



▲ **Mnemosyne 180123**
2018
oil on linen
51 x 38 cm



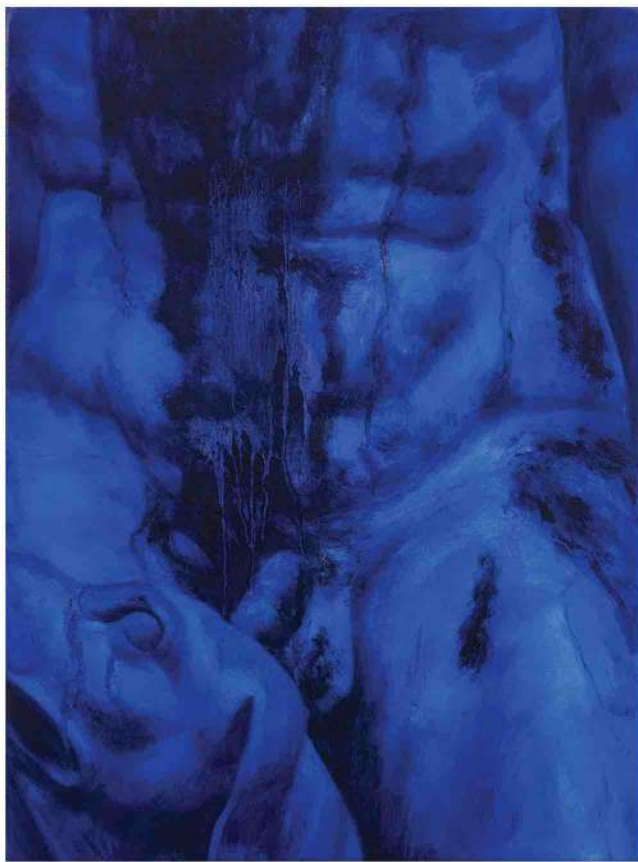
▲ **Mnemosyne 180125**
2018
oil on linen
51 x 38 cm



▲ **Mnemosyne 180201**
2018
oil on linen
51 x 38 cm



▲ **Mnemosyne 180206**
2018
oil on linen
51 x 38 cm



▲ **Mnemosyne 180211**
2018
oil on linen
51 x 38 cm



▲ **Mnemosyne 180225**
2018
oil on linen
51 x 38 cm

this Guanyin statues in Dunhuang. There are seven pagodas on the head of the Guanyin, and also several treasures placed on the four hands of Guanyin. Musical instruments, weapons, and production tools of that era decorated the wall in the background. All these magnificent depictions clearly show us the appearance of social life thousands of years ago and symbolize the infinite powers of the Bodhisattva. The only way to see clearly in the dark caves was to follow the guide's flashlight. The flashlight, an instrument invented only in the late 19th Century, illuminated the murals and the statues, casting shadows of the Guanyin's thousand arms projected onto the cave walls. This created an illusion that her arms were raised and were dancing trippingly. Experiencing this, I felt as if I had travelled through time, and suddenly I was in a reverie: I saw the creators of these statues and murals holding kerosene lamps and receiving blessings and protection from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas living in the Western sky. Under the protection of the Gods, they must have received the vision of Western Paradise, hence reproducing this imagery within the solemnity of the caves. At that moment, I realized the joy obtained from faith in Dharma must exist.

From there, I made a bold inference: from the ancient Greek and Rome statues to the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, to the Kizil Caves in Xinjiang and the murals in Dunhuang, to the Majishan Caves in Gansu Tianshui, the inland Buddhist statues of the Han Dynasty, and the Buddhist statues in the east of Japan – the progression of artistic concepts could have hugely influenced the way these statues were modelled.

After returning from this trip, I started on a new series titled *Ramavna*. I noticed an unusual aspect that was always constant in the fundamental design of the sculptures with the passing of time. I question if this was replicated by human's emotions or simply the beauty of the design.

In fact, within many of the caves, we can clearly observe a significant number of religious believers. Did their demands and impetus speed up this process of human civilization? With this question in mind, let us go back to the Renaissance period. During the middle ages, there was a religious belief that it was a sin to make money with money and that the banks' monetary interest system was then regarded as a crime. The Scrovegni family was a very famous family-owned bank. The work of Giotto di Bondone, *Lamentation (The Mourning of Christ)*, was commissioned by the son, Enrico Scrovegni. Even in the Scrovegni Chapel, we can noticeably spot Enrico Scrovegni himself in the fresco *The Last Judgment* - a young man dressed in pink holding up a miniature version of Scrovegni Chapel to the Virgin Mary.

