

Oscar Chan Yik Long

Don't leave the dark alone

Gallery Exit

Hong Kong

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Aaina Bhargava

Two women and a man with a horned goat's head sit around a table, bearing frustrated and contemplative expressions, a crucifix affixed on the wall behind looming over them. In this latest ink creation, *Not Even God or the Devil Know How to Handle This* (2021), artist Oscar Chan Yik-Long puts a reversed anthropomorphic twist on a scene from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1974 film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Here, Chan replaces Fassbinder's head with that of a goat, often used as a demonic symbol, removing the scene from its original context and transforming it into his own phantasmagoric creation. This practice is ubiquitous throughout his most recent exhibition, *Don't leave the dark alone*, at Gallery Exit.

"'Fear eats the soul' is exactly what I've been feeling and thinking," says Chan in an interview, reflecting on the harrowing events engulfing the world over the past few years. "The world has gone through so much trauma, from Covid to climate change, even [neither] God nor the devil knows what to do. How do they respond to this mess that we've created?"



Not Even God Or The Devil Know How To Handle This by Oscar Chan Yik Long, Chinese ink on canvas, 147 x 150 cm, 2021. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Exit.

A phantasmagoric amalgamation of myth, horror, the fantastical and the occult, the ink murals, drawings and tapestry on view reflect the artist's attempts to engage with and confront his fears head on. In fact, one of his phobias – horror films, especially from the 70s and 80s – provide rich source material for his work. In an effort to control his fear, the artist forced himself to watch many horror films during endless months in Covid lockdown, which he spent in France, and his fear evolved into fascination.

How do we know if the dead would not regret their efforts to survive?

(2020) prompts viewers to physically confront their fears. Chan's signature ambiguous but eerie black-and-white imagery is embedded in a large, circular, woollen rug placed on the floor, a surface simultaneously inviting and intimidating. Above on the wall, a circular outline of the rug is intended to be a point of meditation, but also functions as a sort of portal, according to Chan, reflecting his attraction to the mystical and mythical.

The portal concept is mirrored in *120 Judge John Aiso Street* (2020), which mimic curtains featuring crowds of figures with distorted

features and monstrous accessories. Largely inspired by John Carpenter's films, the imagery also includes carnival festivities and other rituals. Similar to *Not Even God or the Devil Know How to Handle This* (2021), the rest of the works, while referring to films, are devoid of contextual background and are constructed intuitively, imbuing them with an almost surrealist quality.

Emblematic of the artist's subconscious, this quality radiates from 16 new drawings – a medium he began experimenting with during months of lockdown. Most strikingly, the drawings are reminiscent of 19th- and 20th-century German painter Sascha Schneider's theatrical paintings, whose aesthetic the artist cites as an influence. Hints of Chan's own distinctive monochromatic ink aesthetic are still visible, built free from the burden of traditional ink practices. While he never studied ink painting, besides one or two mandatory courses during his BFA, his childhood interest in Japanese manga and comics manifests itself in this set of graphite-on-paper works. His foray into drawing yet again marks the artist's embrace of internal fears.

Seemingly inward looking, in a larger context the show feels like a reaction against toxic positivity, a cultural trope which sustains

the oppression of negative emotions. "Nowadays, I find people force themselves to be positive, or at least that's how they portray themselves," observes Chan. "For me, that doesn't work at all. If I force myself to be happy and ignore the negative emotions, it accumulates to something I cannot handle." In confronting his fears, essentially choosing not to leave the dark alone, Chan's work validates our own apprehensions, and provides unexpected reassurance in collectively facing uncertainties.

陳翊朗

不要讓黑暗獨自留下
安全口

香港

2021年6月14日至8月18日

Aaina Bhargava

兩個女人和一個山羊頭的男人坐在一張桌子旁，神情憂鬱苦惱，他們身後的牆上有一個十字架。在最新的水墨作品《Not Even God or the Devil Know How to Handle This》（2021年）中，陳翊朗將法斯賓達 1974年電影《恐懼吞噬心靈》的其中一幕改成以人擬物。他用山羊頭取法斯賓達的頭，而山羊常被視為魔鬼的象徵。陳翊朗把這一幕從其原本的語境抽離，並轉化成自己的鬼怪風格。這種手法在陳翊朗於安全口畫廊舉辦的展覽「不要讓黑暗獨自留下」中處處可見。

訪問時陳翊朗表示：「我常常覺得『恐懼會把靈魂吃掉』。」這句話適用於描述過去幾年充斥著世界的各式可怕事件。他續說：「這個世界經歷了太多創傷，由新冠肺炎到氣候變化，甚至連上帝和魔鬼都不知道該怎麼辦。他們可以如何解決我們製造的爛攤子？」

陳翊朗把神話、恐怖鬼怪、奇聞、神秘學與水墨畫、繪畫、毛毯融合的做法反映他嘗試面對及克服他的恐懼。事實上，他其中一種害怕的東西——恐怖片，尤其是七十至八十年代的恐怖片為他帶來了很多創作靈感。他為了控制恐懼，在法國時強迫自己在新冠肺炎無止境的封城期間看了很多恐怖片，由害怕恐怖片變成為之著迷。

《予惡乎知夫死者不悔其始之蘄生乎》（2020年）讓觀眾實質面對自己的恐懼。地上的一塊大型圓形羊毛地毯融入了陳翊朗標誌性的黑白怪異曖昧風格，既吸引又懾人心魄。牆上勾畫了地毯的形狀，陳翊朗稱這個圓形是一個冥想點，亦類似是一個入口。這件作品表現了陳翊朗對神秘學和神話的興趣。

《120 Judge John Aiso Street》（2020年）中也有出現過入口這個概念。作品彷似窗簾，繪有一群面目扭曲鬼魅的人。這件作品的靈感來自於尊卡本達的電影，也滲入了嘉年華和其他禮教儀式的元素。與《Not Even God or the Devil Know How to Handle This》（2021年）一樣，其他作品雖然參考了電影場景，但畫作的內容卻與電影原本的語境無關，是陳翊朗隨心創作的超現實主義作品。

陳翊朗於封城期間創作的16幅畫作反映了他潛意識的想法。最令人吃



A Violent Yet Flammable World by Oscar Chan Yik Long, Pencil and colour pencil on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm, 2021. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Exit.

驚的是這些作品讓人想起19至20世紀德國畫家Sascha Schneider帶有戲劇風格的畫，陳翊朗稱受到其美學影響。陳翊朗獨特的黑白水墨風格仍然可見於這16件作品，與傳統水墨畫截然不同。除了藝術學士課程必修的一兩堂課外，陳翊朗從來沒有學習過水墨畫。雖然如此，但童年時對日本漫畫的興趣培養出了他素描的能力。他對繪畫的嘗試再一次證明了他樂於接納自己的內在恐懼。

縱使這次展覽內容看似內向，但宏觀來看，卻是在對毒性正能量這種抑壓負面情緒的文化發出抗議。陳翊朗表示：「我發現現今很多人強迫自己變得正面，或者至少是自稱如此。」他續說：「我就做不到。如果我強迫自己開心而無視負面情緒，這些負能量會一直累積，變成我無法承受的東西。」陳翊朗在面對恐懼並不讓黑暗獨自留下的同時，他的作品也讓觀眾直面自己的憂慮，並意外地安慰了大家面對未知的不安。