

PARASOL PROJECTS

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Odele Zhang

LIVE Broadcast

PARASOL PROJECTS

August 23 - August 27,
2017

Odele E. Zhang

Any statement made here should be considered ephemeral. It serves as a note to myself. Your presence makes this entry a witnessed one, I suppose.

For four years prior to 2017, I had been fascinated with mammals, especially four legged wild beasts: jaguars and any sorts of large cats, rhinos, elephants, hyenas, grizzlies, even ancient ones like mammoths. To learn about them, often my only resort was to capture their movements, behaviors, on camera, then, later, refer to the images. National geographic images, Pinterest, DK science illustrations, “The Prehistoric” were all references I would cling onto. I wanted to understand them, perhaps, because I did not consider myself one of them. I wanted to experience forms that were not me. I studied them, drew them, and drew references of them, learned from the renditions of beasts from artists before me like Eugene Delacroix, George Stubbs.



Odele Zhang, *Dancer*, 2017 / ink on paper / 8" x 10"

Slowly, I began to realize my departure from real life engagements. In the same scope, as I traversed art shows. I noticed that few of my expressions today are based off of a live object/subject. As an artist, I engaged in reference after reference, the layers of references adding to my artificial grasp with the world that I currently indulge in. Via my initial *plein air* sessions, in observing nature, I found that all is lost when fixated to pixels. It was not my memory I captured, they were codes of the image, unrelated to my being, or my way of perceiving. Layers of greens never reaching what my eyes or body really experienced. Depths of view, and angles of view, were all trapped.

On a high wind day, gray, and pre-storm in the autumn, at the Bronx Zoo, I tied a 56 in. x 36 in. large canvas to the bars that stopped the grizzlies from roaming the zoo, so that the canvas would not fall to the ground. The canvas already had two nudes on it I painted a few days prior with professional models in my New York studio. I did not take photos of the grizzlies. I followed their movements with my brush and pinned down what I saw. My live interaction with them was stressful, changeful, and unpredictable. They can screw up my composition within segments of 15 seconds. How do I process that information? How do I commemorate their being? They wouldn't sit still for me. From this painting onward, I changed my practice.

It was frustrating at first: to have the language to paint fluidly within a constraint of time wherein your subjects can be in front of you meant I had to improve my precision. Then, I began to enjoy how the use of a few lines can render my moving targets. Male nudes became my first fascination to interact with live. They are also a species I am not, and I long to understand. Then I moved my interest to couples, and now perhaps will move back to animal forms and trees.

The central moving force is the moment.
Now, really a variation on the same theme:
The ephemeral is invading the permanent.
The live is invading the artificial.
My actions are seized by time (or I seize time?)

About the Artist:

Odele Eleanor Zhang works with multi-media explorations on the intersections of nature and contemporary society. Zhang's work is informed by her engagement with photography, sculpture, and painting. An avid researcher of mammalian behavior, global natural ecosystems, urban landscapes, and contemporary interpretations of intellectual history, Zhang seeks to incorporate and recast her research, offering unexpected descriptions of scenery in work that is at once inquisitive, playful, and tense. Time-constrained execution is integral to her practice, along with providing a glimpse of natural splendor recast within contemporary art practice.

Zhang has exhibited in the United States and abroad at venues including GloguaAIR in Berlin; Chashama, Lazy Susan, REVERSE, and West Chelsea Artists in New York City; SOHO Gallery and O Gallery in Shanghai; Skaftfell Art Center of Iceland, and many more. She participated in visiting artist programs at institutions including Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Victoria Academy. In 2014 and 2016, Zhang participated in artist residencies at Germany and Iceland respectively. In (year), she participated in (residencies?), and recently mounted exhibition as part of (program?).

Zhang holds a BS of Economics from the University of Pennsylvania and has studied with mentors at the Arts Student League of New York, School of Visual Art, and the National Fine Arts Academy of New York. She lives and works in Menlo Park, California.

