

SHAFEI  
XIA

P420

WELCOME  
TO  
MY  
SHOW



Shafei Xia at her studio, 2020 (ph. Carlo Favero)

P420 is pleased to announce the opening of **P420<sup>2</sup>**, a new project space devoted to a great extent to the discovery of young and emerging artists, thanks to a program running parallel to the main activities of the gallery. The carefully selected artists, some of whom are very young, will have the possibility to make a debut on a hybrid exhibition platform, simultaneously live and online, which we might call “onlife,” to borrow an apt definition from the philosopher Luciano Floridi. **P420<sup>2</sup>** intends to break down the barriers between virtual and real, in a period in which the enjoyment of art can be said to be intermodal and fluid, alternating gallery visits and social networks, exhibitions and websites, art fairs and newsletters. A democratic space, open to everyone from any location; a space that is the outcome of technique, but with low technological content, because the focus is on the artists and the works, which in any case can also be seen at any time, physically, inside the gallery.

On Wednesday 1 December, **P420<sup>2</sup>** presents a solo exhibition by Shafei Xia (ShaoXing, China, 1989) titled *Welcome to my show*, which contains a new cycle of works – eight in all – specifically made for the occasion, painted on sandalwood paper with canvas backing.

Just two months ago, Shafei completed her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, with a thesis titled *The World is the Circus*, paraphrasing a well-known remark of Federico Fellini. The cradle of all forms of entertainment, capable of eliciting peals of laughter and deep emotional engagement, of flooding huge tents with light or plunging them into pitch darkness, the circus is the metaphor of life, “perhaps simply its abbreviation,” the artist writes, adding that it “is a marvelous memory of childhood, and a marvelous fantasy of adulthood.”

“The main theme of her works is love,” Maura Pozzati indicates in an essay written as an introduction to the artist, “experienced as desire, jealousy and violence, represented explicitly or symbolically, depending on the case, but nevertheless omnipresent.” Hence Shafei’s circus is inhabited by a myriad of figures, undressed acrobats, lovers making love, tigers, cheetahs and animals of all kinds. All this is narrated without every losing the delicate treatment of the faces, of the depiction of settings, the description of nude bodies, movements and poses.





Irreverent, amusing, impertinent, erotic, but extremely refined. The painting of Shafei Xia is elegant and refined, like that of the Japanese *shunga* or the Chinese erotic paintings of the 1800s, though it also reminds us of the cultured narcissism of Luigi Ontani, with its citations and oriental overtones. The main theme of this series of recent works, made with a very particular technique – all watercolors on sandalwood paper stretched on canvas – is love, experienced as desire, jealousy and violence, represented explicitly or symbolically, depending on the case, as an omnipresent feature of the work of Shafei. The artist often represents herself as a tiger, a symbol of power and instinctive force, which in Chinese alchemy indicates the active principle, energy as opposed to the passive principle. In the work *Welcome to my show*, while all the musicians gravely play their instruments, a tiger hugs the bass violin (an instrument usually played by men) while a naked woman conducts the orchestra, showing the audience her ample backside. An ironic swapping of roles between men and women and between human beings and animals, inside a setting – that of the concert hall – that has great importance in the history of western art. There is nothing boring or ordinary in Shafei Xia's painting: the artist inserts something unexpected in her colorful depictions, forcing us the peer behind the curtains or to look carefully into porcelain plates, where beside tomatoes and grapes (which symbolize sexuality, fertility and abundance) we find fish bones, a sign of danger, while a couple joins in a tender embrace. It is told that Picasso, in 1945, said to Brassai, showing him the erotic prints of Utamaro: "Art is never chaste. Where it is chaste, it is not art," remarking on how the sexual organs were clearly visible, yet stripped of any vulgarity. The same can be said for the works of Shafei Xia, which though speaking of sexual desire and appetites, never lose their delicacy in the treatment of faces, in the description of nude bodies, in the movements and poses of animals and the representation of settings. Because, as Shafei told me regarding the concert: "when everyone plays seriously, I am the tiger, but I am also the orchestra conductor who creates problems. To break the boredom."





