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2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021

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Zhao Mengsha, "Han Bing A Space of Eternal Exception," *Leap*, April 2016.



HAN BING A SPACE OF ETERNAL EXCEPTION

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Translated by: Nathaniel Brown

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《无题》，2015年，布面丙烯，140 × 180 厘米
Untitled, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 180 cm

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People often become footnotes to scenery. For Han Bing, eliminating the human figure from an image makes for fewer problems. In her latest solo exhibition, "Best Least Worst Option," her recent work explores painting as it veers towards a discussion of living environments, testing the limits and possibilities of space.

How can you describe New York's Second Avenue, Seventh Avenue, or the empty subterranean walls of the subway? How can you describe the dirty smears made by time? Though Han Bing's paintings are representational in their mode of expression, the images themselves never seem to point to a specific source.

Her concern is with abstract form, something occurring at a specific moment in time with no relation to its process or precedent. While this point in space time bears little relationship to the resulting image, her work is not about imbuing painting with contradiction—her choice to represent the intangible is matched by a tangible language. She uses each specific image to restore the atmosphere of the painting's point of origin.



《舞厅#1》，2014年
布面油画，111.8 × 152.4 厘米
Ballroom #1, 2014
Oil on canvas, 111.8 x 152.4 cm

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《光#3》, 2014年, 木板丙烯, 30.5 × 40.6 厘米
Light #3, 2014, acrylic on board, 30.5 x 40.6 cm



《圣詹姆斯》, 2014年
布面油画, 101.6 × 152.4 厘米
St. James, 2014
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 152.4 cm

With a transience that comes with every viewing experience, the work does not allow for the simple pursuit of rationality at any given moment in time despite being based in daily life, the paintings create conditional, mutual restrictions and leave an impression that goes beyond the simplicity of the original subject matter. If the audience can experience this resonance in the abstraction, the painting has taken hold. For the artist, the creative process is an attempt to bring forth feelings as if you were seeing them for the first time it is finding an exceptional state of being in the visual experience of the everyday.

The facade of a building, a ladder, nameless street corners—the surfaces of these images are smeared, hidden in the cover of a sense of anxiety. Han Bing calls this series "void," implying imagery that is, by default, ineffective and nullified. As the first viewer of each painting, the artist's expectation for a work is negated the moment she puts a brush to a blank canvas. At the same time, when the viewer begins to look for an image, Han takes the initiative to curtail curiosity. In these stark, honest depictions, expressions of shape and emotion are rendered alien to one another. Titles suggest not the contents of paintings, but states of being. The artist puts up barriers to a straightforward reading, rendering us unable to discuss the work directly. When we are unable to discuss painting and are forced to speak in more general terms, we borrow expressions from learning and experience out of necessity. This is not a language of reproduction, but rather an expression of Han's desire to test boundaries, to let speech and ideas flow free.

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In *Ballroom #1*, what was once a ballroom scene is pressed and condensed—like transforming a picture on a screen—to the point that it no longer seems real. For Han Bing, a screen is just a filter on top of an image. The experience of the screen homogenizes the image. Uneven brushstrokes form crystal lattices and pixelate their subject, creating a flat space out of focus. The earliest example of this technique is a series of works comprised of screenshots taken from video recordings—pieces like *(12:36:18)*, from 2011, are titled directly after the time the screenshot was taken). This method is repeated on the stage of a concert in Han's *YMO* (2012), and in the performance depicted in *Chet Baker* (2012). The artist is no longer satisfied with the space provided by painting—after completing it, she proceeds to add an annotation—rectangles of white, grey, and red in the center of the canvas. The effect is like a vector forcefully embedded into a layer in Photoshop—it forces the previous flat surface to move into the background. The color blocks themselves are not directly drawn from the form, nor do they complement or connect to one another—they merely serve as an abstract base layer that endows the painting with a clear cut visual hierarchy.

Rectangles, as canvas, screen, or window, are always a starting point—and painting is no different. On its surface you can begin to make a grid, or drag a single image and copy it repeatedly until it becomes a pattern. Both are abstract forms that produce cuts and openings in the rectangular space. In Han Bing's 2014 "Light" series, she uses an airbrush to create small works on propylene treated wooden boards. By repeatedly adding new layers to the surface, she creates an experiment in abstract space. While using the airbrush, Han sections off and reorganizes parts of the pieces to create representations and forms—though crevices and cracks are still often uncontrollable. The effect is like creating a shadow—there will never exist a perfect shadow, only ones that are the best, the worst, and the least.

Inspecting the layers of space created or the parts in between, a simple language is found to describe an abstract moment. In doing so Han Bing does not edit or transform the picture in any way, and her way of structuring the proportions of these pieces makes it seem that she cares more about possible exceptions to this process. After the painting establishes a framework of space and defines its scope of color, these two elements—among others—begin to push and contradict each other—as this process moves forward it quickly produces chance outcomes, and accepts rationality. Han honestly admits her own puzzlement and doubt, never premeditating the proper handling or composition of the painting itself.

Nature, in the scenery that Han Bing endorses, is a projection of artificial emotion. In her work, the perfect reflections of cities in glass windows or cinematic theaters and concert halls are what she calls white elitist scenes. All of these images already exist with complete background stories and real locations. Han is primarily interested in the often overlooked, man-made traces that remain in the scenery in between, like the tack of glue left on a billboard from repeatedly covering it with posters then tearing them off. In *St. James* (2014), orange caution tape strung up on a fence, viewed while walking, becomes removed from its environment—a moving line. In light and shadow, or in the superimposing of a city over a landscape, movement and event are always implied, balancing on the moment between awkwardness and error. (Translated by Nathaniel Brown.)