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ArtReview Asia (Autumne 18 issue)
"Yuan Yuan Alternative Realities"

ArtReview Asia

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Yuan Yuan *Alternative Realities*

Palazzo Terzi, Bergamo Città Alta 9 June – 23 July

Palazzo Terzi, situated in Bergamo's Città Alta, is a late-Baroque residential mansion famous for its architecture, for its interiors and for artworks spread throughout. Sited on the remains of an ancient Roman road and medieval and sixteenth-century houses, the current structure was built by the Terzi family in two phases, dating from the 1640s through to the middle of the eighteenth century. The palazzo is known – in many travel books – for its beautiful entrance portal, which leads to a large panoramic terrace, with Giovanni Antonio Sanz's statues of 'Painting' and 'Sculpture' standing on its balustrade, overlooking the Venetian Walls and the Città Bassa. One of the most iconic views in Italy, it combines architectural beauty and the scenery of the Lombardy region. This, together with Bergamo's rich heritage of Renaissance paintings on display at Accademia Carrara, gives Chinese painter Yuan Yuan a challenging context to work with, for his first solo show in Italy.

Each of Yuan's works at the Palazzo Terzi is made precisely for a specific position. Given

that the ceilings are covered in frescoes and the walls are decorated with old paintings, family pictures, framed mirrors and other objects from the collection, Yuan had to search for space among the existing works, in some cases replacing what was on the wall with his own paintings, or putting larger-scale paintings in the middle of the room, or even, in the case of a couple of works, *Canteen of Duck* and *A Tour* (all works 2018), in fireplaces, using the hearths' decorated surrounds as frames (while also deploying antique books to support *A Tour*).

The works are placed in such a way as to make visual connections between components of the paintings and the rooms' interiors. For example, the twisted scarlet canvas of a destroyed pop-up gazebo that occupies the centre of *Dancing Hall* is a response to a red cloak worn by the subject of a historical painting hung on the wall; *A Tour*, featuring empty picture frames hanging on a salon's walls, with three red velvet-upholstered chairs

placed in front of the wall, is a seemingly serious but more likely playful echo of its surroundings.

In these last works, the connection is mainly on the visual level, responding to the architectural and aesthetic features of Palazzo Terzi. But reflecting the continued evolution of Yuan's painting practice, many works here also illustrate an extremely figurative but conceptually constructed world that exists in parallel to (and sometimes intersects with) the actual world. To the Hall of Soprarizzo, for example, a room sumptuously decorated with a fresco by Carpoforo Tencalla, a wall-size mirror, a chandelier and soprarizzo velvet wallpaper, Yuan has added a largescale painting. Titled *Mandarin Duck 11*, it depicts a shabby Cantonese canteen, now inserted into a magnificent Baroque room that once hosted the doppelkaiser Francis, so-named for having been emperor twice: as Francis II, the last Holy Roman Emperor, and as Francis I, the first Emperor of Austria. *Aimee Lin*



Alternative Realities, 2018 (installation view).

Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong