase is on the bottom shelf, it has like, 20 books that I want to get to. Usually, I have all the book titles facing me, but one book by Colin Wilson just really jumped out to me. And it's called the "a cult." Colin Wilson was one of my mother's favorite authors. It's taking me a lifetime to read it. I've tried several times to read it but I could never grab it. I'm, reading him now and I found him incredibly fascinating. Then I realize why I've waited a lifetime to read this book because it has everything that I'm interested in the last 10 years in a nugget. And I wasn't ready to read this book in any other time. So, I don't know how this book will inform my work. But I trust it will and I'm allowing that to work its own magic on my work.

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**Eva:** Do you have anything that inspired your work in your daily life? Where do you usually find your inspirations? Where do you find your theme?

**Furen:** Everything inspires me. Such as news books, museum, all kinds of different material, different information inspires me. A lot of my past working experiences informed my work too. I've been working in museum. During the time I was working in there, I saw how people handling work. At the same time, I worked as a translator between viewer and artists where like I tried to interpret other people's culture. All of the factors added up affecting the way I do my research and the way how I trying to connect the concepts with the medium.

**Tiger:** I got inspiration from films. And also, I'm a big fan of sci-fi like literature and movies.

**Eva:** I do have another question for you because of your main focus on digital art. What do you think the differences like between creating digital art and physical paintings.

**Tiger:** For me, the differences are small. It's just the different form of representation. The most important thing is to tell the story that I want to express. The choice of media is relatively trivial for me. All depends on the media that media at that holds the topic best. The rest of it is choosing medias. It can be a painting, animation, video, or a piece of digital art, but it based on which media can catch the topic best at that moment. It's just a choice.

**Eva:** Emily, are you thinking of using different mediums while you're exploring the new theme or a new path on your creating process?

**Emily:** The paintings that are in the gallery now are done with flashe-paint. These are done with water-based oil. The difference between those two mediums is so vast. The flashe is very quick dry with high intensity color. The oil, you can really pull an image out of mud, coop. So just that subtle difference changes your approach. In many ways I think oil can feel more magical, especially if you're working small. Whereas when I work in flashe, uh, the image has to be formed, you know, because I'm thinking what color of the background might be.

**Eva:** I can tell that your works have like a relatively bright and colorful color. How do you usually choose your colors?

**Emily:** Color to me is light. If I have an idea of what kind of light I want in my paintings, then the color will emerge.