

ANTHEM!



38 SPRING
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TEXT
SCOTT INDRISEK

WEI DONG'S VIBRANTLY SURREAL CANVASES remind us of the best work of John Currin or the Russian duo Dubossarsky & Vinogradov. The Chinese-American artist's imagery—with an emphasis on the female nude, lovingly rendered in a variety of unexpected, impossible or otherwise perverse scenarios—proves that the traditional medium of painting has a ways to go before it exhausts itself. "To paint things right in front of my eyes does not motivate me," Dong explains. "To create my own figures that do not exist in reality but do exist in my fantasy, fascinates me—and to experience them more intimately through my brushes is the best of all. The female nude, to me, is always unknown. I paint female figures, but at the end of the day, it's about life, desire, fear and the anxiety I experience through them. It is about understanding my desire, and myself."

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PLAYMATE

"You can think of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* or Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* as the art historical references. But in terms of art historical references in general, I want to clarify that my works often may appear to have some historical references, but they are not as relevant as some may think. They are just a tool or context used to reveal what I really want to share.

Here, the female nude, so alive but not aware of the surroundings, is put under the gazes of people around her. Think about how we often feel being exposed right under the gazes of people surrounding us...The cake is allegorical. It happened subconsciously. When I painted this piece, I had this strong urge to paint something cut open but did not want to do it with the nude, who looked so innocent and was completely not aware of what was happening around her. I wanted to keep her intact. Instead, the cake was cut open."

ELEGY

"Back in art school, religious paintings from the Renaissance influenced me a lot—not the religious meaning itself, but rather the tragic effect in them. You can clearly see that in this painting. When I paint, I try to seek things that really move me and place them in a composition where the historical art references serve as the axis. Through this process, I try to find myself."

GAME WITH A FISH

"The composition is influenced by Botticelli's *Three Graces in Primavera*. The enormous 'catch' between the two nudes is a surrogate for a male form. I love using brushes to neutralize things that could be cruel and brutal in real life. In this piece, looking from afar, the flow, composition, geometry, elegance and mystery grab you right away—but getting closer, you see the shark-like fish being slit from top to bottom. I enjoy the contrast between the brutality of the dissection and the beauty within the painting."





TWO GIRLS

"The girl in the front was from a photo that an artist friend took of his model. In the photo, she was just sitting there with her hands right by her legs. The expression on her face drew me; it's a kind nervousness—not knowing what to do. When I painted her, I created a scene that you would never see in reality. But the expression on the girl's face remains the same, and that is what moves me the most. The mysterious figure peeking out from behind the dogs is an observer who is trying to figure out what is happening. Often I like placing an observer in the works, sometimes in the form of animals, other times in the form of a female figure. It feels like placing myself naked right there: I am observing it, challenging it, participating in it, and I am also part of it."