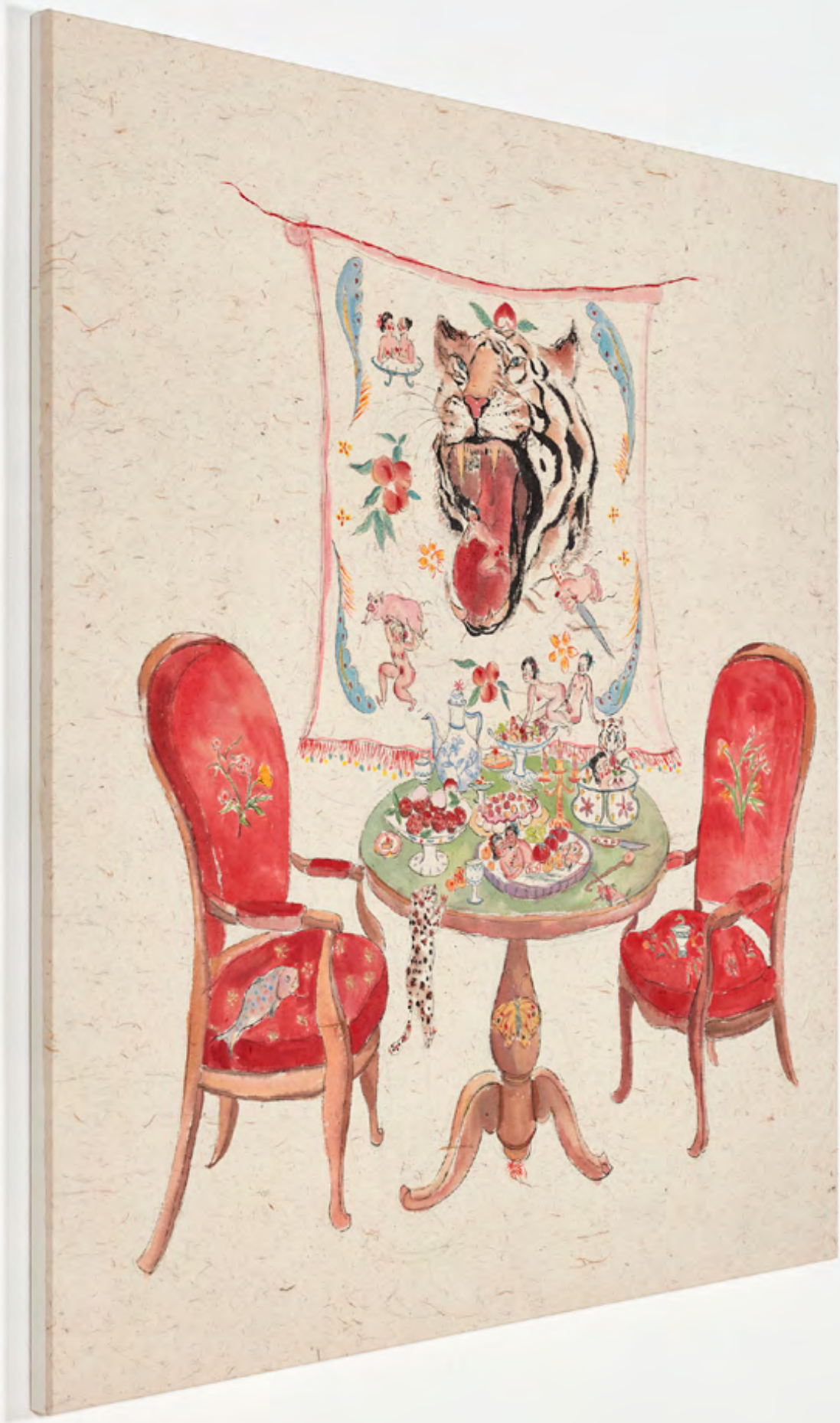






Shafei Xia, *Best wishes*, 2020  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
130 x 120 cm — inch 51" 3/16 x 47" 1/4





side view





Shafei Xia at her studio, 2020 (ph. Carlo Favero)



Shafei Xia at her studio, 2020 (ph. Carlo Favero)



Shafei Xia, *Welcome to my show*, installation view, 2020, P420<sup>2</sup>







Shafei Xia, *Cabinet*, 2020  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
120 x 79 cm — inch 47" 1/4 x 31" 7/64





side view





Shafei Xia, *Waiting for my boat*, 2020  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
96 x 112 cm — inch 37" 51/64 x 44" 3/32





side view









Shafei Xia, *Welcome to my show*, installation view, 2020, P420<sup>2</sup>





Shafei Xia, *Welcome to my show*, 2020  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
95 x 145 cm — inch 37" 13/32 x 57" 3/32





side view







Shafei Xia at her studio, 2020 (ph. Carlo Favero)





Shafei Xia, *Make warm*, 2019  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
204 x 120 cm — inch 80" 5/16 x 47" 1/4









