

Curatorial Essay

Woman, the untouched touches on canvas

Calvin Hui

His "women" coil, twist, twirl, slither, slouch, snuggle, recline or tower, exuding feminine sensuality in all its forms—whether strident, tender, or submissive—leaping off the canvas. Whether the bodies are lushly fleshed out or delicately willowy, they radiate a palpable, lustrous energy, emanating from pain, longing, euphoria, and fantasy. Do not fault him for his sensuously bold depictions because this is nod to his attitude toward life and pay homage to the intrinsic desires wired into every human. To Ma Desheng, the creator of his Muses, this natural and provocative energy fuels his wellspring of inspiration and passionate pursuit of life.

I have personally known Mr. Ma for 20 years, and it was then I collected the first piece of his Rock paintings. The paintings and the spirit they convey remain eternal, with lasting energy that continues to resonate.

This is where Mr. Ma's art truly lies—nothing is ephemeral and hollow, as the themes he explores are rooted in the enduring wisdom of life.



Art repletes Ma, serving as perhaps his most precious outlet to express himself. He channels his life into the image of stones, personifying them to give voice to his inner world, recounts the tale of existence, and even celebrates the beauty of the female form with reverent awe. His bold appreciation of the female figure and women's values signals and magnifies his admiration for what he sees as the god's divine gift to humanity—the most pristine, natural, and organic embodiment of beauty in our universe and nature.

On Ma's artistic conscious plane, women are manifested as highly refined silhouettes of a mythical Muse which is beyond worldly interpretation and access.

Since moving to Paris in 1986, Ma continued to nurture his aspiration of modernising Chinese art and elevating its presence on the international stage. Away from his homeland, Ma took the mission of promoting Chinese contemporary art upon himself. This acute conscientiousness reflected his deep sense of duty, born from an enduring affinity for and gratitude to his country — a sentiment he carried proudly as both a badge of pride and a defining element of his art.

The shape of the "Woman" theme is both inevitable and serendipitous. The initial eureka moment struck when our gallery Co-founder Mark Peaker and I visited Mr. Ma in his Paris studio last year. There, in his compact studio, he unveiled his collection of "magnificent" female form paintings. The

LONDON

Unit 3, G/F, The Whiteley, 137 Queensway,
London W2 4DB, England

+44 203 982 1863

london@3812cap.com

HONG KONG

26/F, Wyndham Place, 44 Wyndham Street,
Central, Hong Kong

+852 2153 3812

hongkong@3812cap.com



striking contrast of his towering yet lushly soft depictions of women left us utterly stunned, evoking a visceral resonance that remains vivid today. What captivated us most was a triptych from 2002 — one of his earliest creations of the female form.

During lunch, Mark proposed the idea of an exhibition dedicated to “Woman,” and both Mr. Ma and I were thrilled by the prospect. In the end, Mr. Ma and I settled on a resonant title: “Woman: Ma Desheng Solo Exhibition”.

Fair to say, the title christened for this exhibition holds meaning far beyond its literal implication. The “woman” in the context of Ma’s exhibition is laden with significance: it represents the female form, the iconic muse that Ma has artistically and emotionally tapped into throughout his oeuvre; it also alludes to the artist’s life vision and philosophy — one of resilience, of gracefully navigating through throes of pain, and of uninhibited expression through creative gymnastics.

In 2024, we hosted Ma Desheng’s solo exhibition, “Wish Upon a Rock”, at 3812 Gallery in Hong Kong. This year, we are proud to present “Woman – Ma Desheng Solo Exhibition” at 3812 London—his first-ever large-scale solo exhibition dedicated entirely to the theme of “women”, showcasing his extensive body of female form paintings. This exhibition also marks the inaugural show at our newly relocated London gallery in The Whiteley, a historical landmark transformed into a lifestyle destination. For both the artist and the gallery, this moment is profoundly significant.

As the gallery owner and curator of this exhibition, as well as an avid fan and a long-time friend of Mr. Ma, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Katie Hill, who is an established academic, curator and speaker with an expertise in contemporary art, and Dr. Jiang Jun, who is the chief curator of Chinese Pavilion at the 60th Venice International Art Biennale (2024), for their insightful articles and academic guidance in shaping this exhibition.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Jérôme Neutres, a distinguished curator, for his insightful Preface to this exhibition and for his generous support in providing photos from Mr. Ma’s Pompidou exhibition. Dr. Neutres took the initiative in curating Mr Ma’s solo exhibition at Musée National d’Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou in 2022. In retrospect, the exhibition in Paris offered a glimpse of Mr. Ma’s “Woman” series, with two ink paintings featuring succinctly silhouetted female figures and another sketch work communicating female form’s lusciousness in delineated fashion. It makes our London exhibition, with its focus exclusively on “woman”, as both a curatorial continuation and a narrative extension.