For more information on Odele E. Zhang's extant work, please visit:
<http://www.odele.co/>

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Catalogue design by Pablo Barrera

I am limited by subject and time, as is the subject. The live painting sessions forced all subjects to remove distractions, to focus on what, at the moment, was significant to show. Was this artist/subject relationship an opportunity to challenge our behaviors?

Interacting with an alive subject. My subject and I being there for that short duration, minutes or hours, will never again be replicated. Even if we reconvene at some point in the future, I'll be in a different state, as will they. We will be in another set of amalgamated skills and thoughts and flesh (cells). No stroke is the same.

Free, fluid, in the moment. Once it's over, we are done. We don't revisit the past. I don't enjoy to. Keeping the free and fluid strokes alive is like keeping some untainted part of yourself alive. It's very easy to lose it. To be tampered with authority, rules, painting rules, conceptual art rules, contemporary art rules.

I enjoy taking information from many different disciplines, living real lives of a modern man to understand it; I don't like to be stuck in the art world nor any particular world. My thoughts rest on contemplations beyond the painting stroke, YET, it all comes back to the stroke, to the way layers of paint react with each other, which colors are chosen, splashed first, dabbled second, the energy the serendipity, the vivacity.

The stroke is the mark of existence. It all comes back to making a mark about that existence.
So what is it a mark of?

It's not really for you to remember me.
It's more for me to not forget me
Reencountering earlier me(s) became rather fun.

Odele E. Zhang, as of August 15th, 2017

LIVE Broadcast

Curated by Pablo Barrera
August 22 – August 27, 2017

LIVE Broadcast delves into Zhang's personal, visual engagement with her subjects. Zhang challenged herself to produce paintings within a set time restriction, a single day, in order to grapple with how the artist responds to the fleeting moments that the target of her art decides to reveal when observed. Her paintings connote a seemingly figurative state, but Zhang's practice also serves to render her momentary reaction to painting. Classical traditions of painting train us to decipher the mimetic, but Zhang attempts to capture the tense moment when the artist is transcribing the shifting visuals of the physical object, making the painted object reflect her ephemeral reactions toward what she observes.

The pursuit of live painting emerged as a key practice for Zhang when she progressed from an earlier reliance on photography for rendering animals in collage-like works. Easy access to thousands of snapshots burdened her previous practice with an overabundance of digital images from which to draw from. Zhang vainly attempted to process the plethora of material, was frustrated by their incompleteness, and became disillusioned by her inability to refer back to each fragment as her art was assembled. The idea of finishing became an authority that turned art into a task. Zhang contemplated rejecting this authority at the same time as her works increasingly ejected standard shorthand for descriptive imagery.

In Zhang's earlier works, animals serve as the actants of an urban landscape. By placing them in unexpected, yet rational relationships to urban settings, nature became a heterotopic place, always in the mind's eye, yet not depicted in traditional format. The looming presence of nature as a sort of ideational “negative space” strains the visual matter of each painting and sculptural arrangement. Their tension is relieved via bursts of color and playful depictions, but the moment each animal touches on “base” acts, such as sexuality, violence, or eating and sleeping, they evoke anthropomorphism, making the human realm a layered referent on top of the pre-existing “natural” form. As these animal visitors invade our constructed spaces, their ability to quickly, easily occupy them threatens our sense of unproblematic presence.

Zhang's continued attention to nature and natural settings catalyzed her recent departure from seeking fixed imagery and relationships. Zhang noted, “Nature and natural beings are transient and resist observation...we ourselves should be worried about being observed as well.” Mindful of how we now capture ourselves in still-images, and how our sense of self is constrained by the images we take, Zhang wondered if the sheer quantity of imagery we possess only serves to give a false impression that we are not missing a single moment. Zhang worried about our collective loss of “that flowing momentariness.”

In her newer work, Zhang seizes the opportunity painting offers toward achieving an ephemeral impression. Zhang's previous works relied on digital photography to produce and reproduce her imagery. Preconceived ideas of nature, city, and order combined with the layered visuals of the digital medium to generating composites of animals and landscapes; however, in observing the shifting colors and textures of fur and hide, Zhang acknowledged how an amateur application of photography allowed the medium to unintentionally facilitate a denial of complex visual elements. In her new works, Zhang discards photography's filter on how she “sees,” instead, aiming for a live reading of her subject's visual reality. Painting from real life allows Zhang to process the layers of color and texture that light reveals over time and through motion. Her attention is now drawn to the liveliness her subjects inherently possess.