Let's compare the Florentine artworks under the collection of the Medici family. If we analyse the Renaissance sculptures from only the perspectives of aesthetics and art history, the analysis would be filled with platitudes. Suppose that we integrate our understandings with myths, there may be more interesting discoveries. The wonderful thing about the Renaissance period is that it creates opportunities for retrospective debates. Sculptures and paintings are constantly being compared and discussed. Sculpture was regarded to be superior to painting because it was considered sacred and metaphysical. According to the Renaissance belief, Geometry and Mathematics were from heaven; Mathematics was considered to be a subject which linked us closer to God, and the composition and presentation of these sculptures were closely linked to Mathematics, Geometry, and Physics.

However, Donatello at the time created a more perceptual work - *David*. To me, Donatello's *David* has more research value as compared to Michelangelo's. *David* is a character from the Bible and is described as a very handsome man with an attractive figure. In the Bible, *David* cut off the head of the tyrant, Goliath, and this detail was vaguely reflected in the statue where the head of Goliath sits under *David's* foot. *David* represented the ideal image of a young hero, in line with the request from Medici's family in order to establish a new prestige in Florence. The height of the statue is represented to scale with the real-life *David*. The statue was initially placed in the Medici family's back garden, but is now exhibited at the Bargello Museum.

As we further observe the statue, more hidden details will be discovered. The statue resembles an underaged boy rather than the perfect physique of a hero in ancient Greece. What is more interesting, is that while *David* dons a fashionable hat and a pair of boots, the rest of his body remains unclothed. The bronze statue emits the tacility of the figure. Rather than resembling a hero returning from battle, *David* is sculpted to look more like a fashionable teenager proudly standing on an ancient Greek plinth. These elements reveal the artistic influences and hidden truths of those times.

To understand this, we must understand the culture during the Renaissance period in Florence. At that time, the Medici family fancied young and handsome men. According to the culture in Florence, the people believed that youth and obedience were deemed as virtues of a young man. Donatello's *David* represented the ideal male beauty standard in Florence. The statue is meant to be viewed from all angles, and when viewed from the back, we can see the inner part of *David's* legs. The feathers on Goliath's helmet extends up further into his inner thigh, which was an aesthetic request to Donatello by Cosimo de' Medici, from the Medici family. These aesthetic requests were common amongst commissioned artworks by wealthy families during the Renaissance period, and although made in private, they are now publicly exhibited in museums today. The history of Ancient Greece, Rome, the Renaissance, and Dunhuang has been mythified by us, and may be simpler in reality than it seems. However, our understanding of it may not be fully accurate as every detail carries a different meaning, which can lead to broader perspectives of those times.

It has been four years since I began exploring the creation of mythology through my paintings, from the initial *Ockham's Razor* series to the *Mnemosyne* series that I started this year. They are a result of a routine disengagement with the past preconceptions that continuously creates depth to my outcome. With this thought in mind, I am interested in the vibrant colours and significant triggers around the spaces around us, this virtual sanctuary, and my constant attempts to connect with these spaces. As the Diamond Sutra says: "Thus shall you think of all this fleeting world: a bubble in a stream, a flash of lightning in a summer cloud, a flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream."

Thanks to my broken MacBook that allowed time and space to overlap momentarily and inspired the title of my solo exhibition in Singapore - *Virtual Sanctuary*.

- Shen Zhenglin

VIRTUAL SANCTUARY

SHEN ZHENGLIN

19 MAY - 24 JUNE 2018

虚拟圣殿 沈正麟个展

Executive Director: Mizuma Sueo
Design: Cai Yun Teo
Printer: Print Ideas

General Manager : Fredy Chandra
Gallery Manager : Theresia Irma
Gallery Liaison : Cai Yun Teo, Marsha Tan

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Cover Image: Shen Zhenglin, *Lapetitemort* No.3 (detail), 2016

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MIZUMA GALLERY

Mizuma Gallery was established in Singapore's new art cluster Gillman Barracks in September 2012 by director Sueo Mizuma. The gallery was established in 1994 in Tokyo, and since its opening in Singapore aims for the promotion of Japanese artists in the region as well as the introduction of new and promising young talents from Southeast Asia to the international art scene. The gallery creates a new vector of dialogue within Asia, by exchanging art projects between East Asia and Southeast Asia.

