

SHEN CHEN



Looking at the chronology of Shen Chen's paintings, he seems to have disappeared between 1988-1996, but there are the years when he went from China to North America. When Shen Chen arrived in New York, he was undoubtedly influenced by New York's rich artistic atmosphere, but he also needed to learn English, find a job, and adjust to surviving in this environment. Most importantly, however, how was he going to be able to continue his own painting pursuits? This must have seemed a long time for a youth, who in China, had always considered art to be the pinnacle of his existence; not pursuing his painting was agonizing. We can only imagine the intensity of his suffering combined with all that he was experiencing during this time; how was he calmly to reflect what direction would his painting go in? During this time, however, Shen Chen created numerous experimental mixed-media works, which made him who he is today. Although he rarely displays these works, this was a period of research and exploration of materials when he contemplated the question of painting and discovered how to control the complexities of acrylic.

In 1996, he picked up his brush anew, but this time, his materials had change; instead of Chinese ink, he used acrylic. He discovered that acrylic could give him an even richer expression than Chinese ink without compromising the essence of ink. The painting surface is covered in seemingly carefully arranged layers upon layers, sometimes in color, sometimes in black and white, which is very characteristic of abstract expressionistic painting. Shen Chen said, "In 1996, I created my 'Diary' series, where I gradually began to clarify my inclination towards using the vertical brushstroke in the main body of the painting. After 2003 – 2004, I stopped using horizontal lines; I pared down the brushstroke to the simplest vertical. This makes the overlapping strokes, the factors of progression and time ever more important. It was hard for us to place Shen Chen in the riotous profusion of the painting world. He continued in this manner of painting for nine years until his painting style changed dramatically in 2005. Before we launch into our discussion of his paintings after 2005, we need to look back for a moment at the paintings done in the transition period between 2003 and 2004; the vertical lines seem to have become already fixed, the delicate overlap between lines have begun to emerge, and the level of control in the overlapping lines become the unique techniques and characteristics found in Shen Chen's subsequent works.