

# Petzel

Edward Waisnis, "Xie Nanxing's Odes to Diversion at Petzel," *Whitehot Magazine*, May 18, 2025.



## Xie Nanxing's Odes to Diversion at Petzel



*Xie Nanxing, "Exploited Dream No. 1", 2022, oil on canvas, 78.75 x 94.5 inches, Photo: Jason Mandella, Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York*

By **EDWARD WAISNIS** May 18, 2025

The blazing transformation of Xie Nanxing's birthplace, Chongqing,\* it would seem, has been absorbed into his verdurous practice, Evincing in roiling layers, reflective of the ever-elusive unconscious, tapping into the jetsam of slumber, Xie seeks liberty from the erstwhile recalcitrant restraints imposed by the picture plane.

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The group of *Eight Dreams* comprising this, Xie's second exhibition at Petzel, consists of the titular number of uniformly-sized canvases that were previously exhibited in China in late 2023 where they were included as part of a group show. †

Earlier work engaged with wafts of the invasive streams of our digitizing world. Xie never crossing the line to populist allegiance, steered a course clear of the support of trend in deference to a metaphysical psycho-social stance through which he mines the ephemera of the psyche.

The touch of Post-Impressionist Les Nabis master Pierre Bonnard signals in Xie's dapple dependent handling. Of course, the obvious discernible correlation to Expressionist primogenitors is predominant. The German 'neo' version—from the 80s to the contemporaneous—in the fray of comparison, being the most apt.



*Xie Nanxing, "Exploited Dream No. 2", 2022, oil on canvas, 78.75 x 94.5 inches, Photo: Jason Mandella, Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York*

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Letterforms and texts waft in and out of view over the first four pictures in the series. A struck-through to an extent of indecipherably—poem that may provide the key to the work's overarching theme(s), enmeshed in clouds of scratched cancellation, cascade as garlands of palimpsest in the posting wall feast that is *Exploited Dream No. 2*, 2022, hinting towards censorship, a relied on principle of a repressive society. Resolved with clouds of pooling pigment, fading in and out, presenting tinges of atmosphere. Additionally, the atmosphere is distinctly redolent of prototypical postings one would encounter in China. The distinction evidential of Xie's cultural geography; an individualistic note of heritage that graces the work with unique enlivening aspect.

*Exploited Dream No. 1*, 2023, codifies meandering bright blue tubular structures—laid out like a garden hose left on a lawn, kinks and all—hinged to a vermillion field transversed above with reaches of blue and green, overlaid with a screed of powdery white, imitative of sky. Crudely rendered standards bisected to include yellow and black near-halves, dance on lawn denoting meaning beyond my grasp of knowledge. The combination of palette and compositional aspect allow Philip Guston into the conversation. At the same time, there is aspects from Albert Oehlen in the elan of the dash of measured carelessness. The spirit of openness that illuminates Oehlen's proto abstract linear skein of nets, conduits and puddles inhabits Xie's own skittering brush trails. Incidentally, I find the regimented pencil grid underpinnings at moments appearing uninflected, more often peeking out between the obliteration of gesture—a handsome souvenir of the artist's hand/mind exercises.

In the past Xie has rifled amongst digital technology for inspiration, literally fracturing the painted surface, spoofing the pixelation of bitmapping. Here he has off-ramped in response to the rule of domains overseen by tech bros, for independence from the vestiges of societal groupthink. At least, that is the wish.

Something akin to Gerhard Richter's use of plastic sheeting to peel away layers of paint (leaving substrate pocks alluring revealing previous passes) or Georg Baselitz' intentionally crude mono-type imprinting method of pressing two canvasses together is afoot in Xie's utilization of a technique he has garnered from precedents in Chinese ink painting. Executing an image on a layer of unprimed canvas laid atop the target work below Xie encourages the bleed through as activating accents of transmutable gesture reflective of the impossibility of capture dimensions locked in the hippocampus. The resultant blotter effect recalling early stain painting—Sam Francis, Gladys Benoit, et. al. Xie refers to the traces left as shadows, ‡ implying that his interest in the unconscious acknowledges the allure and caution inherent in the nefarious mystery of the indecipherable.