Mizuma Gallery has featured the works of Japanese artists including Aida Makoto, Amano Yoshitaka, Tenmyouya Hisashi, Ikeda Manabu, Aiko Miyanaga, and Yamaguchi Akira; as well as works of renown East Asian artists such as Ken + Julia Yonetani, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Ai Weiwei, Zhao Zhao, Shen Zhenglin, and Du Kun. The gallery also organises exhibitions featuring the creations of Indonesia's and Singapore's forerunner and up-and-coming artists including Heri Dono, Nasirun, Made Wianta, Entang Wharso, Angki Purbandono, indiguerillas, Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Agung Prabowo, Gilang Fadika, Robert Zhao Renhui, and Zen Teh. Mizuma Gallery participates yearly in Art Basel Hong Kong and The Armory Show, New York.

GILLMAN BARRACKS

Mizuma Gallery is a part of Gillman Barracks (GB) is Asia's up-and-coming destination for contemporary art. It is distinguished as a vibrant centre in Asia for the creation, exhibition and discussion of contemporary art. Named after the late British General Sir Webb Gillman, GB is now home to 11 international art galleries, three restaurants, as well as the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) Singapore. For more information, please visit www.gillmanbarracks.com



VIRTUAL SANCTUARY 虚拟圣殿

沈正麟 / Shen Zhenglin

One morning in April of 2018, the sky in Beijing was surprisingly clear. I like to come to the studio early in the morning to start a day's work. As usual, I drank a cup of coffee and opened my computer to check some emails and documents. Just then, my MacBook fell onto the ground. I was in the midst of intense preparations for my Singapore exhibition. Unfortunately, my laptop ceased to work. Had it not been due to this incident, I rarely had a reason to visit the main Apple Store in Beijing. Located at Sanlitun complex, the minimalist silvery-white building designed by architect Kengo Kuma gleamed under rays of the midday sun.

Though it was not my first time visiting this outlet, but as I pushed the heavy doors open, my judgement came to a halt that very moment. To me, the sight of it seemed almost like the first time I set foot into the Notre-Dame de Paris – It is like a contemporary church built upon huge pillars plated in metallic-iron and a glass stairway. The store was densely packed with enthusiasts heads down in the illuminating screens, as though it was a new edition of the Bible. Then, I suddenly felt that perhaps myths had never left the present times.

Before the nineteenth century, the foundation of humankind was built around religious beliefs and the magnificent architectural decor was designed to express the solemnity of God. During the twentieth century, however, the influence of traditional religion plummeted, and architects sought to pursue an avant-garde expression, seeking for a space that did not hold the presence of God. With this, came the birth of modern architecture. Hence, under this premise of how we can create new myths or how myths were once created, opened up another perspective for me. This reminded me of what Joseph Campbell once said: "The myth is the public dream and the dream is the private myth". Myths are always hinting at a new world that transcends the visible existence, whether it is an outsider's arrogance towards the West African voodoo witches praying to their wooden idols, reading the wisdoms of Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*, fanatics walking into a cinema and repeatedly watching Marvel superhero movies, or even shoppers entering luxury boutiques with avant-garde decor that changes with every season.

We understand from early sociology that to kill and consume is the essence of life, a profound mystery that triggered the creation of myths. In the early ages, hunting was a sacrificial ritual. To make up for the souls of the dead animals, hunters gave offerings in hopes of them returning back and sacrificing themselves again for human consumption. Wild animals were seen as "ambassadors" from another world that bred a strange kind of harmony between the hunter and the prey, almost as if they were locked up in mortality, stuck in a vicious cycle of burial and resurrection. Cave paintings and word-of-mouth stories are what we term today as expressions of "religious impulses". But as humans converted from the primitive ways of hunting to agriculture as means of survival, the understanding of lifeomics had taken on a great change. Seeds became a remarkable symbol of endless life, and the belief of reincarnation was growing relentlessly in the East.

Once, I paid a visit to the Mogao Caves in Northwest China.

Mr. Ji Xianlin once said: "The world has a long-standing history and vast regions, and there are four cultural systems that have a systematic and far-reaching influence: China, India, Greece, and Islam, and there is no fifth. Yet, there is only one place where the four cultural systems converge, that is, the Dunhuang and Xinjiang regions of China." Mr Ji's statement had fully present the importance of Dunhuang's geographical position in our cultural system.

Known to be the central hub for the ancient Silk Road, Dunhuang is located near an important node of the routes across Eurasia; connecting China, India, Persia, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and other civilizations. The eastward spread of Buddhism and Islam, and the fusion of Chinese multi-ethnic cultures, shaped the aesthetic modelling of Dunhuang.

