

# Chen Ching-Yuan

## *The Ship of These-us*

|

October 8th — December 17th, 2022



Chen Ching-Yuan, Propaganda III (détail), 2022

*The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned from Crete had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their places, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.*

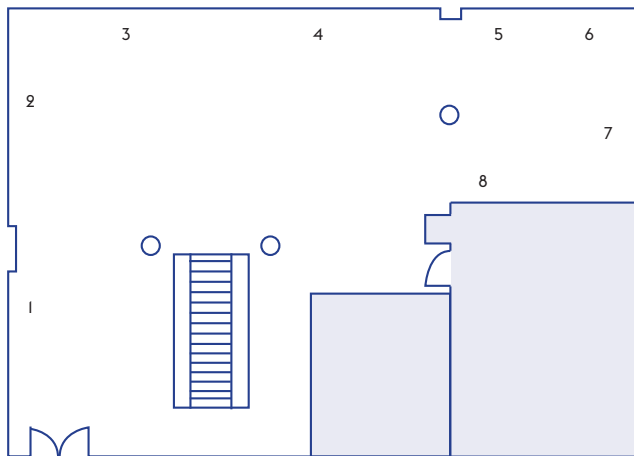
—Plutarch, Life of Theseus

In *Life of Theseus*, Plutarch describes one of the oldest philosophical debates about the identity—the essence—of things and beings. The paradox of the ship of Theseus is whether an object that has had all of its original components replaced remains the same object. Modern philosophers have also used this thought experiment to consider the persistence of personal identity over time. For Chen Ching-Yuan the choice of this reference is not about commenting on a metaphysical debate, but rather giving a clue to the feelings that ignited this series of paintings. His interest about individual and social identity, however, should come as no surprise. Questioning the role of individuality and self awareness in Asian societies has been very present in Chen Ching-Yuan's work through the representation of cultural practices as well as everyday life scenes. In the title lies also the double meaning of "These" and "Us", as his paintings highlight the tension between the group and the individual, a tension that is even stronger in the Taiwanese context. The idea of the propaganda, symbolized in the cardboard megaphones, permeates many of the works.

As an artist, Chen Ching-Yuan doesn't work with the limitation of rational thought, but with a creative process that requires the development of poetic thinking, which can be understood through the inspiration in the Romantic painting of the 19th century. His practice is impregnated with a strong Surrealist influence as well, connecting with an artistic heritage where metaphors, suggestions and symbols are commonplace. In his new paintings one will find echoes of the war in Ukraine, in the logs held like rifles or the bags of sand that double as pillows. One could say that Chen Ching-Yuan is a dream maker. His work is part of an unclassifiable fantasy, which exudes a melancholic and enigmatic aura of mystery, conjured up by a powerful narrative framework that exists neither in reality nor beyond. Many of the references, however, are taken from real life: people getting basic military training with substitutes of the actual, scarce, guns; or the measures taken to preserve public statues in what he refers to as a "monument of protection". The appeal of his paintings lies in the creation of this temporary truth that allows the viewer to grasp the essence of the work, which aims to touch reality, without ever really reaching it. As the subjective elements cannot be fully presented, reality is incorporated in a fragmented way, in order to deliver a sense of fantasy to the viewer. Every painting he makes is a tale created from fragmented symbols, and in his practice, these are signs that refer to something beyond themselves. "I feel as though my work is sampling of reality. No matter what I do, it is merely a fragment. But through these fragments I hope to present a certain regularity and destiny, an inescapable operation. My paintings are like objects salvaged from a lake. They are reflections on my experience of realities, and some choices must be made." Chen Ching-Yuan

## List of works

### Ground floor



(1) **The paddles III**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm  
Unique piece

(2) **The paddles II**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
55.5 x 46.5 cm  
Unique piece

(3) **The wreath**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm each  
Unique piece

(4) **The paddles I**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
189.5 x 262 cm  
Unique piece

(5) **Propaganda III**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
90.5 x 72.5 cm  
Unique piece

(6) **Propaganda I**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
50 x 60 cm  
Unique piece

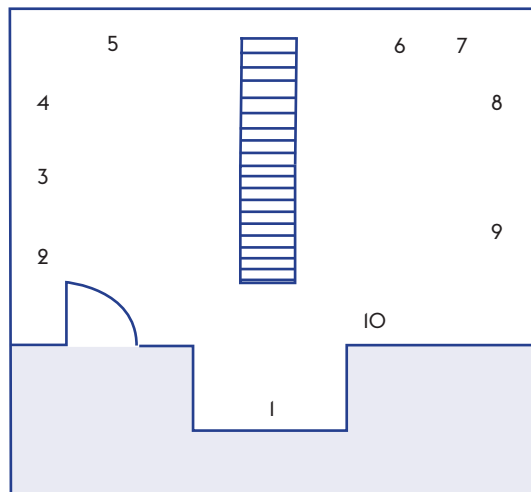
(7) **Slip of the Tongue**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
146 x 110 cm  
Unique piece

(8) **Propaganda II**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
53 x 65 cm  
Unique piece

### Lower ground



(1) **Sand bag I**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
52.5 x 76.5 cm  
Unique piece

(2) **Dreams by sand IV**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm  
Unique piece

(3) **Dreams by sand I**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm  
Unique piece

(4) **Dreams by sand III**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm  
Unique piece

(5) **The corridor**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
146 x 110 cm  
Unique piece

(6) **Study of substituting I**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm  
Unique piece

(7) **Study of substituting II**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm  
Unique piece

(8) **Study of substituting III**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
31 x 41 cm  
Unique piece

(9) **Substitute**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
146 x 110 cm  
Unique piece

(10) **Sand bag II**, 2022

Oil on canvas  
49.5 x 59.5 cm  
Unique piece