

Li Songsong: The Past

March 16 – April 27, 2024
1201 South La Brea Avenue
Los Angeles



Li Songsong, *Past I*, 2023 © Li Songsong, courtesy Pace Gallery.

Los Angeles – Pace is pleased to present an exhibition of new and recent paintings by Chinese artist Li Songsong at its Los Angeles gallery. On view from March 16 to April 27, the upcoming presentation will mark the artist's first-ever solo exhibition in LA as well as his first solo show in the US since 2019.

One of the most celebrated contemporary painters in China, Li has honed his distinct style—marked by his use of reliefs, tense brushstrokes, and solid color blocks—over the last 20 years as part of his pursuit “to paint something that had a certain distance from reality,” as he once put it. Inflected by history, politics, and culture, Li’s art is forged in enactments of accumulation and subtraction, of exposure and obscurity. At once personal, imaginative, and truthful, his deeply expressionistic paintings often depict fragmented, semi-abstract figurations underpinned by narratives that the viewer can decipher and absorb.

During his painting process, the artist deconstructs and reconstructs recognizable images from newspapers, films, historical photographs, and other media, reinterpreting them through the lens of his own experiences and memories while also creating new textural dimensions within his works. In abstracting images from their original contexts, Li has cultivated a unique visual language that invites viewers to see the world in new terms—from a different aesthetic perspective.

“To this day, this principle—of generating various meanings through intensified looking—runs like a red line throughout Li’s oeuvre,” curator Hendrik Bündge writes in his essay “History as Material as History” in a 2015 catalogue for Li’s exhibition at the Museo d’Arte Moderna di Bologna and the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

Li’s latest abstractions, which will be the subject of his upcoming show at Pace in LA, reflect his stream-of-consciousness approach to painting. Seeking psychological liberation from specific notions and themes, the artist has continued refining an increasingly pure language of painting since 2020. His creative approach is informed by the relationship between existence and the existent. Li’s making process for his new works is guided by his mental state—the force that drives his pursuit of freedom on the canvas.

Each work in the exhibition at Pace's LA gallery represents a sum of the artist's idiosyncratic brushstrokes, with the placements, shapes, and colors of his strokes determined by his state of mind at the moment paint meets surface. There is also a temporal quality to this generative process, since each stroke leaves its own indelible mark, even if it is covered by another stroke. For Li, these works are as much abstractions as they are portraits of his ever-evolving relationship to his chosen medium. In his ongoing exploration of what it means to create paintings about the act of painting, Li meditates on what it might mean to capture and express infinity within his compositions.

Li Songsong's (b. 1973, Beijing) paintings animate the fragmentary nature of images and memory, paying particular attention to the people, events, and themes of modern and contemporary Chinese history. Li is interested in the way images cultivate histories and provoke memories, even if their relationship or reference to the past is nebulous and indirect. Although his compositions draw on found imagery—with a range of sources including restaurant advertisements, historical photographs, and movie stills, among others—Li freely reinterprets his sources, altering or omitting visual information. The resulting works eschew narratives, presenting pieces and traces of something rather than a totalizing record, creating new ways of looking at existing information.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

Today, Pace has seven locations worldwide, including European footholds in London and Geneva as well as Berlin, where the gallery established an office in 2023. Pace maintains two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace's long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace's engagement with Silicon Valley's technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, along with an office and viewing room in Beijing. In spring 2024, Pace will open its first gallery space in Japan in Tokyo's new Azabudai Hills development.



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