



# ART FRONTIER

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## Shiqing Deng's Artistic Characteristics and Value in Figurative Painting

Dao Zi

Shiqing Deng is a post-90s generation Chinese artist who has studied and lives in the United States. She gra-

duated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and the New York Academy of Art. Over the past decade,



Figure 1. Shiqing Deng. *ASMR*. Oil on linen, 168×223cm, 2020.

Shiqing Deng has received rigorous and comprehensive training in painting, which has allowed her to achieve notable progress and enter a state of artistic excellence. Currently residing in Brooklyn, her artistic creations and life have become fully integrated into American society and culture.

Chinese art education, which is classical and realistic in style, has provided Shiqing Deng with a solid and stable foundation in sketching, color, composition, inspiring her exploration and broad reception of the spirits of classical masters. After studying in the United States, her exposure to classical painting, immersion in renowned works, and absorption of beneficial international information related to freedom, diversity, and openness have all contributed to her artistic growth. Equally, the encouragement and respect of artistic innovation ability in art education are undeniable in Deng's work.

Within the globally acclaimed international art center of New York, art trends, styles, and movements are constantly changing due to the influence of the political, economic, and popular fashion dynamics of the times. Avant-garde art emerges and dominates for a few years, with no fixed and unchanging rules to follow. The contemporaneity of art is often understood in the context of new materialism, new media, new technologies, digital art, video art, cartoons, and comics within the realm of post-humanist aesthetics. For Shiqing Deng, a female artist who upholds the value

of figurative painting, these developments present both challenges and opportunities.

Shiqing Deng's figurative oil paintings possess a strong sense of reality and integration. Her focus is on contemporary American social life and trends, not through a lens of news or current affairs analysis, but rather through a tendency towards figurative realism that goes beyond a singular aesthetic meaning. Her artistic creations often involve a fusion of styles and symbols, incorporating appropriation and irony. The absurdity of life and concern for human nature, as well as the tension between identity and gender, often form meaningful narratives in her paintings, full of mystery and wisdom. As a result, her works captivate and leave a profound impression, making seemingly weighty, real-life themes appear light and thought-provoking.

Shiqing Deng's paintings explore both personal observations and experiences while significantly expanding the dimensions of social reality. In recent years, she has focused on the theme of art forgery, which involves issues of originality, simulation, imitation, virtuality, and plagiarism within the discourse of postmodernity. In her work, Deng does not seek to reproduce specific original artworks but rather adopts a satirical approach, capturing suspicious elements through imitation, collage, and transformation. She even outlines comic sketches of the forgery process from production to entering the auction market, creating a contrast and stimulating the imagination.



Figure 2. Shiqing Deng. *He/Her Story*. Oil on linen, 71×122cm, 2021.

For example, in her exploration of the perception of the Mona Lisa, Deng combines different styles of artists such as Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp, and Botticelli, attributing the recognition of this classical image to the styles of various artists. This highlights the dramatic condition of art history and the art market driven by style worship. “*Identity Card of Van Dyck (1599-1641)*” is a small-scale yet impactful artwork where the artist utilizes an expired Chinese ID card to reconstruct the identification of this Flemish master. It depicts his melancholic self-portrait and includes elements such as his name.

Deng’s “*Surrogacy*” series demonstrates the artist’s highly mature and distinctive style. This theme encompasses a wide range of social discourses, including bioethics, women’s bodies, and women’s rights. Surrogacy is a legal or semi-legal commercial practice in many countries, making it a gray industry where young and healthy women earn a living by renting out their wombs, cohabiting for surrogacy, or engaging in sexual surrogacy in exchange for compensation. From a feminist perspective, reproduction is a woman’s

right and should not be commodified. The legalization of surrogacy is a controversial topic with no definitive consensus, raising questions of whether it represents progress or regression in human civilization. This is precisely the focal point for courageous and morally conscious artists.

Shiqing Deng has conducted extensive research on this topic and provided her own reflections and expressions, showcasing her talent in figurative and portrait painting. With profound human compassion, her oil painting work “*Unexpected*” depicts a delicate Caucasian girl sitting sideways at a table, holding a cracked egg on her cell phone with a nervous expression. She seems to be looking at a comic strip of an inflated female body on a memo board. The words “OCTOBER” on the memo board imply that the character may already be pregnant, and to emphasize the processes of ovulation, egg retrieval, and egg donation in surrogacy. The artist deliberately exaggerates the large, transparent pouches floating around the character, resembling viscous balloons that are unreal, fragile, and unreliable. The entire composition exudes a nightmarish