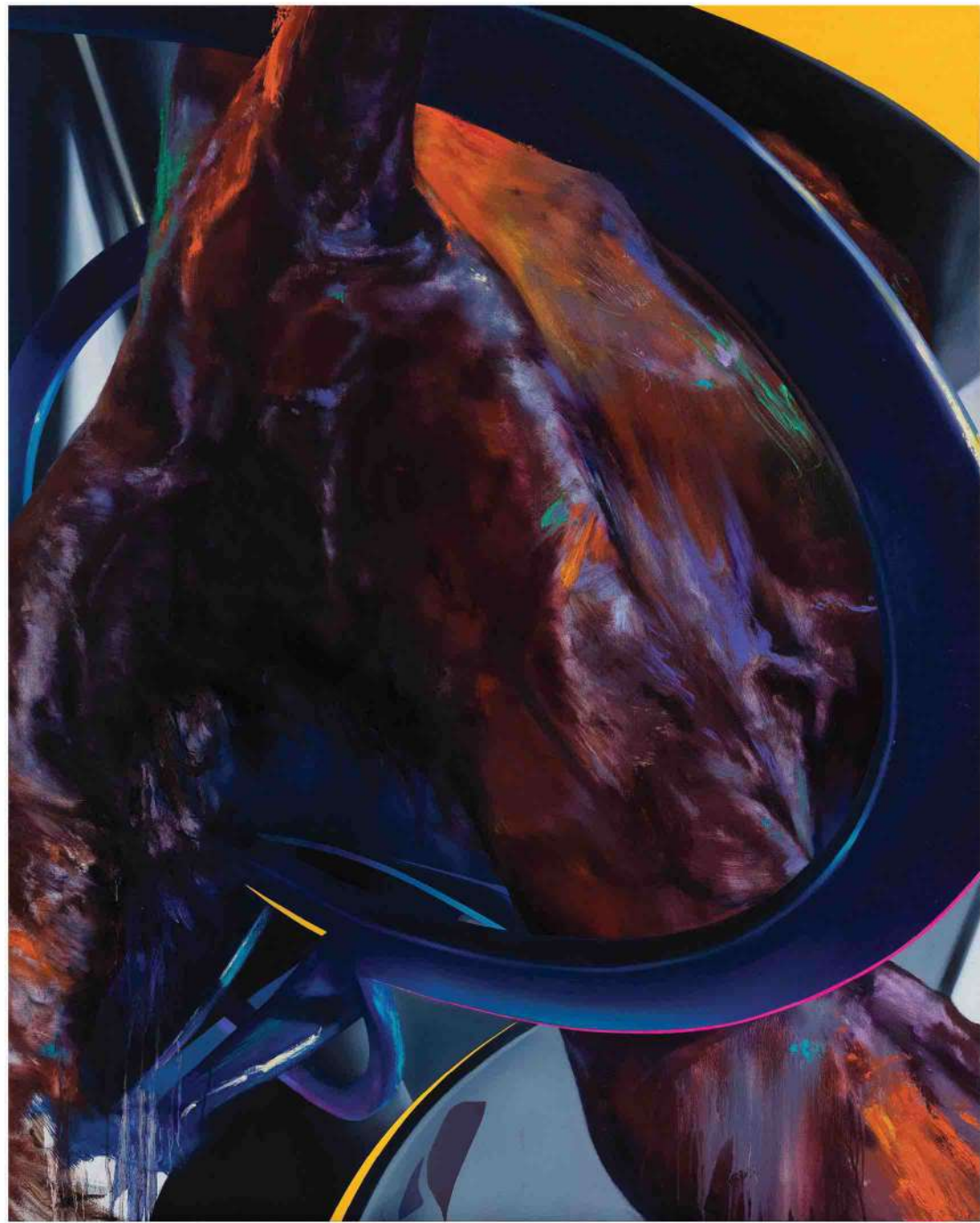
After spending a few days in Dunhuang, I wanted to investigate further. I found a local driver to drive me from Dunhuang to the Guazhou Yulin Caves located 180 kilometres away. It was my first time passing through an isolated highway; and with the Gobi Desert surrounding me, I had music streaming through my earphones. On the route to Suoyang City, I saw the weathered down ancient Ta'er Monastery. It was said that during the Tang Dynasty, this large temple building site was once the main venue for religious activities for the Guazhou people and officials. In addition, the monastery once ushered in Master Xuanzang, a Chinese scholar and monk who had travelled to India for a pilgrimage for Buddhist scriptures. He had once preached his teachings on Buddhism/Dharma in this temple and had even undertaken a great apprentice to follow him. However, this adobe or mud brick building site in front of me has been hollowed out by tomb raiders, and even the surrounding dozens of small pagodas had collapsed. The Ta'er Monastery of today has lost its man-made glory, and all that is left behind is just a masterpiece of time. Time is oppressed as it has no relief from corrosive forces, so everything is bound to be returned to nature. Everything in the world will be judged by time. The beauty that survives all kinds of predicaments caused by the passing of time will be considered precious - it is no longer charming, artificial, dramatic, or even radiant.

