

LARRY LI ASK YOUR MA ABOUT

'89

Exhibition Preview

November 17, 2023-
January 20, 2024

____Residency

About Larry Li



Larry Li is a Chinese American artist born and raised in the bay area, California. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

His practice is rooted in the inherited experiences of the Chinese Diaspora. Using historical photographs of modern China, archival familial photographs, and cultural symbols that permeated his youth, his paintings explore the intersections of familial and political histories. Casting a critical lens on the complexities of cultural hybridity developed through third culture identities, and the historical intersections of a shared perspective existing in a diaspora. Li holds an MFA from Otis college of Art and Design, and a BFA from USC Roski School of Art and Design. His work has been exhibited at Residency Gallery in Inglewood, F2t Gallery in Milan, Long Story Short in New York, Anthony Gallery in Chicago, Think Space Projects, Art Basel Miami, Felix art fair, and more. In 2024 he looks forward to participating as an artist in residence at the Swatch art Peace Hotel in Shang Hai.

Artist's Note on Exhibition

"Ask your ma about '89. I can't say why, but she held me, crying, as I brought back your uncle to the front gates of the university."

The show takes its name from a conversation I had with an old friend of my mother's, his name was Mr. Ma. We sat down at a restaurant in China as he told me stories from his time at graduate school in Beijing, where he studied with both my parents during the 80s. That's when he brought up the incident in 1989. It took me a while to process what he was saying as I was mentally juggling the conversation in Mandarin. But then I knew exactly what he was talking about, and those words clung to me as a reminder that trauma, memories, and pivotal experiences in one's life will always find a way to manifest themselves across generations.

In actuality, I have asked my mom about 1989 before. That was the year of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the student protest that ended in devastation and changed the political and cultural landscape of an entire generation. My mom mentioned this story to me when I asked her about the protest.



Larry and Uncle Ma, Jinan, China, July 27th 2023

*Her younger brother was out in the streets when the government began the violent crackdown. She had no idea where he was. She didn't continue to explain any further, but years later I would be sitting across from Mr. Ma hearing the same story from his perspective. He was the one who found my uncle and brought him back to my mom unharmed. What always struck me was how both my mom and Mr. Ma would recall these memories while brushing it off with a smile, casually speaking of it as if it was just something that happened. Part of me wants to unravel what kind of impact that time in their life amounted to, but we don't speak of trauma. We continue forward, brushing it off with a smile. This is our relationship. However, I've come to **accept it**. I sit and listen, take in what I can, and acknowledge that I will never get the full picture. I lean into the cultural distances experienced inside a diaspora, and how much it takes to regain those. Perhaps these paintings too are a moment of sitting and listening. Not quite inserting myself asking for more and more clarity, but instead embracing the messiness that comes with the yearning desire to understand one's inherited histories.*



My Mother and father and their classmates and professors,
Chinese Agricultural University, Beijing, 1989

Bikes and Concrete I

2023

Oil and Sharpie on Canvas

12x9in



Bikes and Concrete 2

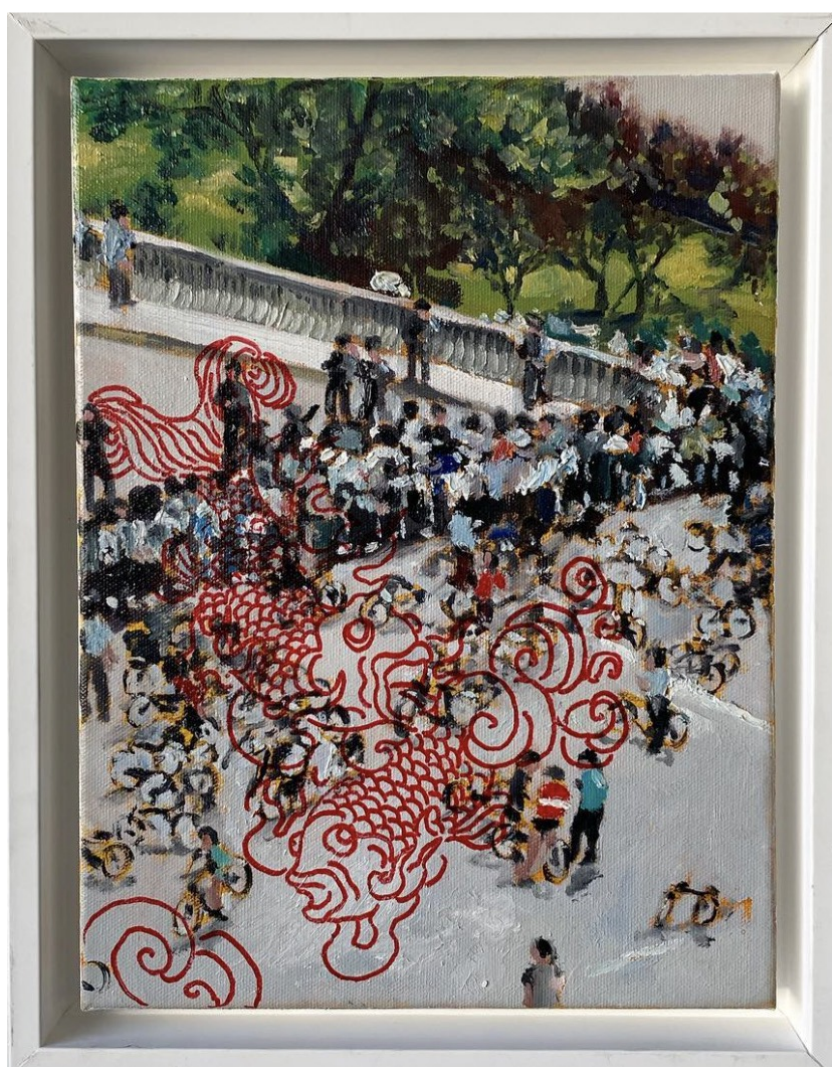
2023

Oil and Sharpie on Canvas

12x9in



Bikes and Concrete 3
2023
Oil and Sharpie on Canvas
12x9in



Cheng Cheng

2022

Gel Transfer and Oil on Canvas

16x12in



Red Knowledge

2023

Acrylic and Collaged
Paper Cuts on Canvas
24x24in



Love in the streets of Zheng Zhou

2023

Gel Transfer, Pastels, Oil Stick
and Collaged Paper Cuts On Board
24x24in



Waiting and Watching I

2023

Gel Transfer, Oil Pastel, Oil Stick and Sharpie
on Canvas Board
24x18in



Waiting and Watching 2

2023

Gel Transfer, Oil Pastel, Oil Stick and Sharpie
on Canvas Board
24x18in



Familial Archive II

2022

Oil, Gel Transfer, Ink and Oil Stick on Wood

Panel

36x24in



Portrait of my cousin from China I

2023

Acrylic, Oil and Collaged Paper Cuts on
Canvas
40x30in



Portrait of my cousin from China 2

2023

Acrylic, Oil and Collaged Paper Cuts on
Canvas
40x36in



Ask your ma about '89

2023

Oil and Oil Pastel on Canvas

60x48in



The Dragon the Tiger and the Sun

2023

Oil, Oil Pastel, Oil Stick on Canvas

72x60in



Beijings Lovers Rock

2023

Acrylic, Oil, Oil Pastel,
Oil Stick, and Collaged Paper
Cuts on Canvas
60x72in





Sunset at the Red Parade, 2023

Acrylic, Oil, Oil Pastel and Oil Stick on Canvas
72x108in