Shafei Xia, *Welcome to my show*, installation view, 2020, P420<sup>2</sup>





OTHER WORKS





Shafei Xia, *My dollhouse*, 2020  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
92 x 120 cm — inch 36" 7/32 x 47" 1/4





side view





Shafei Xia, *Together*, 2020  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
120 x 105 cm — inch 47" 1/4 x 41" 11/32





side view





Shafei Xia, *My dollhouse*, 2020  
watercolor on sandal paper mounted on canvas,  
118 x 86 cm — inch 46" 29/64 x 33" 55/64





side view



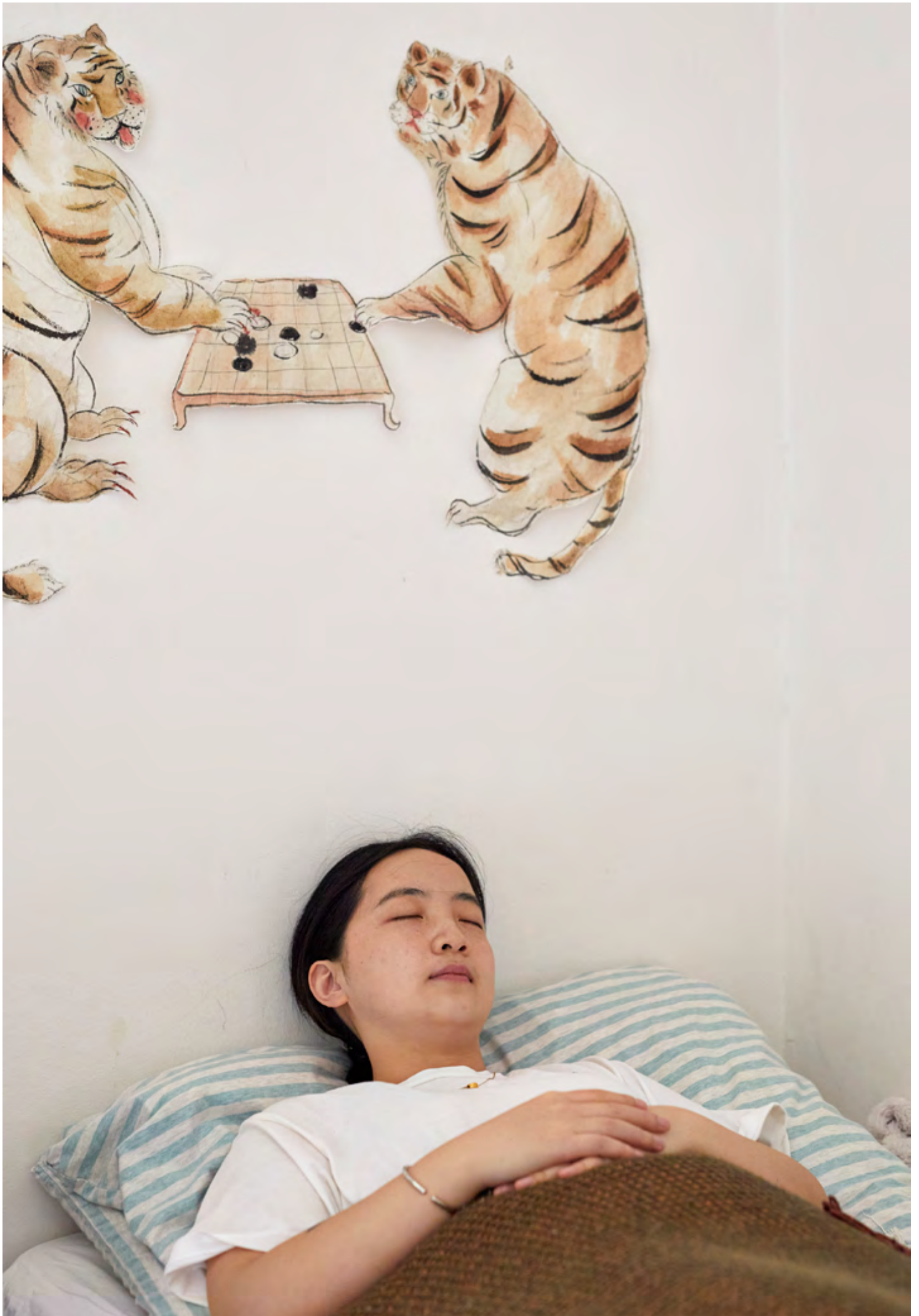


Shafei Xia at her studio, 2020 (ph.Carlo Favero)

SHAFEI XIA  
SELF PORTRAIT FOR P420

WATCH THE VIDEO





Shafei Xia at her studio, 2020 (ph. Carlo Favero)

Shafei Xia was born in ShaoXing, China, in 1989. After graduating in set design from ChongQing University, in 2013 she turned down a steady job in her native city to move to Shanghai, where after various experiences her first sale of a work enabled her to "catch the scent of freedom in the air," as she writes. She moved to Bologna and earned a degree at the Fine Arts Academy in 2020. In 2019 she won the Talent Prize of Fondazione Zucchelli per l'Arte.

**P420**

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