

Meredith Rosen Gallery is pleased to present *On Longing*, the first solo exhibition by Susan Chen. The show opens on Saturday, August 15 and remains on view through September 19. The show will feature a series of portraits about the Asian American diaspora and several paintings made from the artist's living room since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chen's work is a navigation of identity and belonging. Her practice embodies these themes both internally and externally: the painting process prompts inward reflection while the paintings themselves provide outward representation. Chen paints to answer questions about her own identity and to address the lack of Asian Americans in Western portraiture. When painting Asian Americans, Chen is at once powerful and vulnerable. As an artist, she can grant visibility to her community through her work. As an Asian American, she must confront her own fears and desires in every portrait. *On Longing* represents her embrace of this dichotomy.

Chen finds her sitters on the Internet through community social media groups like *Subtle Asian Traits*, *Subtle Asian Life NYC*, *Chinatown of New York City*, and *NYC Yang Gang*. These individuals are not professional models, so they fill the silence of five-hour studio sittings with conversation, turning the painting sessions into "therapy sessions." Chen must multitask: listen and respond to her sitters' musings while translating their likenesses onto canvas. This balance does not hinder her artistic process, but rather drives it. Her portraits are informed by her conversations with their subjects — she has no preconceived notions about these strangers, so her understanding of them comes entirely from their words and her painting.

Equality is central to Chen's practice. She paints with a steadfast energy: every skewed facial feature, every article of clothing, and every object in the background is given equal focus. Each element is rendered with sinuous brushstrokes and punchy colors. But this playfulness betrays the unease that permeates much of her work. Some of the figures in her portraits sit in bright rooms on chairs or sofas, others stand in front of Radio City Music Hall or Butler Library — none of them look quite comfortable where they are. Their glances are darting towards the periphery, their lips are pursed, and their faces are tense. Perhaps they feel like they don't belong, perhaps they are looking for acknowledgement from those beyond the frame. This is the shared Asian American experience, the sense of longing, that imbues Chen's work: to be hidden yet wanting to be seen.

Text by Dani Yan

**Susan Chen** (b.1992, Hong Kong SAR), a first-generation Asian-American, grew up between Hong Kong and the United Kingdom during the Hong Kong handover, prior to immigrating to the United States. She received her B.A. Hons from Brown University (2015) and is currently completing her M.F.A. at Columbia University (2020/21). In 2019, she was a finalist for the AXA Art Prize, and was also featured in *New American Paintings #141* and *#147* juried by Beth Rudin DeWoody and Amber Esseiva.