

Rao Fu Combustion

October 7 - November 20, 2021



Rao Fu left China at the age of twenty-three to live in Germany, where he studied painting and graphics at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts.

During his visits to German museums he discovered the paintings of the old masters, whose influence is present throughout his works. Fiacres, horses, and period costumes are all allusions to a lost world that he transposes in another temporality.

Although less evident at first sight, traditional Chinese painting is also an underlying feature of his works, both from a technical and philosophical perspective.

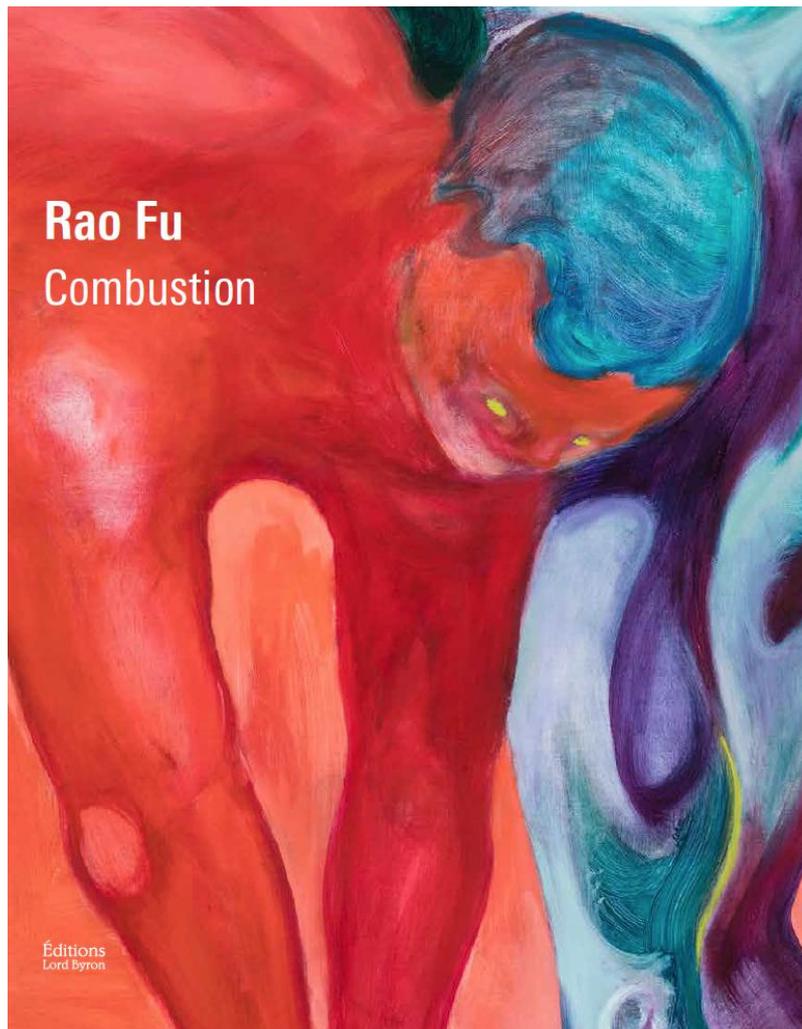
Rao Fu is particularly interested in landscapes, which he likes to represent in all their potency and immensity. Using double or triple perspective, he augments the landscape's grandeur and includes several visual fields in the same picture, creating a captivating immersive effect for the viewer.

The ghostlike and almost transparent figures that people his large landscapes merge into an environment, which becomes the mirror of their emotions and those of the painter. According to Rao Fu, his landscapes reflect his inner world but can also be freely interpreted.

In his narrative and mysterious world, eras and Eastern and Western cultures coexist and are naturally combined. He attempts to render the essence and pure expression of man, to create a universal art that transcends cultural diversities.

Exhibition Catalogue Rao Fu, "Combustion"

**Limited Edition of 30 signed and numbered
including an original work, oil and graphite on paper of 27 x 20 cm**



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Great Ventures Across Seas of Colour

No Sign of the End of Painting

In the pluriverse of the arts, painting is still being executed with great joy and commitment. The so-called death of painting, haughtily proclaimed by conceptual referees, has never come to pass, anywhere. This purported paradigm shift is nothing more than a parlour-trick. Since modernism first surfaced as an artform – irrespective of when exactly one places its beginning there's been persistent chatter that painting has died; these rumours have punctuated the history of modern painting like a basso continuo, at times more audible, at others it seems to fade away, but which nonetheless is ever-present as a continuous base figure of painting's self-understanding in modernism. Ultimately, this has not led to any decline in image production in the painting sphere. If anything, new modes have emerged, painting has expanded in the public realm and even merged with performance or digital art. Across the international art market, painting still continues to attest to the highest sales figures.

