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Wang Zhibo, 'Weather Forecast', 2016.

The disembodied head of Mickey Mouse floats before the striated background of a canvas alongside the head of a *putto* and several archeological finds. But Wang Zhibo isn't another Chinese contemporary artist dredging up Western iconography in an attempt at ironic kitsch. We've moved on from the Mao's and the Marilyn's and Mickey's haven't we? Let your eyes move across the canvases of the dozen paintings hung around Edouard Malingue Gallery and a darker narrative emerges. A sense of dread and foreboding takes hold.

Part of China's post '80s generation, Wang gained attention for her unreal isolated dystopian landscapes, denuded of humanity. This time, in 'There is a place with four suns in the sky – red, white, blue and yellow', a title borrowed from Carl Sagan's 1973 book 'The Cosmic Connection: An Extraterrestrial Perspective', there are figures everywhere. But they are disembodied, decapitated, their faces obscured, juxtaposed with incongruent images. The paintings flit between detailed figuration and abstraction, between polished and sketch-like paint strokes. References from art history are threaded through the works. Small coiffed or wrapped decapitated heads sit like bulbs of garlic amongst an arrangement of fruit, and vegetables in macabre still-lives that draw on 17th century Dutch paintings. The works aren't symbolic of poetic death, reminders of mortality; they hint at violence and uprisings instead. In 'We leave that to the people who wear them' (2016), a tribal mother – her face obscured by an ornamental cage of ribs – sits holding a child amidst scattered bone fragments and a severed leg, while a pair of toucans perch upon a tree in the background. The composition is suggestive of religious Madonna and child paintings of the Renaissance, but with a dash of cannibalism and a throwback to civilizations of another time. A grisaille jungle landscape ('Rise, Fall', 2016) featuring three moonlike orbs across its surface, a phantasm of a mountain floating across the top of the frame in place of clouds, depicts another world entirely, with a stylistic marriage of brutalism and Henri Rousseau. There is a sense that something sinister has just happened or is about to happen in Wang's works, and a feeling of unease trickles through the flat surface of the canvases.

Like Wang's earlier paintings, this exhibition depicts constructed worlds. Juxtaposed images bleed into one another, as if memories and impressions have been culled from anthropology books and documentaries, museums, and the internet and have materialized into visions on canvas. Inner and outer worlds collide and blur, transcending time and space, resulting in the eradication of historical reality or rationality. Objects and scenes are thrown together incongruously. Wang's paintings are fantastical dystopian dreamscapes, collages of the past, present and future filtered through a Ballardian lens.



Wang Zhibo, 'We leave that to the people who wear them', 2015. Courtesy of Edouard Malingue Gallery