



PDF 2025
Acrylic on linen

Next Exhibition

CHEN Fei: Father and Child

Exhibition Term: July 3 (Thu.) - October 5 (Sun.), 2025

Closed on Mondays (open on Jul.21, Aug.11, Sep.15) Opening Hours: 11:00 - 19:00

Admission Fee: Adults 1,500 yen / Pair discount 2,600 yen / Student (high school to 25 years), Seniors (70 years and over), Visitors with disabilities, their caregiver (up to 1) with ID 1,300 yen / Children (elementary to junior high) 500 yen

Organizer/ Venue: **WATARI-UM, The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art**

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Cooperation: PERROTIN

WATARI-UM
The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art



Writing about painting has never come easily to me. I have always felt that painting constitutes its own system of language—one that constructs a kind of visual theatre on a flat surface through medium, gesture, colour, composition, atmosphere, and thought. The way into it varies from person to person. My motivations for making work are often tied to my shifting states of being: sometimes they emerge diffusely, in fragments; other times, they arrive through deliberate and careful orchestration. This fluctuation makes any attempt to trace a linear logic through my practice all the more difficult. In general, this body of work came about less through planning than through an intuitive process.

It began during the pandemic and continues into the present. I have often felt that we now live in a world that is, at times, subtly hostile—and perhaps that sense of estrangement has led to what one might call a kind of regression in my painting. Amid the growing sense of disarray, the feeling of having any real agency begins to slip away. As someone who once claimed a realist stance, hoping to engage with the times through representation, I found myself pulled into a state of paralyzing helplessness. Under these circumstances, even the act of addressing reality felt hollow and insufficient.

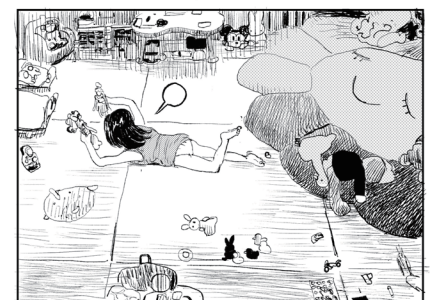
Then something unexpected happened: I became a father. Life's centre shifted, and my energy was naturally redirected toward the child's growth. This shift released me, to some extent, from the anxieties I had harboured about the world at large, and brought me back to a renewed understanding of life and a quiet trust in its unfolding. The experience reminded me of a comic I read in my youth—*Father and Son* by German cartoonist E. O. Plauen. The stories are simple, wordless vignettes about the everyday joy and tenderness between a father and his child. Stripped of any historical context, the drawings speak only of the raw, unfiltered bond that emerges through kinship.

Though Plauen's time could not be more different from my own, his work stirred a faint recognition. A pervasive anxiety seems to hum beneath our daily lives. What futures are we walking toward by the choices we make today? And what versions of ourselves will those futures call forth? As a small voice within the overwhelming chorus, I can only drift in this unfathomable tide. Painting once offered me a form of shelter. I believed art was boundless—that it opened up a universe where the world was born of vast, intricate, and ungovernable forces of imagination. But that belief has started to shift. The rules of the real world increasingly encroach upon that threshold space. Painting feels closer than ever to the world outside it. The imaginative construction of space and time has become fatigued, burdened by its own concealment, while the absurdity of reality grows, like a hyperreal wormhole.

This series is, in a sense, an act of rescue. It pulls me back from the boundless sweep of what lies beyond and returns me to life itself—to something smaller, closer to the root of being. Through it, I rediscovered a language of expression. I once tried to give this body of work a more respectable title, something that would lend it a certain weight. But in the end, I realised it came down to something quite plain: I simply wanted to paint my child.

I wanted to capture the feelings I have for her, to record our conversations, to mark this shared moment. Perhaps it is because, in all that she is, I glimpse something that feels unmistakably true.

