



For Immediate Release

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Media Release

Media Contact

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Willie Yao

HALF : HALF

On view January 4 – February 24, 2019

E. Avery Draper Gallery

The Delaware Contemporary is pleased to present *HALF : HALF* by Willie Yao. This will be the first exhibition of the Draper Experiment series, as well as part of our institution's China Initiative projects. *HALF : HALF* debuts ten artworks created site-specifically and explores how the artist discovers his identity and lifestyle as an urban citizen through painting, video, and other media installations. Figurative and deeply individualistic, Yao invites the observer to ask questions about one's dynamic identity, psychology, and life experiences.

American Artist, Glenn Ligon once said, "The 'one' that I am is composed of narratives that overlap, run parallel to, and often contradict one another."

It is no coincidence that this statement on identity from **Yourself in the World: Selected Writings and Interviews** perfectly explains the title, *HALF : HALF*. Having lived in Shanghai, Beijing, and New York City, Yao, as a Chinese contemporary artist, has in-depth and unique urban experiences. Every city in which he plants roots, Yao immerses himself into the local community with alacrity, even with all the language and so-called cultural "barriers."

To demonstrate the internal “half” his life exemplifies, the largest artwork in the exhibition, *Man-09152017*, reveals how Willie’s internal transformation stems from his iconic graffiti illustration art style into simple compositions with a more confident aesthetic. In his previous practice, Yao drew lines to form color blocks, leaving specks in the in-between spaces to evoke mystery; like stars in the dark night sky, reservations exist in the small gaps. It was on the exact date, September 15, 2017, finding himself alone on a flight to China, Willie experienced an inner awakening. As the influential American performance, video, and installation artist, Vito Acconci once said, “I’m using art as a means of changing myself, as a means of breaking out of a category.”

To portray the external “half” of his engagements and impacts in life and art, Yao invited friends, peers, ex-husband, and strangers to collaborate on the artistic process and thus complete the narrative of *HALF : HALF*. The co-creators in this exhibition include, No. 223, one of the most popular photographers in China focusing on intimate relations, and KidK, Chief Editor of the Chinese street fashion hype magazine, *YOHO!*. By including these collaborators, Yao positions his identity and linkage to a broader context of lifestyle elements, such as the relationship between pop art and contemporary art and how one thinks or lives as the driving force between consumerism and pop culture. As such, the exhibition invites the viewer to encounter their own sense of growth and discovery. For Willie Yao, his most profound discovery upon reading Robert Browning’s dramatic verse in Pippa’s Passes, ...”All’s right with the world,” is the notion that “the Divine has given the most fitting end.”

A mini-documentary produced and based on the creative process of *HALF : HALF* showcasing the artist’s challenges and inspirations accompanies the exhibition.

Willie Yao was born in Shanghai and now resides in New York. Yao entered the media and marketing industry where he developed his painting and design skills, serving as the illustrator for *GQ*, *Bazaar*, *Modern Weekly*, and other media outlets in China. In 2013, Willie relocated to New York where he was able to truly define his own artistic vision establishing his distinctive and recognizable graffiti style. His vivid color scheme and line work evoke

the compositions of notable contemporary artists Keith Haring, Julian Schnabel, and Jean Michel Basquiat. Yao has had exhibitions and worked in Shanghai, Beijing, and New York. Yao is now working as a Creative-in-Residence at The Delaware Contemporary. The overall scope of work is in the capacity of a visual artist, guest curator, press and media relations agent, and Chinese communication and cultural specialist.

WHEN: January 4 – February 24, 2019

EVENTS: Opening reception: Friday, February 1, 5 – 9 PM during Art Loop. Free and open to the public.

WHERE: E. Avery Draper Gallery, The Delaware Contemporary, 200 South Madison Street, Wilmington, DE 19801

DIRECTIONS LINK: <https://www.decontemporary.org/visit-us/>

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