

# Mel Chan

White Chrysanthemums  
and Prince Edward

白 菊 與 太 子

28.05 – 22.06.2021

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Días y Noches de Amor y de Guerra (no13), 2021, oil on linen



# White Chrysanthemums and Prince Edward

## 白菊與太子

### Painting is an act of duality

'I am captivated by the paradox of the painting process; On one hand, things appear in the moment (almost mindfulness, somewhat "carpe diem") in a pure materialistic way-- the smell of the oil paint and the solvent, nuance of pigments, the roughness of the linen, the translation of light and shadows, construction of forms, depth, tone. Every act, no matter how trivial it seems, is capable of altering the outcome. Painting, in this sense, is the combination of many instances of "nowness", and every choice an act of "no return". But at the same time, what lay before me is not an empty canvas; rather, it is a portal for time travelling. Painting is a site of reverie where my thoughts journey through various realms. I not only contemplate upon the past, but also the causal relations of (historical) events, until meanings start to emerge.

This meditative aspect of painting leads to revelation. It is also a means of self-healing, a way to cope with the depressing everyday reality, be it from Hong Kong or Ukraine, Xinjiang or Myanmar. As such, to paint is to remember, to mourn; the object that emerged from such an act becomes the actual site of that same remembrance and mourning.'

### Don't Forget; Don't Lose (莫失莫忘)

'In the literary classics *The Dream of Red Mansion* (紅樓夢), the two protagonists were (re-)incarnated into human beings to "pay the debt" of their past lives. One of them carried a jade with him at birth, with the words "Don't Forget, Don't Lose" engraved on it. The jade can be seen as a metaphor of acknowledging the past -- even if it is a distant past that precedes our lives, even to the extent of geological history (as in the book, in their "past lives", the two were non-humans. One was a plant and the other rain.)

History is important because it makes now Now. Its locus extends into the future. We need history to understand who we are, and to make sense of the world around us. To forget is to stripe oneself of their being.'

### White Chrysanthemums and Prince Edward

'When we look at history, we easily think of people in power. We tend to think that famous historical figures are the ones who make history. But, and I'm not the first to say this, it is the mass, the people, the ordinary nameless individuals, who are truly the most powerful force of history. The title of my upcoming exhibition suggests the anonymous majority (the White Chrysanthemums) stands before the individuals in power (in this case Prince Edward), if not occupying an equivalent position. By mourning the deceased, even, or especially, those whose names we can no longer trace, we honour those who fought for a better society, for freedom, for democracy. By mourning we can shed light in the darkness; we can put courage in fear, and hope in despair.'

*Den Haag, May 2021*

### About Mel Chan

Graduated from Master Artistic Research at KABK in 2019, Mel Chan's artistic research and practice focus on the commercialisation of spirituality in the time of crisis, precarity and the anxiety that follows. They are reflections on the intricate and uneasy historical relation of colonisation, decolonisation and neo-colonisation, from the perspective of a female being who was born in the last colony (Hong Kong) of the British Empire, grew up witnessing the paradigm shift (from neoliberalism to totalitarianism caused by the sovereignty transfer) and live as diaspora in the western Europe (the Netherlands).