Just as I pondered over such beauty, an avalanche of snow that melted from the distant snow-capped mountains pulled me back to the reality. All of a sudden, the boundless stretch of the Gobi Desert let out the sound of a rushing stream of water. I unplugged my earphones, rolled down the window and took a deep breath of the air outside. The driver announced our arrival at Yulin Caves.

The Yulin Caves, also known as Wanfo Gorge, are the sister caves of the Mogao Caves. There are 42 surviving caves left from the Tang, Five Dynasties, Song, Western Xia, and Yuan Periods. The preservation of the Yulin Caves were far more complete as compared to the Mogao Caves. Back then, there were numerous murals made by Chinese artist Zhang Daqian which were then replicated in the Yulin Caves. I could still vividly remember how I felt at that moment when the guide opened the gates to Cave 3 - a cave that was built during the Western Xia period, which contained statues of fifty-one headed thousand-armed Guanyin. This is the only cave with



▲ **Eunzv**
2015-2016
oil on linen
266 x 200 cm



► **INFINI**
2014
oil on linen
150 x 210 cm



► **NALANDO**
2014
oil on linen
150 x 210 cm



◀ **Toledo**
2016
oil on linen
162 x 130 cm



▼ **Lapetitemort No.3**
2016
oil on linen
160 x 220 cm



▼ **Parvathi**
2016-2017
oil on linen
161.3 x 111.3 cm



▼ **Noten**
2017
oil on linen
100 x 75 cm



▼ **Kirtimukha**
2016
oil on linen
178 x 149 cm



Sheng Zhenglin

Born in Yantai, Shandong, China, 1986
Lives and works in Beijing, China

Education

2009 B.A. in Oil Painting, Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts (LAFA), Shenyang, China

Solo Exhibitions

2018 VIRTUAL SANCTUARY, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
2015 Age of Ambition, Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China
2012 For Elizabeth and her family, Cite Des Arts, Paris, France
Solo Project, Korea International Art Fair, Seoul, South Korea
2011 Strawberry's Issue, Artside Gallery, Seoul, South Korea
2010 Overdue, Artside Gallery, Beijing, China

Group Exhibitions

2018 Folkloristics, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
2017 Jungle III--Common, Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China
2016 Paintings of thought, Chinese Modern & Contemporary Art Documentation, Beijing, China
2015 Relocation Jubilee, Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China
Happy Eros & Eternity, Artside Gallery, Seoul, South Korea
2013 Side Road--Reciprocating Self and Consciousness, HuanTie Times Art Museum, Beijing, China
2012 Return To A Visual Method, Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts (LAFA) Museum, Shenyang, China
2010 BUSAN International Biennale, Busan, South Korea
SPECTER-Seoul, Seoul, South Korea
2009 Cross-cultural Dialogue--Chinese Young Artist Invited Exhibition, Cusdro Gallery, Dubai
FRESH EYES'09--FALSIFICATION, He Xiangning Art Museum, Shenzhen, China
ART-Dongbei Youth Contemporary Art Exhibition, WeiLan Art Museum, Shenyang, China
TEN YEARS, Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts (LAFA) Museum, Shenyang, China
Chinese Art Prize By Yue-SaiKan, Finalists Award, Art Scene Gallery, Shanghai, China
2006 The Second of Selection for Teachers and Students from Chinese Fine Arts Institutes, Shenzhen Art Museum, Shenzhen, China

Art Exchange

2015 Art Exchange, Basel, Switzerland
2012 Art Exchange, Cite Des Arts, Paris, France
2009 Exchange Student, Painting Department Of Hongik University, Seoul, South Korea

About the Artist

Shen Zhenglin (b. 1986, Yantai, Shandong, China) graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor's Degree in Oil Painting from the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts (LAFA), Shenyang, Liaoning Province, China. By stripping away any religious or mythical context, Zhenglin reinterprets classical sculptures in our modern time using bold colours that are representative of the contemporary time. He attempts to stimulate the viewers' senses to create a spatial supernatural energy that connects the viewers to his paintings. Through observing figurative forms and geometric shapes, Zhenglin explores the idea of abstraction in his works. Each of his abstract paintings are meticulously planned with a basic structure that evolves as he progresses. By painting and scratching the canvas with a brush, palette knife or even his hands, he is able to fully express himself. His paintings are a form of visual language that portrays the way he calmly observes the world - of its past, present, and future. Shen Zhenglin lives and works in Beijing, China.