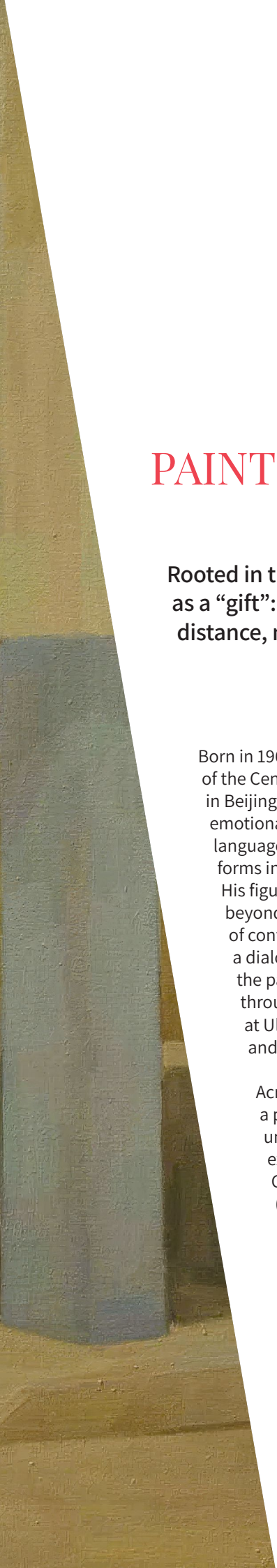


WANG YIN



Filling station 1 (2010), Wang Yin
Courtesy Wang Yin, Vitamin Creative Space



PAINTING AS A GIFT OF TIME

Rooted in theatre and shaped by decades of reflection, Wang Yin sees painting as a “gift”: a dialogue between time, memory and presence. He speaks about distance, modernity, and how art endures as a quiet act of sensing amid change.

Born in 1964 in Jinan, Shandong Province, and a graduate of the Central Academy of Drama, Wang Yin lives and works in Beijing. Initially trained in stage design, he integrates emotional experience and intellectual inquiry into the language of modern oil painting, transforming historical forms into a deeply personal reflection on time and existence. His figures, rendered in muted tones, appear suspended beyond temporal boundaries, evoking the latent spirit of contemporary life. It reveals how painting remains a dialogue between the artist and the world, between the past and the present. This sensibility resonates throughout his exhibition projects such as “The Gift” at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2016) and “Wang Yin 2021” (798 Art Zone, Beijing).

Across more than three decades, Wang has developed a painterly language that resists haste, one that understands creation as both a temporal and existential act. In solo exhibition “Friendship” (Mirrored Gardens, 2017) and more especially “Mother and child” (Mirrored Gardens, Guangzhou, 2023), Wang Yin finds new ways of expressing emotional experience of life that are not necessarily recognised by the people who live it. Whether evoking the meditative rhythm of oil painting or the equilibrium he now feels after sixty years of living, Wang speaks with the same lucidity and calm that characterise his canvases.

How did your background in theatre shape your early development as an artist?

After finishing at the Drama Academy, I began creating art in the 1990s while

still working in theatre for a period of time. Therefore, my painting has always been linked to my theatre background, related to notions of process, time and space.

My graduation thesis in 1988 was focused on Polish dramatist Jerzy Grotowski, a leading figure of the “poor theatre”. Grotowski aimed to remove everything non-essential from theatre: elaborate sets, sumptuous costumes and special effects, to reach a pure form focused solely on the actor and the body. His approach left a deep impression on me and I strive to apply a similar philosophy in my painting, reducing it to its visual essence by eliminating all that is superfluous. What struck me most was his adaptation of 19th century realist and naturalist drama traditions into *avant-garde* theatre, revealing how even methods that seem obsolete can still contain radical vitality. This influenced my work, especially in my early practice and shaped my perception of art and the world.

Confucius once said: “At sixty, one’s ear becomes obedient for the reception of truth.” How would you describe or evaluate sixty years of life so far?

I would reply to this question with an ancient quote by Song Dynasty poet Su Dongpo, “Neither wind nor rain, neither clear nor cloudy.” It captures my feeling about life today. I do not have grand conclusions about my life; many things cannot be reduced to a simple statement. Su’s words resonate with me at this stage of life in a way they did not when I was young. Now, I understand that I am neither very optimistic nor very pessimistic; a sentiment that others may also share.

When you began painting, did you have an idea of what art would mean for you? How has that relationship evolved?

When I first began studying painting, I did not realise it would become a companion. At the beginning, I was simply interested; I was very curious and open to explore. Then, over the years, certain questions started to emerge. As I continued to seek answers and respond to these questions through my work, I began to feel that I had formed a relationship with my work. My relationship with art today continues in the same spirit as in the 1990s. That connection has grown stronger and deeper, but also more challenging. What draws me most is that I see art as an open and expansive working space, simply a space where I can keep creating. A space that allows things to keep unfolding.

