

Cui Jie's paintings are largely based on her continuous study of the architectural landscape in the three cities in which she has lived: Shanghai, where she was born and grew up, Hangzhou, where she attended the National Art Academy, and Beijing, where she currently lives and works. She observed at first hand the outstanding transformation that urbanization in Chinese cities has brought about, drastically changing the cityscape, with a proliferation of buildings, high-rises and plazas being erected throughout. Set in motion by the Chinese government's relentless introduction of marketization since the 1980s, and in particular after 1989, this ruthless process of modernization standardized urban planning. The result was a formula of buildings that mix the influences and aesthetics of the Bauhaus with Soviet and Chinese communist styles, complemented by highly symbolic public sculptures taking centre stage in open squares and expansive plazas.

Cui's paintings depict these urban architectural creations and presences, but from her distinct perspective. In her eyes, the sculptures that inhabit the different city squares appear superimposed on the buildings in the background. At some point, due to the effects of the depicted light, the surface of one merges with the surface of the other so that the sculpture becomes part of the architecture and the architecture part of the sculpture. Her large canvases present surreal architectural drawings, in which enlarged sculptures are grafted onto anonymous buildings found on city avenues, on street corners and in suburban areas. Cui recognizes that this explosion in urban development privileged speed and efficiency over stylistic concerns, resulting in odd changes, random interpretations and, at times, distortions of form and scale. In her work, the buildings are both non-specific and familiar; as are the sculptures which tend towards stereotypes such as birds in flight (be they eagles, pigeons or cranes), arrangements of supported stainless-steel balls, flowing ribbons, or archetypal female and or athletic figures. Donning bright colours, her paintings weave together true-to-life images with imaginary ones to generate the effect of multiple exposures, spotted with marks that resemble the scratches on the surface of photographic negatives.

Overbearing office buildings, common-looking residential housing blocks, circular staircases, blue glass façades, unremarkable ceilings in parking lots, tiled floors, an abundance of columns and domes: all these architectural elements, and more, are juxtaposed in Cui's paintings, with careful attention to composition and surface texture, as well as to the physical 'architecture' built up on the painting by multiple layers of paint. This lengthy, painstaking process can take between several months and a year. The architectural and sculptural elements in her images are given sharp, clean edges through the use of sticking tape, removed once the paint has been applied. Their surfaces, which merge and blend into one another, are painted with steady, smooth brushwork that gives them a distinctively metallic shine and texture. The backgrounds, in contrast, are treated with a more abstract approach, in which the artist gives herself free rein, juxtaposing sometimes incongruous colours. Even so, despite the imaginary nature of these cityscapes, Cui Jie's paintings perhaps remain one of the more perceptive and realistic depictions of the absurd and multi-layered excesses of a particular moment in Chinese urban development.

– Carol Yinghua Lu

CUI JIE Born 1983, Shanghai, China. Lives and works in Beijing.
Selected Solo Exhibitions: 2016 – mother's tankstation, Dublin; 2015 – Start Gallery, Jaffa, Israel; 2014 – 'The Proposals For Old and New Urbanism', Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai; 2012 – Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai. **Selected Group Exhibitions:** 2015 – 'The World in 2015', Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing; 2014 – 'My Generation: Young Chinese Artists', Tampa Museum of Art & Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, FL; 2013 – 'Green Box-Remapping: The Space of Media-Reality', Tianhong Mei Heyuan Arts Center, Hangzhou, China; 2012 – 'Face', Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai; 2009 – 4th Prague Biennale, Czech Republic. **Selected Bibliography:** 2015 – Christina Sanchez-Kozyreva, 'Unpredictable Constructions', *Pipeline*, Sep-Nov; 2014 – Hanlu Zhang, 'Cui Jie: The Proposals for Old and New Urbanism', *Artforum*, Dec; 2013 – Ling Gu, 'Cui Jie', *LEAP*, Feb; 2012 – Kelly Crow, 'China's Rising Art Stars', *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan.



1.

1. S House #1, 2015
Oil on canvas
200 x 150 cm / 78 ¾ x 59 ⅞ in
2. Worker Cultural Palace in Dongguan, 2014
Oil on canvas
150 x 200 cm / 59 x 78 ¾ in
3. Overpass at Shuang Jing Qiao, 2014
Oil on canvas
150 x 200 cm / 59 x 78 ¾ in



2.



3.



4. Crane House #4, 2015
Oil and canvas
230 x 150 cm / 90.5 x 59 in
5. Zhao Wei Building, 2014
Oil on canvas
200 x 190 cm / 78 3/4 x 74 3/4 in



5.