

Ugo Schildge Synthesis

2021.05.15 – 2021.07.10

Bldg. 105, 199 Hengshan Rd. Shanghai

11:00 – 19:00, Tuesday – Saturday

Galerie DUMONTEIL Shanghai is pleased to present “Synthesis”, Ugo Schildge’s second solo exhibition with the gallery, featuring 24 artworks that showcase Schildge’s most recent development on his mixed-media pictorial creations. Combined with a reflection on social reality, the artist initiated a multi-chapter cycle started with “Pollen” in Shanghai in 2018, “Nectar” in NYC in 2019, “Essence” in Paris in 2020, and now the loop closes and anticipates the “Synthesis”¹ of his artistic research around the balance of nature.

The Paradox of Forest Fires

Using the forest fire as a major vehicle, the exhibition highlights the paradox in natural phenomena, philosophical reflections as well as the artist’s practice. The fire ravages, destroys and devours the environment and its inhabitants with great violence, yet it is also an integral part of the forest ecosystem. Long-interval, low-intensity wildfires allow the forest to breathe; it fertilizes the soil and eliminates weeds and animal parasites.

Based on a similar contradiction, Schildge contrasts the raw materials of construction sites — concrete, plaster, and wood — with generally delicate, fragile, ephemeral, or incandescent subjects. This same concrete, the accomplice of modern urbanism that hinders nature, is used to create a flower, a bird, or a tree. Just as the forest fires opened a new chapter in the ecology of the forest, Schildge’s creations bring colorful and diverse forms to materials that we perceive as monotonous, rigid, or cold, sending us messages from nature.

The subject is also a pretext for Schildge’s stylistic research in his increasingly matured language. Like water, fire is formless, which creates both challenges and new possibilities for visual representation. The artist exploited it with varying scenarios, such as the burning flames in “Magnolia”, the high-intensity fires in “Jungle Bomb”, and the aftermath in “Charred Forest”. The literalness here is voluntary. It allows the artist to divert the viewer from pondering the artistic concept to observing his technique — the interplay of pigmented plaster and concrete orchestrated by wood. The infinite variations of form, texture, and color make an irresistible invitation for scrutiny.

¹ The term synthesis refers, in the dialectical philosophy of the 19th-century German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, to the higher stage of truth that combines the truth of a thesis and an antithesis.

Pictorial Experiment with Morphology and Camouflage

Ugo Schildge once explored the cogwheel as a mechanism for reshaping the relationship between image and movement and later as a subject matter for his pictorial creation. In these practices, the artist has gradually developed his language that distinguishes itself from painting.

In "Pollen", his first solo exhibition at Dumonteil Shanghai in 2018, Schildge has already emphasized the importance of "camouflage" as an expressive technique, "I have always been interested in the distortion of images, such as hiding or emphasizing an image depending on your viewing angle. 'Camouflage' is essential to my work. Instead of hiding the idea completely, I prefer to cover a small part, maybe a secret, a taboo. And this can be achieved through 'camouflage'."

In this exhibition, camouflage is used to show the presence of people and other animals. For instance, in the "Jungle Bomb", the expressive power of the vegetal elements takes precedence over a human existence in the form of a bust that merges with the landscape, making it almost invisible. Coexisting with the fire is the excess of human desires, evoking our introspection and reflection.

Through his unique approach, Ugo Schildge applies the sense of volume to the plane of the painting. His work blurs the boundaries between painting and sculpture, canvas and medium, control and freedom while creating dynamism between technique and perception through morphology and camouflage.

A Vivid Interpretation of the Circle of Life

The forest has long been a repository of life and an essential source of aesthetic inspiration for human beings. In the face of nature, humans have always been self-centered. Nevertheless, the relationship between humans and the environment has never been about dominating and being dominated. Schildge's works, most of which are 2 meters high, depict life stories through the first perspective, allowing us to look beyond the digital images and see our actual position.

To this series on fires, a few "Water Lilies" are added as a soothing conclusion. Water is, therefore, the answer to fire, restoring the equilibrium dear to the artist. In "The Pond", while using the scattered perspective inspired by traditional Chinese painting, the artist has created a vivid depiction of floating lotus leaves with a touch of depth and reflection, specific to his material and technique.

The artist chooses his side — the untamable wild nature. The domestication of the latter appears to us only through the sunflowers, cultivated in a field or gathered in a bouquet in homage to the master Van Gogh. Meanwhile, the rotating frame customized for "Water Lilies II" and "The Bouquet" is both a review of the artist's point of departure revolving "cogwheels", and a dynamic interpretation of the Cyclical Movement of Tao.

Through this exhibition, Ugo Schildge gives us a "Synthesis" of the multi-faceted nature. He assumes a non-demanding ecological posture and confronts us with the deterioration of our ecosystem. Perpetuating the circle of nature in concrete, the artist wishes to give us a testimony, a glimpse of hope, a reminder that once mother nature stops living and breathing, so do we. The continuation of human civilization is predicated on facing the changes in climate and environment.