

# Bad Timing

Xper. Xr

02 April 2022 — 04 June 2022



Hot on the heels of *Tailwhip*, Empty Gallery is pleased to present ***Bad Timing***, Xper.Xr's second exhibition with the gallery, and his first presentation of new work in nearly three decades. Occupying a seminal, if oft-overlooked, position within Hong Kong art history, Xper stands nearly alone as a regional representative of the radically individualistic and anti-authoritarian potentials embodied by the shared legacy of industrial, no wave, and noise music. *Bad Timing* sees this interminable provocateur re-animating his long deceased painting practice - last sighted at the Quart Society in 1991 - with a perverse and unexpected turn towards society portraiture.

Fomented by Hong Kong's suffocating recent history of governmental ineptitude, political strife, and elite abdication of responsibility, this ensemble of new paintings depicts an international cast of sociopolitical bad actors - from financiers and technocrats to religious leaders - brought together by a shared propensity for betrayal of the public trust. Each portrait appropriates its sardonic title from a classic pop song (see such choice examples as MTV Makes Me Want To Smoke Crack), extending Xper's career - long fascination with ersatz covers of iconic tunes into the media of painting, and indelibly linking the exercise of societal power with the operation of the culture industry.

Working from publicly available photographs, Xper first renders a likeness of the VIP in question on stretched pig skin roundels, before subjecting this figure to a quasi-ritualistic defacement, a kind of expressionistic hazing which yields a picture plane rich with scintillating deposits of synthetic pus, mucus, and other substances. These cathartic (and deeply humorous) traces of defilement point to the origin of these works in the intimate sphere of private performance. They hint at their function as (perhaps failed) therapeutic attempts by Xper to exorcize the toxic influence of certain public figures from his mental landscape - a potentially relatable impulse during a cultural moment in which the borders between individual experience and media-sanctioned consensus realities have grown frighteningly porous. However, if these paintings gesture towards an ideal of control through their command of representation, they do so in full knowledge that this is merely a facile maneuver born of juvenile fantasy - one which, lacking any real political efficacy, can propose only blackest humor as a form of potential resistance.

While the portraits in *Bad Timing* may function admirably as more or less sincere outlets for cathartic rage, as elsewhere in Xper's practice, they are riddled with contradiction and self-sabotage, dead-ends and false-turns: tragicomic objects rigged to auto-destruct. Presaging and even reveling in their own socio-political failure, they stage critique - that most vaunted form of artistic capital - as self-lacerating farce. Exchanging complicit glances with both the viewer, and each other, as a group they seem to express a sense of knowing dread: an intimation of clandestine malevolence, or the outlines of a monstrous collusion lurking behind the stately artifice. As its elegantly appointed central chamber gives way to labyrinthine darkness, *Bad Timing* conjures a sense that the socio-political future is not only foreclosed, but somehow deliberately compromised - subject to a shadowy consensus lurking just beyond the edges of our collective consciousness.

**XPER.XR** (born 1970) is a Hong Kong-based artist, performer, and provocateur belonging to the city's first generation of experimental musicians. After releasing *Murmur* (1989), arguably the first industrial noise recording in the territory, he went on to release and perform alongside such names as Otomo Yoshihide, Merzbow and Whitehouse. Characterized by a constitutional irreverence, deliberate courting of failure, and self-effacing aesthetic, Xper.Xr.'s practice represents a crucial moment of the city's artistic counter-history. From 2012 to 2015, he ran the seminal underground exhibition and performance venue CIA in Kowloon, organizing shows with like-minded artists Kago Shintaro, Vagina Dentata Organ, New Noveta, Hermann Nitsch, Laibach and Olivier de Sagazan.