

# NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021

[nightgallery.ca](http://nightgallery.ca)

## HAN BING

territory to be tamed

——if not later then when

October 13 – November 17, 2018

In this new group of eleven paintings, Han Bing mines the constant but mostly unobserved skirmish between our precisely gridded metropole and its unruly constituents. The works on view are inspired by photographs, many captured in subterranean stations across Manhattan, which the artist has crystallized into delicate abstractions that evidence a tenuous balance. Crucially, while capturing the dilapidated state of her adopted city's transit system, these paintings also serve as framing devices by which to present compositions hiding from the commuter in plain sight.

The paintings call to my mind the pastime of bored riders waiting for a delayed train: peeling the surface of ads pasted to terminal walls to reveal fragments of previously pasted ads below them. Han Bing's process is an inversion of this insubordinate act. Rather than peeling away, she instead built several of the paintings up from heavily saturated grounds of hunter green. This hue, now visible only peripherally, is the color dictated by New York City zoning laws for the construction of the ubiquitous and highly contentious scaffolding termed "sheds." It's a color with which most city residents are familiar to the point of having become inured to its presence, but Han Bing homes in on this visual detail of the urban landscape and employs it strategically and emphatically, her green grounds structuring the works at their upper and lower edges. The artist affixed multiple layers of acrylic that had been carefully spray-painted so as to mimic the granular texture of commercial photographs. And there is another inversion at play. The artist selects her happenstance compositions for their ineffable "rightness," but the resulting paintings are anything but casual. Han Bing's is both a humble undertaking and a monumental one. As any painter (or, for that matter, comedian or ballet dancer) can attest, nailing the effect of effortlessness is no small task.

One striking example is "Champs-Élysées," 2018, which features a forest-green acrylic wash on canvas whose gridded framework is created from negative space—lines taped off while the fabric was saturated so that the unprimed support peeks through. "Champs-Élysées" was inspired by a photograph of half-scraped ads—this time, as the title indicates, observed from the Parisian street. The resulting piece recalls Lynda Benglis' poured latex floor experiments. Han Bing disrupts the grid with deceptively complex organic forms at the work's upper and lower edges, created by pouring pale blue paint onto the horizontal canvases so that it formed tendrils and eddies. The pattern is thus disrupted by a combination of chance and control. In its reference and in its process, "Champs-Élysées" evokes the interplay of intentional destruction and random interventions by which the work's source image came to be. As in all of these works, the friction between the two is clear.

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While these paintings present photographs distilled to abstraction, a key to understanding them can be found in a separate but directly correlated suite of works on paper. These pieces, sheets of New York Times newsprint originally used as paint blotters, were chosen just as the subway compositions were, for their satisfying formal relation between surface and ground. It's difficult not to project the titles of these articles onto the works themselves. (One reads "Who'll Pay for the Mess at Equifax?" recalling last year's panic-inducing nationwide security breach.) And yet that is what the artist asks us to do: To see them not for their headlines but as visual objects. Far from paeans to modernist notions of "pure abstraction," these pieces cumulatively suggest simply that we take a moment to appreciate the elegance of this wild, messy, visual world before plunging back into the fray.

— Cat Kron

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**Han Bing** was born in Shandong, China, in 1986. She received a MFA from Parsons the New School of Design, New York, and also holds a MFA and a BFA from Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing. She has had two solo exhibitions with Antenna Space in Shanghai, and is currently based in New York.