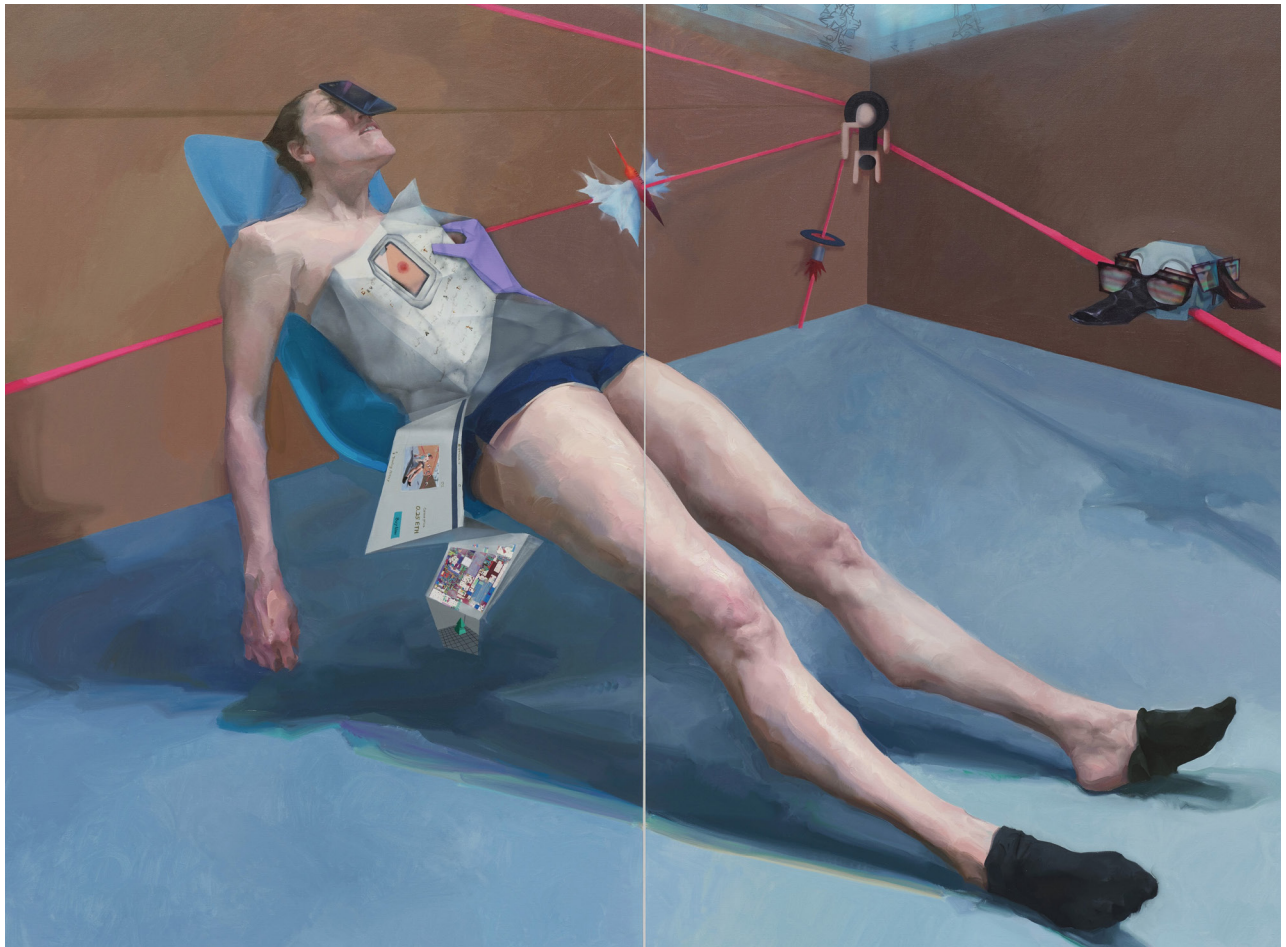


Figure 3. Shiqing Deng. *I'm Tired*. Oil on linen, 173×234cm, 2021.



Figure 4. Shiqing Deng. *Visual Art*. Oil on linen, 137×183cm, 2021.

atmosphere. In another painting from the same theme, a surrogate woman is depicted eating attentively, surrounded by vibrant yet fragmented objects, vividly illustrating her objectified existence. In the top-right corner, a cartoonish female body further hints at and summarizes the surrogacy scenario.

It is evident that the artist's compositions incorporate various elements such as graffiti-like writing, comic book techniques, and pop-art-style collages, all serving as supportive and indicative elements, sometimes with lively decoration. The most crucial aspect is that the central focus of the composition is the emotions and postures of the characters. Even when the characters are standing with their backs turned, viewers cannot escape the strong messages emanating from them. For example, in the artwork *Missing*, a woman wearing a black suit carries a square letter board resembling a pop culture T-shirt, adding a mysterious and decorative touch, like an implied puzzle. Above this letter board, a suggestive

representation of a female back hangs diagonally, and through layering, we can read information about this young woman's name, age, and physical characteristics on a red label in the top-left corner. The artist clearly employs a counter-narrative and unconventional approach, engaging viewers' anticipation to capture and comprehend all the subtle traces within the image. This may be seen as a form of psychological realism in visual representation.

Shiqing Deng's figurative oil paintings exhibit extraordinary composition, harmony between reality and illusion, expansiveness, and contraction. The colors deserve commendation for their brightness, cleanliness, certainty, and well-balanced contrasts, which are elegant yet carry intrinsic strength. In her continuously emerging figurative artworks, her mastery of realistic techniques has reached a level of excellence. Moreover, her assimilation and integration of other contemporary artistic languages and styles enable Deng to skillfully



Figure 5. Shiqing Deng. *Faces*. Oil on linen, 142×173cm, 2022.



Figure 6. Shiqing Deng. *Unexpected*. Oil on linen, 117×147cm, 2022.

navigate more significant subjects, approaching them with greater acuity and freedom.

In 2023, Shiqing Deng was awarded the Bennett Prize, an influential, biennial award aimed at recognizing outstanding women painters, and promoting the development of representational realism. Her relentless spirit of innovation has received the recognition it deserves, and with her outstanding artistic talent and humble wisdom, Shiqing Deng is destined to embrace new horizons.

June 2, 2023, New York



Figure 7. Shiqing Deng. *Van Dyck ID card*. Oil and marker, 9.5×6.5cm, 2023.

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