— Chen Fei



About the exhibition

CHEN Fei (陳 飛) was born in 1983 in Shanxi, China, and now resides in Beijing. The exhibition showcases 15 works by Chen Fei created between 2022 and 2025, a towering seven-meter mural, installations and documents, presented within a unique, site-specific curatorial design.

Drawing on the iconic German comic Vater und Sohn (Father and Son) as its starting point, the exhibition references a timeless publication created by renowned German cartoonist E. O. Plauen (1903-1944), who was profoundly affected during the Nazi era. This work not only depicts the relationship between father and son but also explores the valuable and thought-provoking meanings of family, companionship, and love in its unique historical context in a very specific social setting.

Resonating with E. O. Plauen's story, Chen Fei employs an autobiographical approach in this exhibition to illustrate relationships with individuals he knows intimately, interweaving narratives about his identity as a Chinese painter. The works delve into familial relationships between husband and wife, father and child, as well as social dynamics among colleagues and friends. The project also encompasses the painter's contemplation of his own professional image as an artist.



Cartoonist's voyage
2024
Acrylic on linen
290x220cm

Chen Fei has been a friend of mine for over ten years. We come from different countries, belong to different generations, and our artistic practices are entirely distinct. Yet we're connected by the same instinct—to engage with the world through painting. In that sense, we're the same kind of painter. Even though we don't speak the same language, I always feel a deep joy whenever we meet. How does he see the world now that he is a father? I am really looking forward to seeing his new solo exhibition in Tokyo!

—Izumi Kato (artist)



Love sonnets 2024
Acrylic on linen
290x220cm

Description about the works

This painting begins with a memory.

My daughter was born prematurely, weighing just under two pounds. Frail from the start, she required constant care. And one of my unexpected daily duties as a new father was tracking her bowel movements.

In both Chinese and Western medicine, an infant's stool is an important sign of health, so photographing her diapers became part of my daily routine. Years passed, and as she grew stronger, I left that chapter behind. It wasn't until I was scrolling through my phone for something else that I stumbled across that forgotten archive—hundreds of diaper photos, each showing a different form and color. They seemed almost like a language. Before my daughter could speak, perhaps she was already saying: “Daddy, I'm fine today. Look how perfect the shape is,” or “Daddy, I'm not feeling so well... the color's a little off.” I didn't recoil. Instead, I felt a quiet tenderness. Looking at them all together, it felt less like documentation and more like a long poem.

I'm well aware this is a father's gaze—what touches me may not move anyone else. But I still felt an irresistible need to give it form. As a painter, I couldn't bring myself to render such residue literally. So I turned instead to the language of Neoclassicism, and to the way William Morris arranged forms across surface—reconfiguring the images like wallpaper, flattened and ornamented. That felt like the most fitting approach. A single beam of light cuts through the surface, breathing air into a composition saturated with form.

This is, undeniably, a deeply personal painting.

But then again, isn't that why I became a painter in the first place—to please myself, before anyone else?

— Chen Fei



Supernatural is the first painting I made of my daughter—not as a study or gesture, but as a complete work. The structure was already there: composition, symbolism, formal decisions I had long internalized. But once the painting began, I found myself unprepared for its simplest demand. Much like becoming a father, it brought on an unexpected tension. I became anxious not about the image as a whole, but about her—whether the likeness held, whether she looked “right.” Concerns that should have stayed peripheral came forward, unsettling the balance. In the past, I knew how to tolerate a painting’s failure. My training had taught me that unfinished work could be set aside, reworked, or discarded altogether—given time, something would eventually resolve. But this painting didn’t follow that logic. It felt as if the painting had begun to lead, not follow. Perhaps it was because of the child—because I cared more, or because my attention to her began to eclipse everything else I had once held central.

I tried to deny that her arrival might shift my work, told myself that practice should remain indifferent to circumstance. But the change came slowly, then steadily,

and eventually I allowed that feeling might be reason enough.

But in the end, that shift had to be resolved through painting itself.

