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Xiao-yang Li

1 June – 15 July 2017

Private view 1 June, 6-8pm

narrative projects is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Xiao-yang Li, a Chinese born painter who lives and works in London. In her work, Li explores the relationship between bodies in space and the way they translate to the two-dimensional surface of a painting. The motif of transformation or metamorphoses is recurrent in the artist's practice; she often turns to mythological tales as a key point of inspiration.

In this exhibition, Li presents a new body of work in which she looks at the relationship between space and surface in a wider sense. The artist has created a series of small ceramic sculptures, which reference her main pictorial subjects. The works are presented on purpose built steps, bringing to mind the shape of an ancient ziggurat or a temple, while simultaneously looking at formal hierarchies of female bodies. Steps are one of the recurrent themes in Li's paintings: it is a way for her to explore perspective and to amplify the inherent tension between the flat surface of the painting and a sculptural volume of bodies being painted.

Giorgio Agamben's text *The Unspeakable Girl* has been one of the major theoretical influences on Li's practice. The Unspeakable Girl, Kore, has her qualities described by Agamben as liminal, resting on the threshold between woman and girl, mother and

child, life and death, animal and divine – entirely annulling their distinctions. Kore has fascinated Li, and often becomes a subject in her paintings; a subject that can't be defined by age, family, sexual identity or social role. This ontological nothingness, reflected through her painterly subjects, makes the viewer shift their attention towards a formal analysis of the works. Li's balanced use of colour, her approach to composition, the decisive, almost aggressive brushstroke, and her unorthodox approach to the use of the body as subject, inevitably places formal gestures at centre stage. The artist is not afraid to refer to the work of some of the most prominent painters of the last century. She appropriates and reworks their visual language making it her own.

### **About the Artist**

**Xiao-yang Li** (b. 1985, Harbin, China. Lives and works in London). Her most recent exhibitions and awards include: *A Splinter in the Sun*, curated by Tim Stoner, narrative projects, London (2016); *Next Generation*, from Ruth Borchard Collection, Piano Nobile Kings Place, London (2016); *Heads*, curated by Vera Portatadino, Yellow artist run space, Varese (2015); *Bloomberg New Contemporaries*, touring exhibition: ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art) London, Newlyn Art Gallery, World Museum, Liverpool (2014-2015); Finalist at Dentons Art Prize, Dentons London (2016); Fellow (stipend), Vermont Studio Residency, USA (2016).

Image credit: Piotr Kamler, *Cronopolis*, 1982 (film still).

For further information or high-resolution images, please contact:

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