So, there's no need to be afraid of those virtualists calling painting into question; rather, we need to cease reducing artistic realities to virtual contacts. Throughout the current pandemic, digital channels have indeed been an aid for exchange and information transfer. They are no substitute for the sheer enjoyment of painting, however. We have a communication problem under our modern regime of alienation. The art of painting immersed in tradition insists on its specificity, continuing to tempt our yearning for painting's sensuous potential, as well as for visual experiences in a museum context. For critics of painting, it seems as though painting enthusiasts have been employing a traditional genre, working as it were in an artistic sphere with seemingly out dated means, and merely borrowing from the works of other artists and from past epochs. Were that the case, painting would now be nothing more than an anachronism. To their credit, let me make it clear from the outset: no painter has stopped believing in painting; they continue inventing clever ways of relating it to tradition. In their eyes, painting as an artform represents an exultant medium, whose demise has been proclaimed over and over again by know-it-alls, but which nevertheless remains fresh and more audience-oriented than ever.

Rao Fu and “Dresdenness”

Dresden has always been a city of painters. And, we can be sure – as long as the Elbe carries water, this stream of painting will never dry up. Among Dresden’s current crop of artists, Rao Fu is the only one with Chinese roots. His contribution to Saxon neo-expressionism has been tantamount to live-cell therapy. His experimentation with painting materials and his all-embracing approach – ranging from Chinese landscape painting to the magical triumvirate of Edvard Munch, Peter Doig and Daniel Richter – can be attributed to his pure experience of colour and has culminated in his working on monumental formats since 2019.

Fu pursues the characteristic Chinese method of using colour in order to enhance the atmospheric. Influences derived from traditional Chinese calligraphy, combined with colour-energy aspects and a figurative form of painting that increasingly takes up the entire pictorial space, communicate a will to form that strives to make the most diverse painterly categories subservient to his ends, as well as interlink many things with a multitude. Fu shows us how the distant is not far-away, but rather quite local and present. It’s no longer a dichotomy of what’s foreign and what’s one’s own, for there’s no longer, or never has been for that matter, a pure, hermetically sealed culture that can be certain of its non-mutable identity. Fu’s paintings are less about cultural divergences than about a debate on cultural hybridity.

Rao Fu studied in China for two semesters. Living in Germany since 2001, he began his studies under Siegfried Klotz and Elke Hopfe. With Klotz, he was able to learn what in German art circles is referred to as the *Dresdnerische*, a specific attribute found amidst “Dresden’s” painters. As the Dresden art historian Diether Schmidt often remarked, a Dresden painterly practice consists in “cultivating atmospheric tone.” Klotz, under whom Fu subsequently studied, became head of the basic studies Department of Painting/Graphic Art at Dresden’s Academy of Fine Arts (HfBK) in 1988. From 1992 until his death in 2004, Klotz was a professor in the basic studies of painting there.

The Dresden School’s traditional painting style involves the use of the impasto painting technique, thereby creating three-dimensionality with its thick crust. From this perspective, anything objective is “anti-Dresdnerische.” Nevertheless, certain Dresden painters also exhibited cool-objective tendencies in the early 20th century, as can be witnessed in Otto Dix’s idiosyncratic realism from before World War I until the early 1930s. In the mid-1970s, Ubertus Giebe revisited this tendency, vitalising his painting style increasingly through his use of colour.

Fu's most important teacher is Ralf Kerbach; he had been forced to leave the German Democratic Republic in 1982, only to return in 1992 when the HfBK Dresden appointed him professor of painting and graphic art. During his time in exile in West Berlin, Kerbach had to constantly grapple with such weighty issues as the partition of Germany and German art, wrestling with questions concerning the status of artistic work in the socialist East German state, the inner torments of whether to go into exile or remain behind, adaptation or resistance. He never gave up and was to succeed in creating grandiose symbols of shattered hopes, painterly designs in a similar vein to predecessors such as Georg Baselitz and Frank Auerbach. Accordingly, he had differentiated and modified his personal style. Cleverly recognizing the real situation, he continues to paint what he wants to paint, not what the art market expects. He teaches his students to think flexibly and to paint thoughtfully and knowledgeably.

Fu was a master-class student under Kerbach from 2008-2010. Fascinated, Fu not only looked at the originals of European art history in museums, but also studied them extensively as a member of the build-team and in the process accumulated experience in dealing with a wide spectrum of painting materials. He learnt from Kerbach what it means to scatter one's gaze, which, between distraction and diversion, leads back to itself over and over again. In his large-format works measuring 220 x 435 cm, which he painted as of 2019, Fu arranges with expansive gestures what his declinable guideline of discussion means aside from dogma – and what exciting painterly effects such an adaptability can incorporate. Fu found himself in that field of tension between the Dresdnerisch poles," though not as a captive soul.

Refusing to take sides, conversely, Fu constantly tested (and still does) what for him could be stimulating or engrossing in order to instil his own insights from calligraphy and Asian landscape painting, for example, or to surf on a wider spectrum of visual platforms. His modus operandi involves appropriating things through adaptation and generating new knowledge. In some of his paintings, this power to adapt is stronger, in others less so. With its ethical principles, our liberal open society is indispensable to this process, because it strengthens the position of the outsider, who as yet lacks any advocates to represent their interests, and who can only find a worthy place in society by virtue of their ideas and capacity for performance.

Rao Fu's Colour Offensive

Rao Fu's grandfather was a practitioner of Chinese calligraphy. Fu's work is unmistakably characterised by this cultural and image-specific coding, as seen, for example, in how he reveals the power of nature through a single brush-stroke or the concretisation of human essence as the expansion of an energetic field in a line. Throughout his studies with the prominent draughtswoman Elke Hopfe, Fu was able to incorporate his approach to stroke design and length that establishes itself as a direct conduit, as the shortest connection from the spiritual via the hand to paper, as well as an objective expression, related to a scientific justification and gravitating toward the anatomical.

Circa 2010, Fu was still working with relatively small formats, but a decade on, his paintings will be reaching wall filling dimensions in spacious exhibition halls (such as Gallery 102 of the Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei National University of Arts). Fu had run the gamut of a process bursting forth with colour. In 2007, Fu was to discover working with bitumen as a painting material, as well as its dark expressive register. As of 2017, figurative aspects come to the fore and his use of paint begins to celebrate the spewing forth of black fury into a smooth parlando.

Fu's expansive pictorial formats formulate a cultural diagnosis akin to the animating effect of a Cinemascope film. They are conceptions of this world that are actually about a differentiated world event and yet remain imbued with something clearly emphatic, an emancipatory energy that will appeal to a wide range of audiences, depending on where they are exhibited. One can find a place in these pictures and yet leave a place behind. They are anchored in the history of art and yet open to a global discourse. They interweave first person perspective, the artist's cultural background, and inferences about his trajectory with the modes of existence of those who receive, like, and perhaps even acquire these painting because they want to have them permanently around. The artist's large-format pictures in particular are open, in the best sense of the term non-narrative through the addition of objects in such a way that the spectator's mind does not at once utterly forget this open ending. Certain design elements continue to haunt the back of one's eyes, while also surfacing in Fu's other compositions. His paintings relate a polyphonic tale and his open, fluid and painterly melody provides the aesthetically seductive interface for this. The unexpected at any moment, the new in the emphatic sense here, it becomes an event. No concrete landscapes can be assigned to Fu's topographical plot. Rather, they are perceived security zones in which he embeds his visual vocabulary. And yet, the manner in which he aligns the seen, the imagined and the dreamt with images from art history reveals precision work.

Whether we find our selves in the past, present, or future is irrelevant in view of the suggestive atmospheric levels. Though Fu doesn't create tableaux that correspond to any experiential reality, they nevertheless are extremely appealing because they trigger emotions. It is precisely these permeable boundaries of reality that trigger not only such feelings as fear, threat, disaster, a sceptical sense of overwhelming, but also a sense of jubilation through and in colour that touches the highest levels of world affirmation. These paintings encompass a multitude: baroque world theatre, romantic yearning, and figures scaled down in the Chinese mode of thinking, shuddering in front of an overwhelming natural backdrop. In mutual interpenetration, the physiological, psychological and intellectual dispositions of those creators of Chinese cave paintings fuse with David Hockney's inspiration through Chinese role models, in which the act of seeing is assumed as moving (1), with hints of Ferdinand Hodler or Max Klinger's symbolism.

