



WELLSPRING

An exhibition with works by
**Michael Angelo Bala, Tomasz Kowalski, Eric McHenry
and Yan Xinyue**

CLEARING Los Angeles
May 11 - June 15, 2024

This exhibition brings together artists who codify space, whether elongating the picture plane à la Yan Xinyue's *Her with her landscape #2*, or Michael Angelo Bala's architectural objet trouvés. Tomasz Kowalski similarly proposes a reorientation of space, in a trio of images that challenge conventional perspective. The characteristic weirdness across Eric McHenry's compositions is also a bedrock here, as he depicts apparently banal subjects with dreamlike flair. The term wellspring is understood as "a source of continual supply," one that is consigned to the infinite. This communicates both the artists' referential underpinnings and each work's potential to become muse-objects.

Eric McHenry's paintings oscillate between cropped images of natural subjects, weird portraiture, theatrical scenes, and beyond. Themes of pastoralism, religion, and the surreal often feature in his work, though McHenry strives toward an equilibrium that tampers any potential chaos. *Center of a Library (Respite)* is a void land without people or chairs, though it becomes a contemporary allusion to the Library of Babel's infinitudes. Also on view in the gallery is a "flying fish" that connects back to the exhibition's namesake.

The Animal finds its referent in a work by Pieter Bruegel the Elder aptly titled *Two Monkeys*. McHenry, however, zooms in on just one of the collared mangabeys. The situation of his subject is also a departure from the original, as the lone monkey is featured without the weight of a chain. What this suggests, perhaps, is a sort of freedom previously unavailable to the creature. The ominous backdrop in Bruegel's original is also reduced to a small fraction of its contemporary counterpart. McHenry riffs on the Antwerp landscape, though forgoes the majority of it in service of his painting's mammalian subject.

Active a century after Breugel, Bada Shanren (or Zhu Da) emerged as one of the most important artists in Chinese history. His semi-abstract articulations of the natural world are infused with calligraphic acumen and swell with emotionalism. Yan Xinyue recognizes Bada as a crucial figure in the tradition of Chinese painting, and thus borrows from his work and other artists from this historical vantagepoint. She observes a spell-binding energy spurred by precise brushwork as well as the expert balance between painted and unpainted zones. Practitioners like Qi Baishi and Qian Xuan formulate their work with a knowing touch that Yan pulls from while still maintaining her own painterly poetics.

Yan stages pictorial situations that incorporate a metropolitan sensibility as she continuously observes the speed and alienation inherent to city living. The emergent paints are specified though, rooted in Yan's experience of loneliness and displacement through her international travels. Transparency of colors and zonal disarticulations are the formal tenets that contribute to this visual imagination. As such, Edvard Munch's landscapes are considered in conjunction with Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*. The latter's impressionist haze is funneled into Yan's *Her with her landscape #2*, a painting whose verticality also aligns with a traditional Chinese scroll format.

Three paintings by Tomasz Kowalski demonstrate the artist's iteration of a "new surrealism" that is deeply intertwined with his Polish roots. In an untitled canvas one of two discernable figures is caught in a folding door while a foregrounded brunette gazes off, seemingly unbothered. Interior and exterior are similarly frustrated in *siblings*, which situates its cast of characters alongside a technicolor door. A mass of tumbling figures on the right

provides a counterpoint to the contemplative duo that appear amidst a picturesque landscape. No matter the particularities, each painting contributes to a theater of Kowalski's design. The oversaturation of images, both functional and nonfunctional, is an operative factor in the artist's effort to eke out his own framework.

Kowalski counterbalances the influences of Bruno Schulz and Witold Wojtkiewicz with his own compositional lexicon. As such, inflections of abstract surrealism and fantastic symbolism are woven into the frame. Beyond the content, a consistent formal logic is manifest across Kowalski's compositions. From up close, oils soak into or coagulate atop the linen's surface. The canvas thus reveals its own materiality, albeit piecewise.

Space emerges again as a foremost concern for Michael Angelo Bala. His freestanding sculptures populate the room with their marked dimensionality, wedded to his installation-oriented practice. These collaged objects distend materials from their original situation and spin them into structural investigations. *Mirrored Wool and Cross section (Silver of shadows)* are combinations of red oak handrails, chair parts, and other sundry items that the artist accumulates through careful selection.

Bala's assemblage tactics are also applied to a wall-bound work that functions as a dimensional form of sketching. *Green of shadows's* nature pulls from minimalism as well as color field painting, which rose to prominence in New York City during the mid twentieth century. The practitioners of this mode include Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Jules Olitski, and Helen Frankenthaler. Newman succinctly elucidates the style in an essay from 1948 in which he pronounces that he and his colleagues "are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions," and, as such, produce "images whose reality is self-evident and which are devoid of the props and crutches that evoke associations with outmoded images, both sublime and beautiful." Bala leverages this history and funnels a marked consideration of form and environment into his objects. He limits visual characteristics, reducing the format to repeated dots and an Yves Klein blue background. The green orbs mimic shadows, while the piece at large enforces a stable locus.

Wellspring thus cultivates both architectural and imaginal passions, which coagulate in the gallery space. Dialoguing across mediums, these four artists actualize their individual mindscapes while producing work that broaches common currents.

Michael Angelo Bala (born 1994 in Maui, Hawaii) lives and works in Los Angeles. He received a BA from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2019.

Solo and group exhibitions of his work have been held at Overduin & Co., Los Angeles, CA; Et al., San Francisco; Paul Soto, Los Angeles; CASTLE, Los Angeles; Tiffany's, Los Angeles; and PEANA, Mexico amongst others.

Tomasz Kowalski (Born 1984 in Poland) lives and works between Warsaw and Antwerp.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis; Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw; Dawid Radziszewski Gallery, Warsaw; 15 Orient, New York and Carlier | Gebauer, Berlin, among others

His work has been included in group exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthalle Wien; De Appel, Amsterdam; S.M.A.K, Ghent; MUMOK, Vienna; La Casa Encendida, Madrid; Zacheta National Gallery, Warsaw; MOMA, Warsaw; National Museum, Warsaw; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius; Timothy Taylor London, Simone Subal, New York; Sophie Tappeiner, Vienna and Crèvecoeur, Paris, among others.

Tomasz Kowalski's work belongs to the collections of Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Pinault Collection, Paris; X Museum, Beijing; Boros Collection, Berlin; Frac des pays de la Loire, Nantes; MUMOK, Vienna and MOCAK, Poland among others.

He is the recipient of awards including a Prix de Dessin de la Fondation d'Art Contemporain Daniel et Florence Guerlain.

Eric McHenry (Born 1989 in Illinois) lives and works in Los Angeles.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at Praz Delavallade, Los Angeles and Slow Culture Gallery, Los Angeles, among others.

His work has been included in group exhibitions at Fisher Parrish Gallery, New York; Harper's Books, Los Angeles; Praz Delavallade, Los Angeles; A+D Museum, Los Angeles; Sulk, Chicago and Slow Culture Gallery among others.

Yan Xinyue (Born 1992 in China) lives and works in Los Angeles, USA.

She received a BA from Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art in 2015 and an MA from Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in 2018.

Solo and two-person exhibitions of her work have been held at Capsule Shanghai, Shanghai; Sans Titre, Paris and Jack Barrett, New York.

Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Capsule, Shanghai; Public, London; Harpers, Los Angeles; Capsule, Venice; Giovannis Room, Los Angeles and Sans Titre, Paris; and Flemish Cultural Center De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam, among others.