Figures in your work seem to be suspended in time. How do you understand time in relation to painting?

Time is an prevalent subject in my work, closely tied to how my experience as an artist has developed. Since my artistic

experience is built through painting, especially oil painting, that is my sense of time, so I understand how my work may appear suspended in time. I see my paintings as a kind of stage where blurred figures and indistinct faces drift through scenes of suspended time. They seem caught somewhere between presence and absence, as if the moment itself were holding its breath. That in-between state creates a quiet tension, one that contrasts with the apparent banality of the everyday subjects I depict. About ten years ago, I produced an exhibition called “Gift”, which was quite representative of the fundamental of the methodology and subject matter in my work. I regard oil painting as a kind of gift. The real question is how to respond to that gift... This question has defined the space of my work even until nowadays. As I continue to uncover layers after layers of my relationship with oil painting, it has increasingly come to involve concepts such as time.

What connects this sense of time with oil painting as a medium?

Oil painting, for me, carries the weight of modernity. Though it may seem ordinary or lack novelty nowadays, it holds special meaning to me and is closely tied to my subject matter. I believe painting inherently contains a sense of time, a kind of temporality. In many of my works, particularly those from the early period, the starting point of creating often involves this temporality. When I try to make this temporality visible, it also reveals certain neglected questions, which means it may bring something unfamiliar to the surface as well.

How is this temporality in your work connected to contemporary life?

I keep a deliberate distance from contemporary life — really, I have

cultivated a kind of detachment. Talking about “the contemporary” is therefore quite abstract for me. My sense of time was shaped along a path I think of as a “20th century moment”, when I first felt modernity arrive — when the world suddenly seemed different. That moment has stretched forward to the present. I do not feel a strong intimacy with contemporary life as it is now — one can debate this — but that is how my experience takes shape. I focus on working through my own lived experience rather than illustrating an external social phenomenon; that distance gives me perspective. After the 1990s, when oil painting became central to my practice, I inscribed that temporality in the medium itself, tying it to my perception and understanding of the modern world. For me — as for some painters — oil painting carries a particular meaning: it bears a long-time scale, layering and memory. Through that time — rooted in the 20th century yet ongoing in my work — my practice engages with the present without seeking to merge with it.

You have lived through great transformations in China’s art world. What was it like when you first started working in Beijing? How do you see those changes now?

As an artist of 60 years old, I would say the art ecosystem in China nowadays was formed quite recently. When I graduated in 1988, there were no galleries, no art collecting systems in China, none of what we know today and take for granted existed, yet the absence of such system did not affect or reduce people’s enthusiasm for art. Since I have lived and worked in Beijing ever since 1988, I recall the 1990s Beijing art scene with nostalgia. Although today’s system



Wang Ying

Courtesy Wang Ying



Exhibition view of "Wang Yin 2021", Beijing, 2021

Courtesy Vitamin Creative Space



“Art is a state of mind. It is not about form or style, but something you feel directly from within yourself.”
— Wang Yin

did not exist, art at that time was not inactive; it had a kind of vitality and collectivity. Back then, there were only several not very formal exhibitions, but artists did not feel lonely or isolated as we would see one another during those shows. There was a strong sense of community. I experienced the period when artists gathered together, produced underground publications and hosted exhibitions in friends' apartments, creating an ambiance of radicalism. After 2000, around 2002 or 2003, galleries began to appear in China and gradually formed today's ecosystem and the art world became dominated by novelty and spectacles. My generation of artists holds a special feeling about that period in the 1990s. That earlier period cannot be re-made or repeated; it was unique. Once systems are established, elements can become more standardised and lack fluidity.

How do you view younger artists working in this new ecosystem and how do you feel about the commercialisation of art today?

Young artists today are much more professional than we were. Our generation was not like that. I often read early 20th century European memoirs and I find that they too faced realities very different from those of later generations. Each era has its own particularity and cannot be compared with another.

I feel that today's art scene is clearly more oriented around trade. During most of my career, especially in the early years, there was no commercial art market at all, not the kind of well-established commercial ecosystem for the arts that exists today. However I am not very sensitive to these structural changes. My concerns are more at a personal level.

Do social shifts of this fast-changing world influence your art, even if indirectly?

Transformations happen every day, often imperceptibly, and they inevitably affect everyone. Since I live and work within the same era, my work is naturally touched by these forces. Still, I deal more with personal feelings than with social or political themes. I take in information and impressions from many directions as they resonate with me. Then I respond to them in my own way. I do not aim to explain or analyse these influences, but rather to absorb and reveal them through my practice, acting as a receiver rather than an interpreter.

