

Michael Lin *A Tale of Today**Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai 5 March – 10 April*

A Tale of Today is artist Michael Lin's fourth solo exhibition in Shanghai since moving to this city 10 years ago. Lin is a creator of situations who likes to transform contemporary art spaces into places of social and economic activity. Although the three-floor space of *Leo Xu Projects* – hidden in a quiet, narrow lane in Shanghai's former French Concession district – is too small and too private for the artist to trigger public interaction, Lin still tactfully introduces the potential for economic interaction – not the kind normally happening in a commercial gallery – into this show, with *Forever (For Sale)* (2016), a set of nine brand-new (sales tags unremoved) Forever bicycles, placed in a row by the gallery entrance on the ground floor.

Forever is an iconic national bicycle brand founded in 1940 in Shanghai. It features in a number of works by Ai Weiwei. For many people in this country, the Forever bike recalls the memory of the socialist and collectivised era of China back to decades ago when bikes were the dominant means of transportation and the country was called the kingdom of bicycles for Lin, who uses a Forever bicycle as a means of transportation in his daily life, the bike is basic equipment and an artistic instrument that facilitates his continuous interest in urban mobility. In *Flow Lab*, his 2013 solo show at Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing, Lin pulled down the street wall of the gallery, transformed the space into a carpark and invited people who owned 750 – the popular gallery and creative industry zone in Beijing in which

it is famously difficult to find a parking space – to park their cars, scooters or bicycles. At *Leo Xu Projects*, through *Forever (For Sale)*, Lin transforms part of the ground floor into a temporary bicycle shop, encouraging people to engage with his concept by buying one of the bikes (at market price).

After triggering economic activity, *A Tale of Today* proceeds with a narrative strategy that spreads throughout the gallery space. If the bicycle shop installation on the ground floor could be viewed as representing a streetscape of China in the golden age of the socialist era (when photographs of crowds of urban cyclists came to represent the nation), the two artist-assembled bicycles that are separately placed on the first floor would seem to show that the bike is still a basic means of transportation (and an object of fetishisation to a small group of people) in today's urban life. In addition to the actual function of the bikes and their practical and cultural role in urban life, Lin describes the facts and symbols of a high-speed developing metropolis via a series of paintings, both on canvas and directly onto walls, that spread throughout the gallery. The words, characters, typefaces and patterns used in these, all excerpted from the classic logo and design of the Forever and Phoenix (another brand by the same company, targeting the export market and formerly presented as a gift to foreign dignitaries visiting China) bikes, are appropriated, enlarged, deconstructed, reassembled, duplicated, realigned and sometimes slightly

revised. In doing this, Lin humorously questions ideas such as 'Made in China', 'Shanghai', 'fore' or 'fore' (part of 'forever') and more. He also uses gold leaf, a material that he has never used before, and thus has created a powerful material visualisation of Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's 1874 classic novel of the 'golden age' of America, *The Golden Age – A Tale of Today*.

The narrative of the myth of the speed and development of the city or country that appears in both the literary and artistic versions of *A Tale of Today* reaches its climax on the second floor of the gallery, filled by two of Lin's signature semi-design, semi-painting wall works. Covering one wall is a painting of patterns adopted from the Forever bike logo, covered with gold leaf and suggesting the high-speed economic development that has now occupied and been internalised within the gallery: a kind of monumental architecture of 'the tale'. Covering the opposite wall is wallpaper printed with the time and destination of flights departing during one day from Pudong International Airport: a symbol of Shanghai's engagement in global economic interactivity at more accelerated speed (and of the way in which the international trade that once built the 'local' Forever and Phoenix brands might now consume them). At this point, *A Tale of Today*, which started from a carefully designed economic activity on a neighbourhood scale, ends up becoming a monumental sculpture of a mega-city's economic miracle. *Aimee Lin*



Forever (For Sale), 2016, set of nine Forever bicycles, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist and Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai