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MODERN SPACES CHECK OUT **MODERN SPACE'S** NEW LOOK *SEE PAGE 7*

Art



BY CAMERON NORSWORTHY

Light spills through Dongfan Chen's studio. Floor-to-ceiling windows give way to the familiar, industrial views of Long Island City — alleyways, truck loading docks, warehouses. Beyond that, bridges and water, and later: Manhattan. Turn inward, though, and Chen's studio walls glare brighter than any blue sky or pre-summer sunshine could; his paintings gleam brighter than any Midtown skyscraper. Chen's created an immersive painting in his signature saturated hues

— so much so that you can barely distinguish portraits from the studio walls painted beneath them. For 11 days, Chen nurtured this room, turning white walls into surfaces rife with energy and paint. He took inspiration from W. Somerset Maugham's "The Moon and Sixpence," wherein the main character, an artist, spends days painting his room over. Thus, Chen spent 11 days of his own studio, "making a 360-degree, colorful environment," he explained, through friend and translator Jane Shi. Chen's current series-in-progress is a

grouping of colorful, cartoon-ish portraits featuring his friends. He starts with one "prototype" — a generative, abstract portrait, and then riffs on it in various iterations. "All of their facial expressions accumulate in my re-

source pool," he explained, "strengthening the prototype." In the paintings, exaggerated smiles and tears abound. Though Chen lives in Williamsburg,





Art

“ I think people here really love art and really respect artists. ”

CHEN DONGFAN
Artist



Art



and has only used his Long Island City studio for two months now, he's been "very touched by the artistic vibe here," citing MoMa PS1 and Socrates Sculpture Park as endless sources of inspiration. "The reason why I got this studio is because I... met some people living in this neighborhood, ... and I think people here really love art and really respect artists."

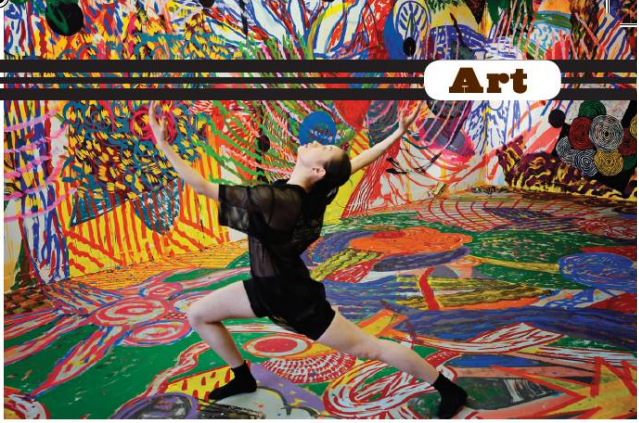
Chen's lived in New York for four years, and speaks limited English. But he believes that this is an advantage; he doesn't find "too much discomfort" in speaking limited English. "It doesn't influence the way he experiences and feels the city," Shi shared, as it "gives him more chances to experience or feel [the city]... for what it actually is."



Chen's studio in Hangzhou, China, was a traditional, blank space. Chen's work remains in his hometown in a permanent sense, though, in some long-standing public art projects. He's also created public art works in Greece, Italy, and Germany. But throughout his work with portraits, studio spaces and public art projects, Chen "doesn't" think the forms of art matter" to his artistic journey. "It's more about finding myself and trying to get closer and closer to something called 'purity,'" he insisted.

After creating this "360-degree, colorful environment," Chen invited his friends for an immersive, Open Studio showing. One friend, a dancer, gave an improvised performance, transforming "what she felt in that space ... into bodily movement." He's since invited other artist-friends to perform in the space — and then asks that they sit for a portrait session. Thus, "the energy isn't just one way; it's two





directions." In the creative process, he explained, "If you spark, the others can feel that energy, and they can spark, and those sparks are unique as well." In this way, the energy rings through his studio's walls.

The studio space is a living painting in and of itself: "As time passes, you can tell that when I invite all my friends, and even when I work in this studio, something changes — like the marks [they've] left on the wall. All of these things influence the way the studio looks ... it's ever-changing." It's for this reason that he doesn't see himself ever painting it all white again and starting over. "I guess when I have to wrap up the studio and have to leave this place, it's going to feel like a bitter moment for me," he said, "because all of these memories."



Chen has an ongoing exhibition at Fou Gallery in Brooklyn. His work for

the series "Nevermore" is featured on the second floor of an apartment-turned-exhibition-space. You can see more of his work on his Instagram, @chendongfan.