Impressionists have addressed some of these issues, but, for Zhang, it was less

about impression and more about the existence of her subject. In vying for this honest, constrained impression of her subject, Zhang deviates from the scientific and ocular preoccupations of impressionist painters, per se, as well as the emotional tone of abstract expressionists, while fighting the commercial illustration style that informed the surfaces of modern painters. Zhang cites J. M. W. Turner as an influence on her version of a *plein air* painting style, but while Turner's works use light to masterfully execute a portrayal of the atmosphere and mood of nature, Zhang is interested in the nature of the relationship between herself and her subject. Zhang acknowledges how light governs how an artist sees, and uses that moment to capture her "selfish" pursuit of engaging by painting. Zhang is learning how she feels as she paints, and painting what she learns.

Zhang celebrates the subject's unique existence by leaving the traces she has managed to retrieve at the moment of painting, as opposed to a prolonged rendering. Her nude subjects submit to light and time: subtle skin tones are exaggerated, clashing with brushstrokes eager to depict motion. Her quickly executed paintings wrench these furtive qualities, as the painting toggles between abstraction and figuration, without respecting either. The figurative is not enough, as Zhang aims to equally prioritize the undeniable primal instincts her subjects possess and share with her. Abstraction is insufficient; Zhang is just as preoccupied with the illusory elements the combination of physical presence, shifting light, and time produces. The viewer is then invited to shed trained modes of seeing and consider the problematic need for self-presence during our voyeuristic perusal of the depictions she provides.

LIVE Broadcast is about Zhang's fleeting attention to the subject during the limited time of interaction, depicting an internalized sense of the moment that rendered the painting in that condition.

As a short-term pop-up space, **Parasol Projects @ Rivington** mirrors the type of constraints that Zhang's recent works desire to capitalize on. The compressed time limit of the show drives Zhang to discard any unnecessary projections or attempts at quotation. The limited showing compliments Zhang's momentary engagement with her subjects leading up to the exhibition. **Parasol Projects'** pop-up nature offers the viewer an equally compressed, live engagement with the works themselves.

The works in this catalog are illustrated in pairs, with one older work in conversation with a newer work. This does not mean that one must engage the works in this order, or necessarily equate them to the given pairings. Rather, my hope is that these pairings stimulate analysis of each work in ways their chronological creation cannot. These pairings let the viewer better see the interaction between subject and artist via selected attempts at an artistic gesture that each pair draws attention to.



Detail from: *Two Rhinos*, Odele Zhang, 2016 / oil on linen / 18" x 24"

LIVE Broadcast



Odele Zhang, *Nude Rocks in Central Park*, 2016 / oil on linen / 11 " x 14"

The central boulder seems to evoke a turn-of-the-century preoccupation with nature and geology. However, Zhang intended the stone as a “nude” protrusion, taking us away from Romantic artistic notions by shifting the stone’s presence from “nature as god intended” toward “nature as raw and primal.” Atmospheric techniques play with sharp brushstrokes to visually unify the “nude” stones with the “dressed” trees.



