

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present From Leaves to Shields, an exhibition of new work by Guan Xiao. The exhibition will be on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from May 13 through June 16, 2023. An opening reception will be held on Friday, May 12 from 6 to 8 PM.

Guan Xiao's work traces the lineages and connections between disparate imagery and iconography sourced from the digital realm. The works on view imbue the flattening effect of the smartphone screen and generate cohesive textures from contrasting, and even conflicting, worlds to fuse old and modern, digital and analog, and natural and artificial modes. By juxtaposing discordant images and materials, the artist reconsiders the technological thrust of the present moment and the capacity for physical objects to store memory.

In From Leaves to Shields, Guan Xiao creates a new installation, paintings, and floor-based sculptures that explore design, technology, and our fractured relationship with the natural environment. Episodic poetry and visual references throughout the exhibition hone in on a more mnemonic approach to these themes. The works on view incorporate familiar motifs such as an apple emoji, plant life, and the color green—commonly associated with nature and environmentalism—and mimic figurative forms in their presentation.

In the central triptych, the artist further explores the natural environment and the human influence in the manipulation of natural resources—both for creative purposes and for more industrial uses, like the design of combat weaponry. The first of the three canvases is reminiscent of a paint palette, a recurring form in the artist's practice, which likens the maker's hand to the manufacturing engine in production. A plant stem with visible nodes prominently extends out across the two adjacent rectangular canvases. Plants are a critical icon in Guan Xiao's presentation, both in their self-protective quality, similar to a shield, and in their ability to store information on a cellular level, which strengthens their relationship to the internet's capacity to endlessly store data. The artist

abstracts found images of foliage to find a more haptic sensibility in the composition, pulling the viewer closer to—as if touching—the textures and patterns organically constructed from the collaged elements. The rippled pixelation and contrasting qualities in light and color showcase the influence of—and Guan Xiao's engagement with—Impressionist techniques combined with low-res images sourced online.

Throughout the show, bronze-cast sculptures of tree roots—an ongoing typology in the artist's larger project—populate the space. In these works, known as Root Sculptures, Guan Xiao rethinks the value of traditional objects, making futuristic, anthropomorphic sculptures that stretch out over the floor and extend upwards with antenna-like additions, implying ideas of transmission or communication. The twisted and gnarled tree trunks are made using the ancient Chinese tradition of root carving, a process of sculpting and polishing tree roots into chairs, tea tables, and other functional design objects that have continued well into today. Guan Xiao has described her Root Sculptures as an ideal form: they are at once ready-made and naturally shaped by environmental conditions, causing the tree roots to curve in shape over long periods of growth. The tree itself creates lines and shapes in the negative space, embodying a figurative-like form in movement.

In the installation, "Apples are the favorite food of butterflies." she said. (2023), Guan Xiao combines several distinct objects to stage an independent environment within the exhibition. The figural sculptural object near the center of the installation continues the artist's interest in how sculpture can mirror aspects of the human body. The other elements in the work form a subtle connection between the placement of specific fruits and materials in classical still lifes and human interpretation through memory associations. Together, they pose the question: can memory move beyond subjective interpretation and, instead, live in the physical properties of an object?

Across From Leaves to Shields, texts accompany the works on view, providing an entry point into each object from the artist's perspective. While the narrative structure is not

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prescriptive, it functions as an alternative reading into the nuances of the material and narrative history of Guan Xiao's work. The exhibition showcases life as it exists in the contemporary world and offers a perspective that life—in its excavation and co-opting of natural materials—is never far from nature's influence.

Guan Xiao has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions worldwide including Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany (2019); Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2019); Kunsthalle Winterthur, Switzerland (2018); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2016); and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2016). Recent and notable group exhibitions include Post-Capital, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2022); Though It's Dark, Still I Sing, 34th Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2021); Viva Arte Viva, 57th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2017); La vie moderne, 13th Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art, Lyon, France (2015); and Surround Audience, 2015 New Museum Triennial, New York. Her work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland; Long Museum, Shanghai; Grand Duke Jean Museum of Modern Art (MUDAM), Luxembourg; Boros Collection, Berlin; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino, Italy; and Start Museum, Shanghai. Guan Xiao lives and works in Beijing.