Invariably, two roots nourish Fu's thinking and sensations – one Chinese, the other European. Parallels with those Chinese masters such as Chang Yu, Lin Fengmian and Zao Wou-Ki, who were all active in Paris throughout the 1930s, come to mind. Even back then, questions of inclusion and exclusion played a determining role. At that juncture, artistic responses were not presented through a “grammar of national narratives.” As with the above-mentioned Chinese artists, Rao Fu is equally disposed to downgrading Chinese pictorial dynamics, a tendency which not only has to do with likely tags such as “offensive” or “sublime,” but also with the finesses of articulation and phrasing, with deliberate blurring. Multiple details could be used to illustrate this.

Only someone who leaves his homeland to venture out into the unknown can understand what exile entails. To leave or to stay? Twenty years in China. Twenty years in the West. To be here or back there? From 2010 on, Fu painted a series of about thirty paintings under the title “Chimerika”, exposing the clash of cultures – the permanent reciprocal challenges in the symbiotic relationship between China and the United States of America, where either side have declared arrogance as an economic principle – in impressive thunderstorms of images. Fu plants the chimerica as an organism in pictorial space, one comprising genetically different cells and yet representing a unified individual, opening up space for the imagination and the supernatural.

In four versions of *Girl Behind the Tree* (2021), Fu orbits the experiential states of being or becoming estranged in society. Furthermore, he explores the sense of alienation between mankind and nature. Fu is a master in colourful shifts in the image's musicality. His pictorial surfaces pursue a vibration suffused with a metamorphic quality. One then swings into the other. The fragility of one form is absorbed by another and transformed in the flow. Throughout the process, everything remains rich in contrasts, yet lucid, even elegant (cf. also *Socotra Island* or *Villa Bararo*, both from 2021).

Fu's predilection for the colours pyrro-orange and dark blue has evolved slowly yet steadily in order to make an image his own with the greatest technical aplomb in this duality. Whether a picture story is logical or symbolic or simply inscrutable is irrelevant insofar as a painting can captivate with profound, emotional precision. Fu's paintings emanate from world-hungry eyes rather than from a world-designing brain. Their truth-like potency is based upon the artist's painterly linguistic sensitivity. His painterly manoeuvres brim with action. A colour activist, Fu is enclosed in the open space that he himself has created. He has internalised what colour is, how light and darkness relate to each other, how to unfurl the intrinsic worldliness of colour. Whatever a viewer might behold in Rao Fu's paintings, their sole content is colour.

(1)“There is a principle in Chinese painting called ‘moving focus.’ It acknowledges the spectator's moving eye and body. [...] Most of these prints try to utilize this idea in some form. When the body is felt to move, the depiction of space is changed from a static ‘hollowing out’ to a more dynamic restless one...closer, I think, to our experience of it.” (David Hockney in Helen Little, *David Hockney. Moving Focus*, Londres: Tate Publishing, 2021, p. 22)

Selected works



Combustion

2021, 175 x 120 cm, oil on canvas



Squatting Girl

2021, 120 x 80 cm, oil on canvas



Girl behind the tree I

2021, 136 x 115 cm, oil on canvas



Petits Fours

2021, 120 x 150 cm, oil on canvas



Pool

2021, 105 x 135 cm, oil on canvas



Rote Krabbe

2021, 120 x 140 cm, oil on canvas



Insel Socotra
2021, 135 x 175 cm, oil on canvas

About Artist

Born in 1978 in Beijing, China
Lives and works in Dresden, Germany

Formation

2010-2012 Studied art therapy, Academy of Fine Arts Dresden (HfBK), Germany
2008-2010 Meisterschülerstudium with Prof. Ralf Kerbach, Academy of Fine Arts Dresden (HfBK) Germany
2002-2008 Diplom, Class Prof. Ralf Kerbach, Academy of Fine Arts, Dresden (HfBK), Germany
1999-2001 Academy of Arts Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Awards & Grants

2020 Project funding -"Denkzeit", Kulturstiftung des Freistaates. Sachsen
2016 Heimspiel - Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei, scholarship of Kulturstiftung des Freistaates Sachsen
Spielerei Leipzig scholarship
2014 Project funding, Kulturstiftung des Freistaates. Sachsen
2009 DAAD-Award für hervorragende Leistungen ausländischer Studierender
2008-2012 Scholarship of the Heinrich-Böll-Fondation 2006 DAAD-prize
2006 DAAD-prize

Public Collections

Das Nationalmuseum für Geschichte und Kunst Luxemburg (MNHA), Luxembourg
Kunsthands der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, Germany
Kunstmuseum der Stadt Dresden, Dresden, Germany
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Kuandu, Taipei, Taiwan