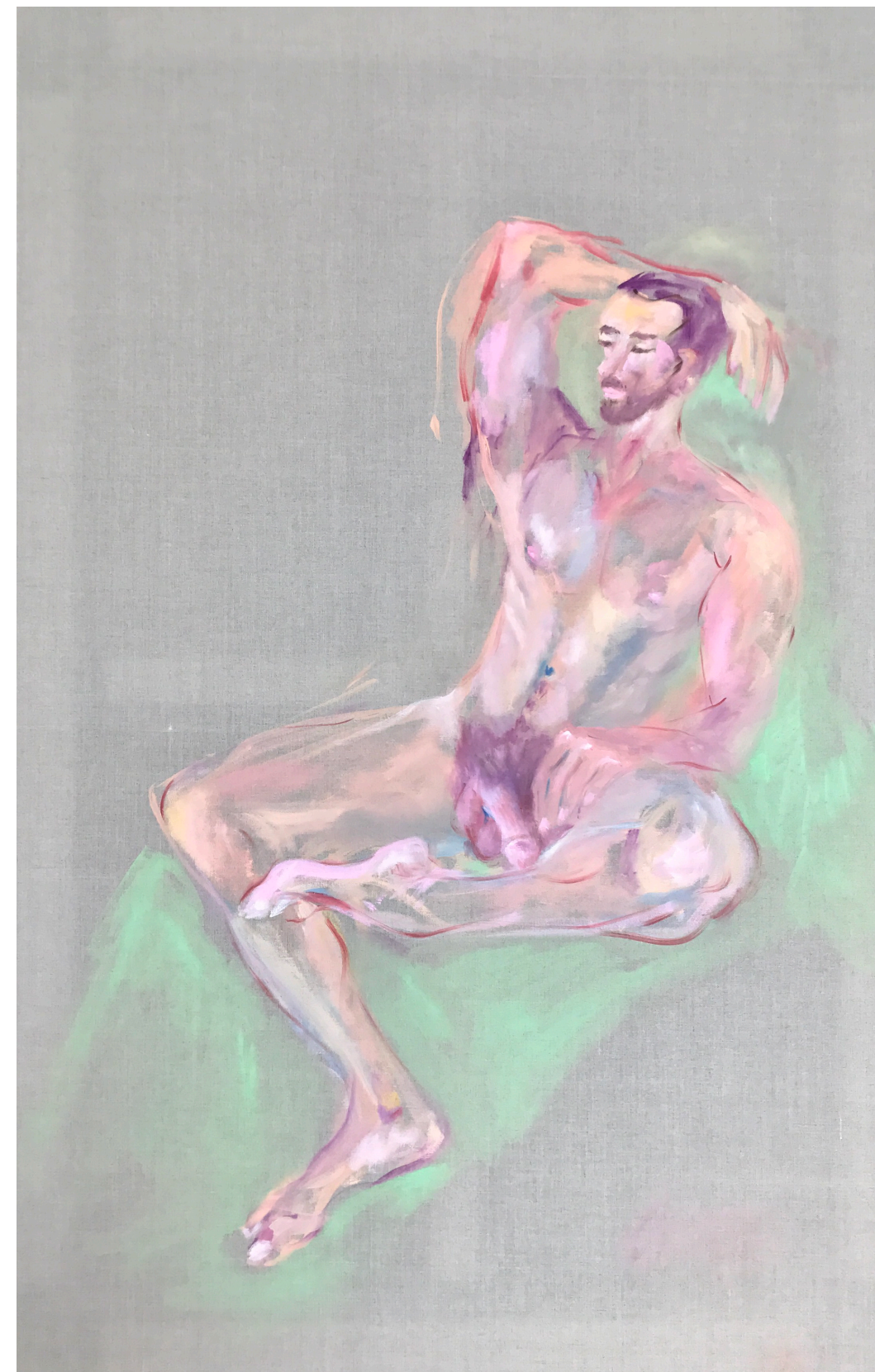
Odele Zhang, *Forest*, 2017 / oil on linen / 56" x 32"

The resulting landscape is less concerned with detail but still thinking of the ephemeral qualities of nature from previous works. Turner is a major influence for the “atmospheric” attributes, threatening to drag the viewer back toward the idea of “Romanticized” landscapes, but the expressive painting style denies that formal interpretation.



Odele Zhang, *Grizzly*, 2016 / oil on linen / 9" x 12"

The bear as subject is given agency and presence. Zhang is still relying on the features of a bear for recognition of traits and character, but at this stage, she is asking as to what is the "bear-ness" of a bear, working out which features should be kept and which can be discarded without losing an honest representation.