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*Installation view, “Xie Nanxing: Eight Dreams”, Petzel, 2025. Photos by Dan Bradica. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York.*

The structure, with the softness of pastel, of *Exploited Dream No. 3*, 2023 is at once a warmly beckoning cottage with sparks of twilight leading up to it, a carnival balloon tree (or, is it a cactus) sprouting above the roofline, or a natural outcropping of near-miraculousness, with one searching for St. Francis’ presence amongst this wilderness.

Much as Picasso was invested in the twisted gaze a handful of international painters, Peter Doig, Amy Sillman, Richter the younger, Cecily Brown, and Jason Woodie Fox among them, have been championing elusive imagery, blending the stylings of late-Modernism with a surrealistic impulse. It is my contention that Xie Nanxing sits comfortably in the company of this emergent early twenty-first century strain.



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*Xie Nanking, "Exploited Dream No. 8", 2023, oil on canvas, 78.75 x 94.5 inches, Photo: Jason Mandella, Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York*

Case in point, Xie delves this descriptive in *Exploited Dream No. 8*, 2023, where is the monstrous qualities of the naked body are flaunted. But for the subject, replicated from snapshots of the artist himself, given the aura harking to a melding of Tiepolo and Boucher, it could be installed on a Venetian ceiling, or in an alcove of The Frick Collection. Simultaneously, with a savage weight it exudes a power along the lines of Lucian Freud's portraits of the late Leigh Bowery, minus the melancholy.

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*Xie Nanxing, "Exploited Dream No. 5", 2023, oil on canvas, 78.75 x 94.5 inches, Photo: Jason Mandella, Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York*

As Sigmar Polke was known to for, Xie's includes detached incisions of signifiers of their indigenous culture witness in *Exploited Dream No. 5*, 2023 where Asiatic appearing deities—tourist market tchotchke?—form a trinity, joining with a cartoon thought bubble tornado evaporating before them.

*Exploited Dream No. 6*, 2023 bears description as a riff on Matisse's *Dance* depicting as it does a bevy of headless figures in a circular formation. (First impressions not always being reliable, the work is truthfully redolent of the ripe-for-reinstatement candidate of the moment, in the person of Francis Picabia, currently featured in a much touted exhibition a couple of blocks away at Hauser & Wirth) and an absorbing take on Dadaists absurdity that adds up to being among the fiercest representatives of the reveries of a dreamscape in the exhibition.

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Pitting the self-inflicted disputes in the trade, A.I., and other fields of endeavor, between our countries, in the trade, A.I., and expansion of a global market, against harnessing the voracious appetite for diversity, equity and inclusion as considerations when considering which artists are shown and collected is particularly resonant in these uniquely fraught times. As the world finds itself in the grip of resurgent nationalism, isolationism, and resurgent Fascism dare I applaud (and lament) Globalism? And while I am at it, celebrate the arrival of the visually and sensorily stimulating—while not overtly provocative—paintings of Xie Nanxing to these shores.

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- The Chinese megacity, located in the southwest of the country, that has sprouted to the position of contested largest city in the world. Xie Nanxing presently splits his time between Beijing and Chengdu.

† “Painting Unsettled”, UCCA Edge, Shanghai, China, 2023.

‡ Referring to this ‘canvas printing’ method Xie stated: “The spots that are left behind are fundamentally linked—as evidence—to the completed work. These surplus materials carry some of that work’s meaning. They are like its shadow”. “Artist’s first solo exhibition in London offers new perspective” by Bo Leung, China Daily Global, June 19, 2019:<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201906/10/WS5cfe7ceaa31017657723060d.html>

**Xie Nanxing: *Eight Dreams***

**Petzel**

**520 West 25th Street, New York**

**April 17–May 23, 2025**

<https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/xie-nanxing-s-odes-diversion/7015>