As the work developed, I made certain formal adjustments—introducing peripheral imagery to counterbalance my fixation on the central figure, and to open a space for projection.

—Chen Fei

CHEN Fei (陳飛)

Born in 1983 in Shanxi, CHEN Fei is a graduate of the Beijing Film Academy and now resides in Beijing. As an observant artist, Chen Fei excels at uncovering, capturing, and rearranging the fragments of time that linger in daily life after the disintegration of grand political narratives. Chen's work embodies a dialectical inheritance of realist painting, one that has actively engaged with the course of China's modernization. He turns his focus to the human condition within the empirical flow of time. His narrative portraits and contextual still lifes capture fleeting moments of everyday life, where the interplay between historical illusions and concrete reality emerges. At the same time, Chen's temporal dramaturgy continuously rewrites lifestyles and settings. His self-portraits, where his identity shifts and transforms, reflect these seemingly parallel narratives, redistributing the weight of destiny across different dimensions. By forging unconventional connections between events, he reveals a collective temporal experience that defines our present.

He has held solo exhibitions at the Yuz Museum of Art Shanghai, Nizayama Forest Art Museum Japan, Today Art Museum Beijing, Gallery Perrotin New York, Paris, Hong Kong, and Galerie Urs Meile Beijing, Lucerne. In 2012, he won the Martell "Focus on Future Artistic Talent Award" and the Chinese New Painting Award in 2007.

Chen Fei - CV

- 1983 Born in Hongtong, Shanxi Province, China
Lives and works in Beijing, China
- 2005 Graduated from Beijing Film Academy, Beijing, China

Solo Exhibitions

- 2025 Grand Lobby, Le Consortium Museum, Dijon France
- 2021 Morning Market, Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China
- 2019 Reunion, Perrotin, New York, USA
- 2017 Fine Art, Perrotin, Paris, France
- 2016 The Day is Yet Long, Galerie Urs Meile, Lucerne, Switzerland
The Day is Yet Long, Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing, China
Living in Figures – Izumi Kato x Chen Fei, Nizayama Art Park Power Plant Museum, Toyama Prefecture, Japan
- 2014 Flesh and me, Perrotin, Hong Kong, China
- 2012 Extravagant Imagination, Olyvia Fine Art, London, UK
- 2011 Stranger: Chen Fei Solo Exhibition, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
- 2010 Bad Taste, Schoeni Art Gallery, Hong Kong, China
- 2009 One – Track Minded, Star Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2004 Chen Fei Solo Exhibition, Beijing Film Academy, Beijing, China

Group Exhibitions

- 2024 目 China, a new generation of artists, The Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
A Cloud in Trousers: Painting Today, West Bund Art Museum, Shanghai, China
Pictures of the Post-80s Generation — Generational Leap, Tank Art Center, Shanghai, China
- 2023 Glitches in Love: A New Formula, Chinretsukan Gallery Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo, Japan
Looking at the Stars, G Museum, Nanjing, China
- 2022 The Story of Painting – the History of Chinese Painting with Personal Narratives,
One Art Museum, Beijing, China
Being In The World, The Tenth Anniversary of The Long Museum, Long Museum, Shanghai, China
Common Ground, UCCA 15th Anniversary Patrons Collection Exhibition, UCCA, Beijing, China
ON OFF 2021: Carousel of Progress, He Art Museum Guangdong, China
- 2021 A Higher Calling, White Space, Beijing, China
- 2020 From Treatise On Superfluous Things, Jinji Lake Art Museum, Suzhou, China
On Sabbatical, West Bund Museum, Shanghai, China
- 2018 Well – Wishes, Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai, China
- 2016 Our Painting, Yang Museum, Beijing, China
Painting as Strait Gate: Post-80s Artists Invitation Exhibition, Hive Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China
New Capital Huang Yu Collection Exhibition (2007 - 2016), Museum of Contemporary Chengdu, Chengdu, China
- 2015 The Civil Power – Beijing Minsheng Art Museum Opening Exhibition, Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, China
A New Dynasty – Created in China, ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Aarhus, Denmark
- 2014 Hole – Gravity, Lin & Lin Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
1199 People, Long Museum, Shanghai, China
Chinese New Painting Award 10th Anniversary Invitation Exhibition, Hi Art, Beijing, China
2014 Wuhan Documentary Exhibition of Fins Arts, Hubei Museum of Art, Wuhan, China
- 2013 Criss – Cross: Artworks of Young Chinese Contemporary Artists from Long Collection,
Long Museum, Shanghai, China
Uneasy Trip in Asia III, Cans Tea & Books House, Taipei, Taiwan
Future Master, Winshare Art Museum, Chengdu, China
A Miscellany of Arts: The Visual Rhetoric of the Young Generation, Suzhou Jinji Lake Art Museum, Suzhou, China
- 2012 The First Xinjiang Contemporary Art Biennale, Xinjiang International Convention and Exhibition Center, Urumqi, Xinjiang, China
Latitude / Attitude: Schoeni Art Gallery 20th Anniversary Exhibition, Schoeni Art Gallery, Hong Kong, China