Odele Zhang, *James*, 2017 / oil on linen / 56" x 32 "

In this painting, Zhang's relationship to her friend is crucial to understand why the surface presentation is actually a psychological attribute. The self-satisfied posture is a key element of his personality. The limited moment of capturing these traits is true to form.



Odele Zhang, *Pink Lions*, 2015 / oil on linen / 20 " x 26"

Compared to Zhang's earlier works, the canvas is almost entirely covered in paint except for a selected area, bringing in the texture. The composition is about a pairing, but the relationship is ambiguous. Are they fighting? Mating? Playing? Surreal in its setting, jarring in its rendering, yet, soft and palatable. Zhang's color choices are abstract but intentional, and the surface area is strained but approachable. At the same time, the composition is inaccessible, as the viewer is limited to non-linear perspective.



Odele Zhang, *Ben & Emily*, 2017 / oil on linen / 56" x 32 "

In rendering this pairing, the viewer is placed in an almost voyeuristic position, yet the relaxed postures of the subjects are inviting to the viewer. Like the pair of animals from before, the subjects are positioned to be confrontational, while allowing the gaze to wander beyond the figured subjects onto other parts of the composition. Likewise, personalities emerge.

The relationship between Zhang, her friend, and his significant other enriches our understanding of Zhang's artistic priorities between her and the subjects. . For the painting, the couple said that they were "locked in time" and "forced" to look at each other, be with each other, which aroused them.

This intriguing, fully painted canvas with intentional coloration contains a face that sticks out. That face was a request that interrupts the painter's program: a feature that contains too much detail but is indicative of the subjects' desire to recognize their captured moment together. That displayed desire is an invitation to an otherwise personal and private moment Zhang was allowed to see.



Odele Zhang, *Two Rhinos*, 2016 / oil on linen / 18" x 24"

This painting is Zhang's ultimate expression of ephemera in abstraction. The rhinos are reduced to the most essential aspects Zhang's painting technique can manage without becoming illustrative. The lack of outlines makes the work definitively painterly and definitely transient, even quixotic.



Odele Zhang, *David*, 2017 / oil on linen / 56" x 32"

The composition is an equally accomplished mastery of Zhang's new painterly approach: capturing a fleeting moment the subject has allowed to be transcribed visually. For David, he felt compelled to focus on writing his comedy sketches. Zhang effectively transposes personality and charm; details allow the eye to linger, yet do not lock down upon any overbearing form. One can recognize features upon the almost featureless subject. As a whole, the painting contains a compositional completeness, but can be broken down as you peruse aspects of the subject's personality. All aspects are given equal priority: Zhang is no longer fixating on faces or phalluses on her nudes, allowing her to step away from Freudian concerns, as genitalia are given as much importance as soles of feet or book covers. However, these genitals and book covers are still affectionately rendered and respected as part of the subject.



Odele Zhang, Bison Fight, 2016 / oil on linen / 58" x 24"

The saturated forms of the bison are unburdened by the striking black contour lines. The winding line of trees in the distance and shadowy curves in the foreground echo and contrast the mass of the bodies. Light becomes an expressive element that commands as much space as these roaming animals.