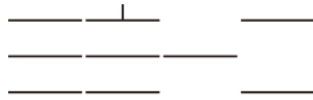
I would like to thank my incredible teams in London and Hong Kong for their outstanding dedication, expertise, and team spirit in bringing this exhibition to life with such resounding success.

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Last but certainly not least, I am profoundly grateful for the trust, support, and guidance of Mr. Ma. It is an honour to represent him in both London and Hong Kong.

Among over 20 meticulously handpicked works on display are Mr. Ma's two rare woodblock prints of silhouetted, goddess-like figures from the 1970s, along with his signature ink paintings of

voluptuous women—read as an intimate dialogue with Henri Matisse, featured in his 1980s oeuvre—lacing the exhibition with historical significance and grandeur.

As the inaugural exhibition of our new space at The Whiteley, “Woman” further consolidates 3812's curatorial DNA of “Eastern Origin and Contemporary Expression”, with Mr. Ma's East-meets-West artistic manoeuvre offering a precise and potent interpretation of our enduring vision.

Launching us on an experimental artistic journey and reaching a new height in our quest for cultural reinvention and East-and-West artistic dialogue, this exhibition marks a groundbreaking and rewarding milestone in both Mr. Ma's artistic path and our own vision. Another message distilled from Ma's “Woman” series is that the theme of “woman” defies eras and artistic zeitgeists, never becoming obsolete from history to the present. Ma's “Woman” series is more than what meets the eye. As Mr. Ma's relentless reinvention of artistic expression is steeped in his struggles, survival, and serendipitous encounters with his envisioned, idealised yet elusive female muses, the ultimate outcome of this artistic and life wisdom lends us an enlightening extension for our vision and horizon so that we could interpret and promote his art far and wide in a globally accessible language.

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london@3812cap.com

HONG KONG

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hongkong@3812cap.com



展覽前言

女人，畫布上不可及的觸感

策展人：許劍龍

他的「女人」或盤繞、或扭動、或旋轉、或蹣跚、或悠閒、或依偎、或斜倚、或挺立，以各種姿態散發著女性獨有的性感——無論是尖銳的、溫柔的或是健壯的，都躍然於畫布上；無論身材是豐滿還是纖細，她們都散發著熾烈的、閃耀的能量。這些都源於藝術家的當下情感——喜、怒、哀、樂；或渴望、或歡欣、或幻象。我們不必對他直白的描繪感到唐突，因為這是一種對生命的態度和對原始慾望的敬禮。對於這些「繆斯女神」的創造者馬德升來說，都是他的靈感泉源和熱愛生命的追求。

我認識馬德升已經有 20 年了，亦早在二十年前開始收藏他的「石」系列作品。他的畫作所傳達的精神是永恆的，具有持續共鳴的能量。這就是馬德升藝術的精彩之處——沒有什麼是短暫和空洞的，因為他探索的主題是植根於生命中恆久的智慧。



藝術填滿了馬德升的人生，藝術是他表達自我的唯一「渠道」，將自己和生命描繪成石頭，以石喻人，用石頭抒情，說生命的故事；也是他用仰慕的心情去歌頌女性身體之美，在他的筆下，女性以一種超凡脫俗、精緻絕倫的「繆斯女神」形象出現，象徵著上帝賜予人類最美好的禮物，也是他對宇宙天地之美的禮讚。

自 1986 年移居巴黎以來，馬德升一直以推進中國藝術現代化、提升中國藝術在國際舞臺上的影響力為己任。面對著中國當時不確定的環境，馬德升並無氣餒。相反，他將在海外傳播中國當代藝術作為己任。這樣的宣言反映了他作為藝術家的擔當，這種責任感源自於他對中國文化與身份引以為傲，並將其作為自己作品中典型的視覺元素。

「女人」作為展覽主題的緣起是偶然，也可以說是必然的。去年，我與 3812 畫廊的聯合創辦人及行政總裁 Mark Peaker 去巴黎拜訪馬德升老師，在他細小的工作室內，他給我們翻開一幅又一幅「偉大」的女人體畫作，那份視覺震撼感依然歷歷在目，讓我們望而生敬。其中那組於 2002 年創作的最早期女人體三聯畫，仍然讓我記憶猶新。

