

PRESS RELEASE

Liu Xiaodong. Slow Homecoming
9 June to 19 August 2018

A joint exhibition by the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf

The Chinese artist Liu Xiaodong has long been a superstar in Asia and belongs to the legendary generation of artists who peacefully demonstrated on Tiananmen Square, challenged the system, and years later caused a worldwide sensation. *Slow Homecoming*, a joint exhibition by the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf, will present the world's first comprehensive retrospective on this exceptional Chinese artist from 9 June to 19 August 2018.

Curated by Heinz-Norbert Jocks, the double exhibition *Slow Homecoming* is a world premiere and the first exhibition to focus on the enormous complexity of Liu Xiaodong's oeuvre. It features works from the years 1983 to 2018, including some sixty paintings, sketches, photographs, overpainted photographs, a digital painting machine, journal notes, and the internationally acclaimed, black-and-white avant-garde film *The Days* (1993) directed by Wang Xiaoshuai.

The Kunsthalle Düsseldorf will offer an overview of Liu's painting, supplemented by the film, which will be shown on 18 June 2018 at 7 p.m. at the Black Box in Düsseldorf. Produced outside the state-run film system, the film was promptly blacklisted after its release. *The Days* tells the story of the married couple Dong (played by Liu Xiaodong) and Chun (played by his wife, the artist Yu Hong), who after their studies at the Beijing Art Institute live in destitution, hoping to one day be able to live from their art. The NRW-Forum will focus on the artist's works of photography as well as his digital engagement with painting and will also present the digital painting machine that was developed in collaboration with scientists. In the exhibition space, pictures taken with a camera installed on the rooftop of the NRW-Forum will be transferred to the canvas by the painting machine in real time. The slowness with which the digital image transforms into an analogue image produces the disorienting impression that the painter is moving the brush over the canvas remotely.

Slow Homecoming approaches the extraordinary complexity of Liu Xiaodong's work not only through the different media presented at the two exhibition venues, but also through a thematic division into four chapters. The starting point is the town of Jincheng (Liaoning Province), where Liu Xiaodong was born in 1963 and grew up.

The second chapter deals with his travels within China, the third with traveling outside his homeland, and the final chapter with his return to Beijing.

Liu Xiaodong belongs to the circle of contemporary artists who caused a worldwide sensation and were recently presented at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. As a painter struggling against the absolutism of collective thinking, he is committed to the diversity of cultures and subjectivity. In his works he deals with the conditions of human existence and addresses global issues such as shifts in population, environmental crises, and economic upheaval. For years he has sensitively and critically dealt with minorities both within and outside China as well as the rapid changes in Chinese society. For the double exhibition, Liu Xiaodong realized the project *Transgender/Gay* in Berlin, for which he created portraits of the transgender woman Sasha Maria von Halbach and the gay Chinese artist Isaac

Chong. Along with his paintings, which capture the immediate impressions of the location, a film realized according to the artist's concept focuses on the mutual relationship between the artist and his models.

What is unusual about Liu Xiaodong's artistic practice is that he usually does not paint based on photos or from memory, but in front of the subject, like Cézanne. He is concerned with the physical and psychological confrontation with the outside world and its translation into unique images in the mind parallel to reality, which testify to his deep empathy and sensitivity. He approaches foreign places and people with the greatest possible openness. Out of his obsessive desire to depict the world around him in accordance with his "organically organizing imagination" (Peter Handke), due to his experiences in China and elsewhere, he prefers to rely on his own perception, experience, and perspective rather than on images from the media.

The exhibition is a joint undertaking by the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf. It is curated by Heinz-Norbert Jocks in cooperation with Gregor Jansen and Alain Bieber. The exhibition design was created by Francesca Fornasari. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalog, which includes an interview with Liu Xiaodong and texts by Gregor Jansen, Heinz-Norbert Jocks, and Pi Li.

About Liu Xiaodong

Liu Xiaodong, born in 1963 in the small industrial town of Jincheng, moved to Beijing at the age of seventeen to study art at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). In 1988 he received a bachelor of fine arts, and in 1975 he earned the title of "master" in oil painting. From 1998 to 1999 he continued his studies overseas at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Complutense University in Madrid. He then became professor of painting at CAFA.

As a student at CAFA, the most important art academy in China, he made a name for himself as an actor in the black-and-white underground movie *The Days* by the filmmaker Wang Xiaoshuai. Banned in China, the film was a great success abroad and was recognized by the BBC as one of the 100 most important international films of the past century. Fascinated by his painting, it was the famous American painter Mark Tobey who was the first in New York to recognize the quality of Liu Xiaodong's work, and he exhibited it in his studio in 1994, where he introduced his great discovery to fellow artists and important figures in the American art scene.

In Europe, Liu Xiaodong was featured in the group exhibition *Des artistes chinois à la Fondation Louis Vuitton* (2016), among others. In October 2018, important paintings by him will be featured in the group exhibition *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World* curated by Alexandra Munrow, Hou Hanru, and Philip Tinari at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Liu Xiaodong. Slow Homecoming

Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and NRW-Forum Düsseldorf

Exhibition dates: 9 June – 19 August 2018

Opening: 8 June 2018

7:30 p.m.: Opening at the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf

9 p.m.: Opening at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf

Press conference: 8 June 2018

11 a.m. at the Kunsthalle, 12 p.m. at the NRW-Forum with lunch until 1:30 p.m.

Screening of *The Days* (1993)

Director: Wang Xiaoshuai

Dates: 18 June 2018, 7 p.m.

Black Box, Schulstraße 4, 40213 Düsseldorf

Images are available on www.kunsthalle-duesseldorf.de, Login: user: press, password: information

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