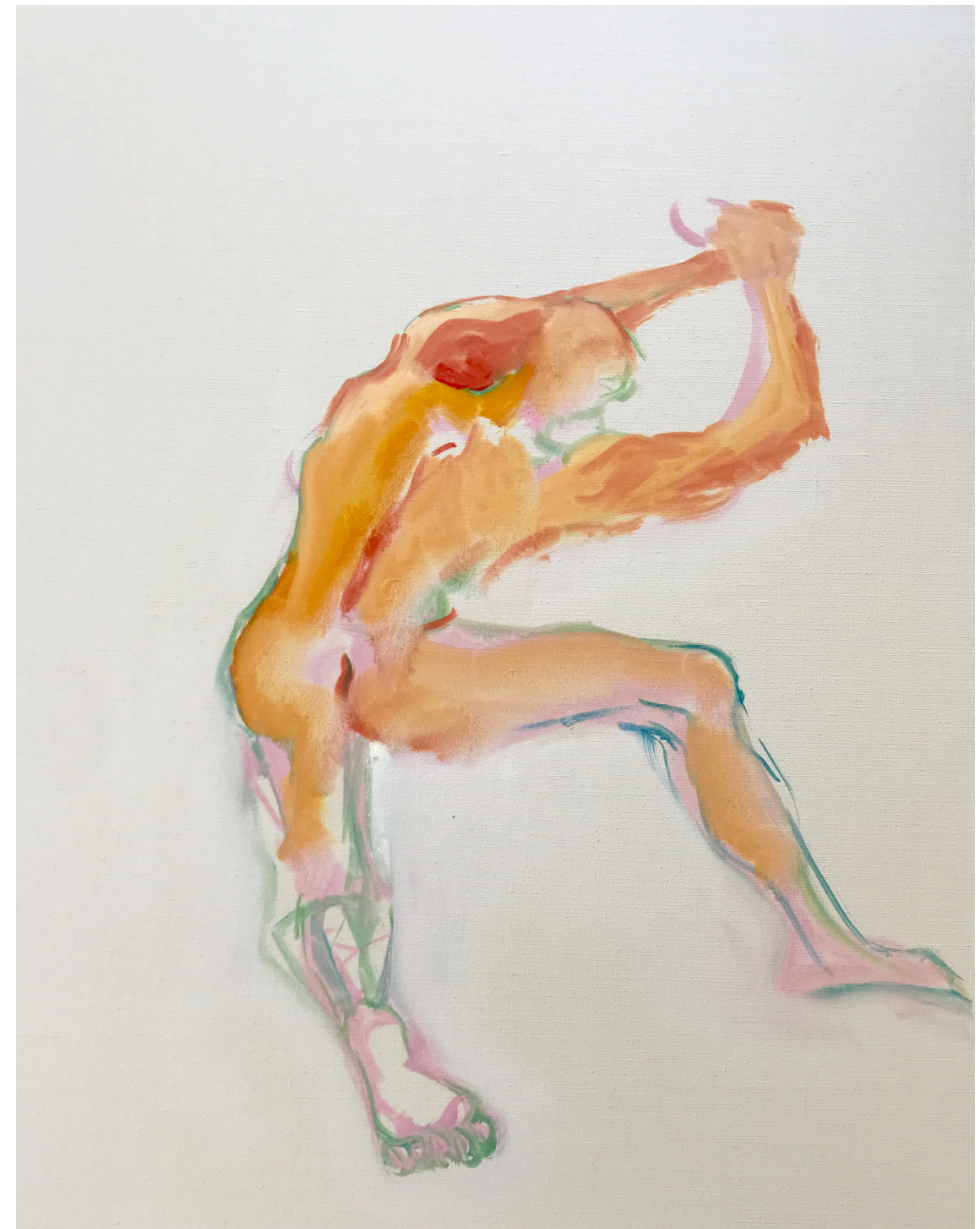
Odele Zhang, (untitled), 2017 / oil on canvas / 20 x 26"

Lines work with shading that gives way details and form contours. The subject's pose is dynamic, but quiet and meditative. The surrounding of the body is as important as the body itself: in this newer work, background colors highlight the figure in a way that is not seen in the previous image. Instead of color strictly emerging from the figure itself, here, the hues are imbued in their surroundings, giving off an emotional expression.



Odele Zhang, *Bison Ate the Idea*, 2016 / oil on linen / 56 " x 28 "

There is a strange comfort in the soft monotony of this polychrome. The use of color is, once again, unexpected in palette, but grounds the gaze and guides the viewer into a landscape. Efficient, expressive strokes evoke the presence of bison on the horizon.



Odele Zhang, (untitled), 2017 / oil on canvas / 20" x 26"

The nude figure seems to leap across this canvas, belying the static of the now dry paint. The colors and strokes are memories of the corporeal movement that Zhang perceived and captured. The sparsely shaded yet structural rendering of the left leg strikingly evokes kinetic musculature that contrasts with the daubs and streaks of color forming the rest of the body.