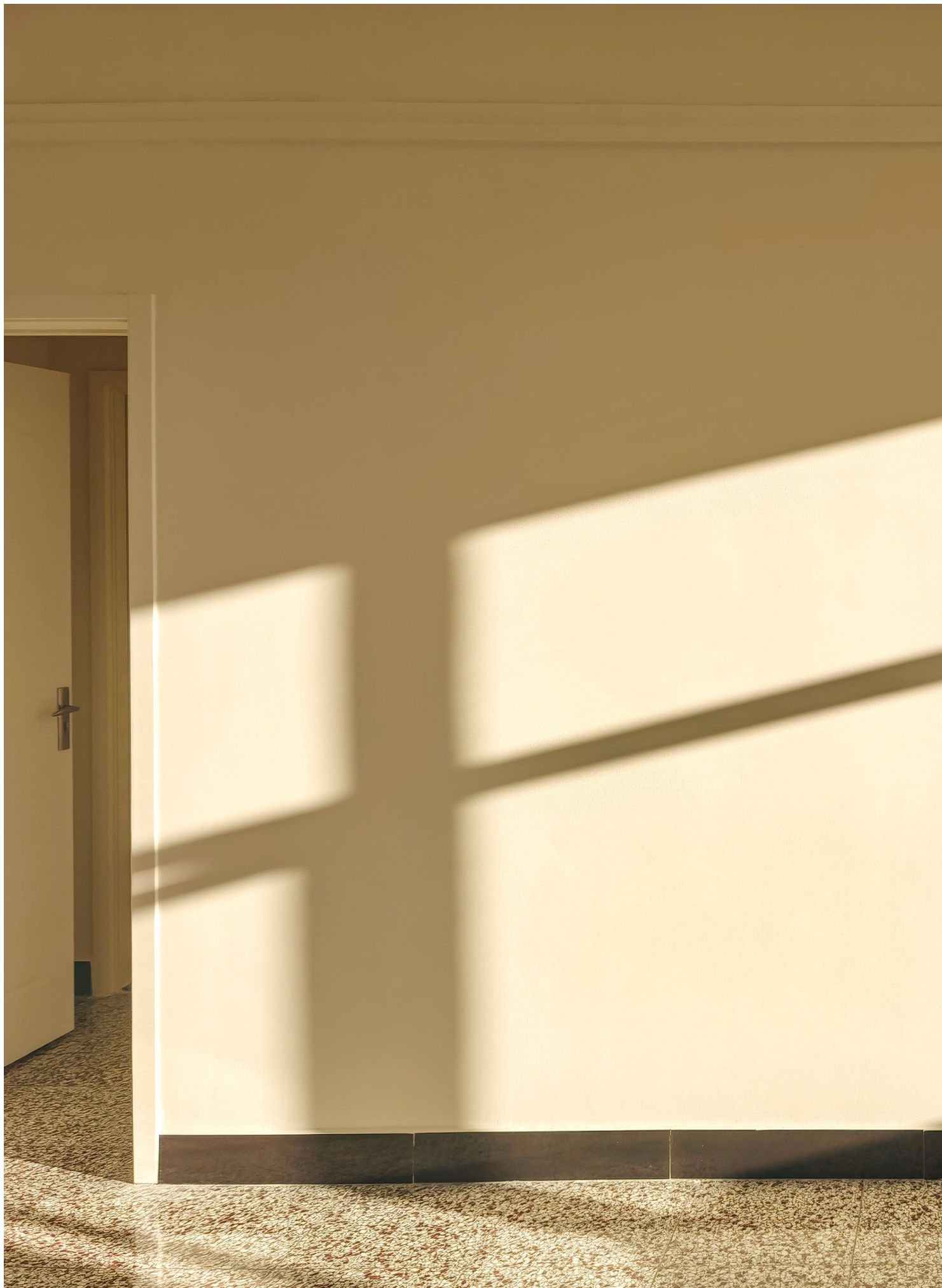
What does art mean for you?

What can it bring in uncertain times?

That is a difficult question, as it touches on the very essence of artistic value, what makes art meaningful today; and that is never simple to define. Art can be understood in many ways: as production, originality, creation or reflection. For me, art is a state of mind. It is not about form or style, but something you feel directly from within yourself. Art becomes a place that accumulates feelings: a space, a language, a bridge through which those feelings can be expressed. Whether in visual art, writing or theatre, I believe many creators share the same drive: to express something deeply felt in life through their work. These feelings are essential in today's world of uncertainty and constant change. And when I say “feelings”, I am not referring to mere emotions or sensations, but to something deeper, something that strikes us instantly and profoundly, involving both mind and spirit. Art connects directly with personal experience. Each person's understanding and perception are different, so what they see or feel before an artwork will always be unique.

Father 1 (2010), Wang Yin
Courtesy Wang Yin, Vitamin Creative Space







Exhibition view of "Wang Yin: Fragrant", DRC No.12, Beijing

Courtesy Wang Yin, DRC No.12