午餐時，Mark 提出舉辦一個以「女人體」為展覽主題的想法，我和馬老師對此感到興奮。最後，我們的命題：「女人 — 馬德升個展」。

LONDON

Unit 3, G/F, The Whiteley, 137 Queensway,
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HONG KONG

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hongkong@3812cap.com



平心而論，這個標題遠超其字面含義。「女人」在馬老師展覽的語境中不僅代表了女性形象，更是他藝術創作的靈感來源，還折射了他的人生願景和哲學——一種堅毅不移克服苦難的韌性，並通過滲透生命真諦獲得精神自由，並以其開創性的技法於畫布上無拘無束地表達。

2024 年，我們在 3812 的香港畫廊為馬老師舉辦「在「石」空下許願」個展，今年在倫敦 3812 推出「女人—馬德升個展」——是老師藝術生涯中首次以女人為主題並全面性展出「女人體」畫作的大型個展，亦是我們的倫敦畫廊喬遷往全新地標式大型歷史建築活化項目—懷特利 (The Whiteley) 的開幕展，對藝術家及畫廊來說，都是極具標誌性意義。

作為畫廊主及展覽策展人，又是馬老師的粉絲和他 的多年好友，我在此希望感謝今次參與的著名學者和策展人，包括：英國著名的當代藝術專家與學者何凱特博士 (Dr. Katie Hill)，以及 2024 年第 60 屆威尼斯國際藝術 雙年展中國館的首席策展人姜俊博士，感謝他們為本次 展覽撰寫學術文章及提供學術指導。我還要向法國著名 策展人黑陽博士 (Dr. Jérôme Neutres) 致以最真摯的 謝意，感謝他撥冗出席展覽開幕式並發言。黑陽博士於 2022 年策劃了馬老師在巴黎蓬皮杜藝術中心國家現代藝術博物館的個展。回顧來看，巴黎的展覽呈現了馬先生 的「女人」系列一瞥，其中包括兩幅以簡練剪影描繪女 性形態的水墨作品，以及另一幅以勾勒手法展現女性體 態豐盈感的素描作品。這使得我們在倫敦聚焦「女性」 的展覽成為一次策展與敘事上的延續。

此外，我要感謝我的倫敦和香港畫廊團隊，為此次展覽的付出、他們的專業和團隊精神讓我引以為傲。

最後，我必須向馬德升老師致敬，非常感謝他的信任、關愛、支持和指導。我們很榮幸能成為他在英國和大中華地區的代理畫廊。

今次展覽展出超過 20 幅大尺幅畫作，包括兩幅 1970 年代女神般剪影的人物木版畫，相當罕見；以及於 1980 年 代創作的水墨畫——藝術家特意地分享他與法國野獸派大師亨利·馬蒂斯 (Henri Matisse, 1869 - 1954) 進行的隔空精神對話，使得這場展覽更富宏大的藝術史意義。

作為我們位於 The Whiteley 新空間的開幕展，「女人」進一步堅定了 3812 畫廊「東方根性，當代表現」這一貫穿始終的策展理念。而馬德升東西交融的藝術手法 為此提供了最好的詮釋。

此次展覽開啟了我們探索文化重塑的新旅程以及在東西方藝術對話實踐中的新高峰。它標誌著馬德升先生 藝術道路上的一個突破性且富有成果的里程碑，同時亦是 我們理念實踐中的重要篇

章。我們可以從馬老師的「女人體」系列中提取出另一個訊息——「女人」這命題是超越 時空、無分國界，永不過時的。不僅如此，這些作品還為 我們提供了極富啟發性的視野延伸，因為老師

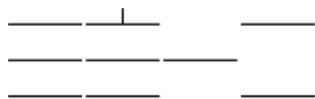
LONDON

Unit 3, G/F, The Whiteley, 137 Queensway,
London W2 4DB, England
+44 203 982 1863
london@3812cap.com

HONG KONG

26/F, Wyndham Place, 44 Wyndham Street,
Central, Hong Kong
+852 2153 3812
hongkong@3812cap.com

3 8 1 2 GALLERY



W: 3812gallery.com

IG: @3812gallery

一生奮力地 掙扎求存, 為藝術理想而活, 並在他與難以觸及的「繆斯女神」於畫布上美妙邂逅當中, 啟發我們用一種蘊含普世價值的藝術語言來詮釋、欣賞和領悟他的藝術。

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