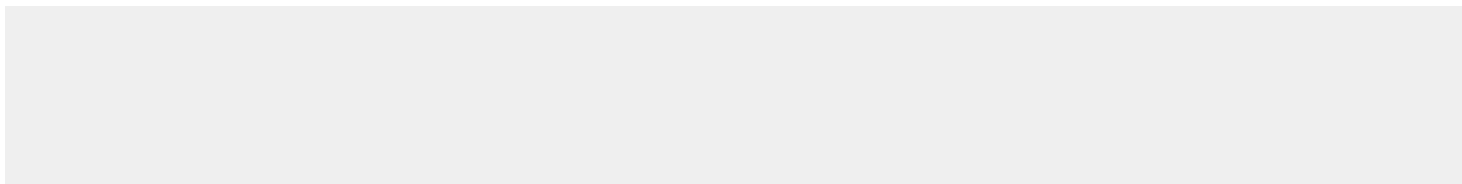




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Hello darkness, my old friend

Weekend Glitz | Crystal Wu 3 Sep 2021





As children, we are often afraid of the dark. But for artist Oscar Chan Yik-long, darkness is a friend to be faced head-on - as he did in *Don't Leave the Dark Alone*.

The title of the exhibition came from a conversation with a friend about laundering dark clothes, and how they should be taken out as soon as the cycle is complete to prevent a damp smell. "I thought this phrase would also work as a metaphor for my work," said the artist.

"We're willing to give so much attention to the people we like and to the lighter aspects of ourselves, but maybe we should also give more attention to the darkness that is both outside and within ourselves."

The exhibition begins with four ink paintings referencing horror movie stills. *Unfavourable Extermination* came from an episode of Masaki Kobayashi's 1965 *Kwaidan*, which depicts the story of Hoichi the Earless, a monk who was bewitched by ghosts. His friend tried to help him by writing the Heart Sutra on his body, rendering him invisible to the ghosts, except for his ears, as he forgot to write on them.

Not Even God Or The Devil Know How To Handle This superimposes a goat's head, one of the symbols of the devil, onto a character in the 1974 film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. The result is a witty depiction that runs true to its title, as the characters on the canvas sit in front of the cross.

Watching movies has always been Chan's hobby, but his move to France gave him the chance to explore more genres.

"I used to feel panicky watching horror movies, but maybe because of the lockdown or the global climate and political crises, I slowly found the meaning and the fun of watching them, especially those made between 1940 and 2000, before digital special effects," said Chan.

"I guess the process of watching horror movies is similar to the process of confronting my own fears, and that my reinterpretations of the movie stills are results of this processing."

The horror genre is a consistent theme throughout his show. For example, the eight-curtain work *120 Judge John Aiso Street* frames the middle space of the exhibition into a nightmarish scene where scary beings surround the viewer.

Ink has been Chan's main artistic medium for more than five years but to the artist, it is much more than black and white. "It is very pure but at the same time dark and intense. Depending on how much water I add, it allows me to create warm or cold tones, a whole spectrum of subtly different hues that, in turn, allows me to

create a whole world."

The monochromatic practice also aids the artist to focus on "mental form and emotional temperature," without "the specter of color."

Chan has also moved back into creating with pencil during his time in lockdown, or *Le Confinement* in Paris, and the second wave of Covid restrictions during his artist-in-residence in Helsinki.

"The whole social machinery around art production broke down everywhere - no invitations to do exhibitions, no commissions for new works - so I found myself having to create a new studio practice: making work for myself, based on my own interest and pleasure rather than a theme suggested by a curator or gallery," he said. "In fact, I started to take back control of my own practice by returning to the old-school method of working alone in the studio."

The result is a series of 16 pencil drawings, taking inspiration from various references like the cinema, old photographs and postcards.

Perhaps the most fitting conclusion of the exhibition is *We Must Focus to See The Light*, which depicts a young girl lighting a match with a face behind her. While his works are open to interpretation, the artist said: "We may interpret that second figure as the devil or darkness, but once we dare to face it we might find out that he is just her grandpa."

His advice: "Don't leave the dark alone. Stay calm, don't let the darkness accumulate around you. Then you won't become like the people you hate."

Don't Leave the Dark Alone will run at Gallery Exit until September 18.

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