- CAFAM • Future, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing, China
 A4 Young Artist Experimental Season 2nd Round Exhibition, A4 Contemporary Arts Center, Chengdu, Sichuan, China
 "Focus on Talents" Finalists Exhibition, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
 After Deliverance, 798 Space, Beijing, China
 New and Past, Michael Ku Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2011 One Man Theater: Works by Post 80s Artists, He Xiangning Museum, Shenzhen, China
 All Cannibals?, Me Collectors Room, Berlin, Germany
 Sketching the Heart, Beijing Space, Beijing, China
- 2009 New Works, Star Gallery, Beijing, China
 Enliven – In between Realities and Fiction, Animamix Biennale, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
 Niubi Newbie Kids II, Schoeni Art Gallery, Hong Kong, China
 My Dream 2009 Art Exhibition, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
 From Zero to Hero, Star Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2008 Niubi Newbie Kids, Schoeni Art Gallery, Hong Kong, China
 Finding Oneself, Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, China
 The Origin – The First Moon River Sculpture Festival, Moon River Art Museum, Beijing, China
 Rebuild – China School Charity's Artwork Donation Exhibition for the Sichuan Earthquake, Star Gallery, Beijing, China
 Superficiality is not our Motto – Post 80's Art, Star Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2007 Gathering Sand Castles – Chinese New Generation Artist Exhibition, Yan Huang Art Museum, Beijing, China
- 2005 Next Station, Cartoon?, He Xiangning Museum, Shenzhen, China
 Archaeology of the Future – The Second Triennial of Chinese Art, Nanjing Museum, Nanjing, China
 The Second Chengdu Biennale, Chengdu Century City, Chengdu, China
 The Self-Made Generation – A Retrospective of New Chinese Painting, Shanghai Zenda Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China

Awards

- 2012 Focus on Talents Project, Today Art Museum and Martell Art Fund, Beijing, China
 2007 Awarded "China New Talent Painting Award", Beijing, China

Publish

- <One-Track Minded> Star Gallery
 <Bad Taste> Schoeni Art Gallery
 <Word Film Villains> China Youth Publishing House
 <Stranger> Today Art Museum
 <Extravagant Imagination> Olyvia Fine Art
 <CHEN FEI> Distanz
 <The Day is Yet Long> Galerie Urs Meile
 <Izumi Kato x Chen Fei - Living in figures> Perrotin
 <Reunion> Galerie Perrotin
 <Morning Market> Yuz Museum

Collection

- Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
 Long Museum, Shanghai, China
 Aurora Museum, Shanghai, China
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, U.S
 Me Collectors Room, Berlin, Germany
 Franks-Suss Collection, London, UK
 dslcollection, Paris, France
 Hong Kong M+ Museum, Hong Kong, China