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2021 Combustion, Galerie Vazieux, Paris, France
- 2020 In The Rain, EIGENHEIM Berlin, Berlin, Germany
- 2019 Night fishing, Gallery EIGENHEIM Berlin (salon), Berlin, Germany
Infinitrace, Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts (KdMoFA), Taipei, Taiwan
- 2018 Paysages Intérieurs, Gallery ARTSCAPE Contemporary S.à.r.l.-S, Luxembourg
CENTURY, Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China
- 2017 COXCOMB, Galerie Irrgang, Berlin, Germany
Rao Fu - Painting, Galerie HeissingsART, Lübeck, Germany
- 2016 »CHIMERICA«, Projektraum Neue Galerie, City Art Gallery, Dresden, Germany
OPEN STUDIO, HALLE 14, Baumwollspinnerei Leipzig, Germany
- 2015 PLANKTON, Galerie Irrgang, Leipzig, Germany
- 2014 Follow Wind, Kunstverein Junge Kunst, Wolfsburg, Germany
- 2013 MIRAGE, Gallery Grafikladen, Dresden, Germany
- 2012 CHIMERICA, Kunstverein Göttingen, Germany
- 2011 Rao Fu Arbeiten, Kunst bei Gericht, Ständehaus, Dresden, Germany
- 2010 Chimäre, Gallery Ling, Berlin, Germany
- 2009 Qi Nian / Sieben Jahren, Gallery Elly Brose Eiermann, Dresden, Germany

Art Fairs

- 2021 Art I Basel OVR Online Viewing Room
Art I Basel HONGKONG, Hongkong, China
- 2020 ASIA NOW Paris Asian Art Fair, France
Art I Basel HONGKONG, Hongkong, China
Art Fair Philippines, Philippine
Taipei Dangdai, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2019 Taipei Dangdai, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2018 Art Düsseldorf 2018, Germany
Art Basel, Hong-Kong, China
- 2016 Amsterdam Drawing, Amsterdam
PAN Amsterdam, Amsterdam
- 2014 Cologne Paper Art, Cologne, Germany
- 2009 SCOPE Basel, International Contemporary Art, Basel, Swiss

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2020 PRISMA-Group exhibition, Galerie EIGENHEIM, Berlin, Germany
Renaissance: Marina CRUZ, Rao FU and SHI Jin-Hua, Mind Set Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan
And Life Goes On: The Special Project for MSAC 10th Anniversary II, Mind Set Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan
Janus: ABHK Booth at MSAC, Mind Set Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2018 CHAOS, avec JHONG Jiang-Ze, TANG Jo-Hung, Mind Set Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2017 1443, Galerie Ursula Walter, Dresden, Germany
- 2015 "Das muss man gesehen haben", 10 Jahren Städtische Galerie Dresden-Erwerbungen und Schenkungen, City Art Gallery Dresden, Germany
Pushing Hands, with Andreas Sachsenmaier, Galerie Ursula Walter, Dresden, Germany
- 2014 DaDa Ty, Hellerau - Europäisches Zentrum der Künste, Dresden, Germany
Kooperation, Galerie Ursula Walter, Dresden, Germany
Cologne Paper Art, Köln, Germany
- 2013 trotz alledem..., Galerie Modul 8, Dresden, Germany
jetzt hier, Gegenwartskunst. Aus dem kunstfonds, Kunsthalle im Lipsiusbau, Dresden, Germany
Homage to Asia, Chinesischer Pavillon, Dresden, Germany
HYPE, Geh8, Dresden, Germany
- 2012 4. Dresdner Biennale des 20. Kunstfestivals Ornö, Dresden, Germany
Die unsichtbaren Städte, 2025 Kunst und Kultur e.V., Hamburg, Germany
Fu: Leyh, mit Stefan Leyh, Gallery cCe Kulturhaus, Leuna, Germany
- 2010 Frühjahrssalon, Galerie ZANDERKASTEN, Dresden, Germany
- 2009 60 V.R. China, Centre culturel chinois, Berlin, Germany
Meisterschüler, Oktagon, Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Dresden, Germany
SCOPE Basel, Basel, Swiss
- 2007 Nebel, HypoVereinsbank, Chemnitz, Germany
Chinakohl, Galerie op-nord, Stuttgart, Germany
- 2006 Telling Surface, Senatssaal, Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Dresden, Germany
- 2005 Niemandsland, Motorenhalle Dresden, Germany
Junge chinesische Kunst, New Galerie Landshut, Landshut, Germany
Meisterschüler HfBK Dresden, Kunstverein Burgwedel/Isernhagen Art Club, Isernhagen, Germany

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