

Rexy Tseng

*Mouthful of Dirty Copper*

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Lower Level

Painting has survived successive revolutions in technological image-making, and its value has only grown with each one. From photography to television to digital media to social networks, each new wave of innovation has clarified painting's unique capacities: its embodiment of thought through material actions, its specific mechanisms of creating spatial complexity, density and ambiguity, its creation of meaning through myriad irreducible decisions. Now, as we witness another revolution with the rise of AI-generated imagery, Rexy Tseng's paintings offer a particularly timely reminder of these essential qualities.

Looking at Tseng's paintings, one can trace resonances with certain masters—Luc Tuymans' photographic distance, Francis Bacon's psychological spaces, Chaim Soutine's organic treatment of landscape. While these influences are clear, Tseng's paintings speak to our particular historical moment in a startlingly original way. At a time when algorithmic systems generate endless simulated imagery, Tseng's work demonstrates why painting remains not just relevant but essential—through its capacity for material specificity, accumulated time, and embodied thought.

His compositions, frequently adopting aerial viewpoints, create vertiginous perspectives that destabilize our relationship to the scene while maintaining rigorous structural organization. Rather than depicting destruction as spectacle or as abstract concept, Tseng's paintings occupy a unique position—they show us aftermath scenes with both distance and intimate material engagement. Where AI-generated imagery tends toward averaged, idealized forms, Tseng's paintings reveal themselves through highly specific details—the particular way a metal roof buckles, how building materials splinter and scatter, the strange geometries created by collapse. This attention to the unique behavior of materials and structures sets his work apart from both photographic documentation and algorithmic simulation.

His paint handling shifts between fluid and precise, with areas of thin wash contrasting against more heavily worked passages. This approach allows him to think through these spaces of destruction, creating something that is both documentary and deeply subjective. Architectural and geological forms are treated similarly, suggesting landscape as organic, almost flesh-like matter. The muted, earthy palette punctuated by occasional blues and oranges speaks not of catastrophic drama but of gradual transformation and decay. These paintings embody time differently than instantaneous media—they show us not just moments of destruction but accumulated duration, visible in both their subject matter and their making. The surfaces hold the history of decisions and revisions, parallel to the geological and architectural transformations they depict.

Spatial ambiguity runs throughout the work—the paintings hover between representation and abstraction, with forms that dissolve and reconstitute themselves across the canvas. This creates a productive tension between recognition and uncertainty, mirroring our own complex relationship with environments in states of change.

His paintings reveal not apocalyptic events but rather the slow, ordinary failures of structures we've built, expressing a kind of everyday precarity that characterizes our time. In an age when images are increasingly algorithmic—averaged, idealized, instantaneous—Tseng's paintings remind us of painting's distinctive ability to hold contradictions: to be both analytical and visceral, distant and deeply engaged, documentary and profoundly personal. Painting endures not by competing with new media, but by embodying what remains uniquely human: the ability to think through material actions while creating irreducible visual complexity.

—Lev Manovich

Rexy Tseng (b. 1986, Taipei, TW) is a visual artist who primarily works in painting and installation. Born and raised in Taipei until the age of thirteen, Tseng relocated to upstate New York to further his education. He received a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University in 2009; he withdrew from MFA at UCLA in 2012; and he withdrew from MFA at University of Oxford in 2017. Between degrees, Tseng worked as a software engineer in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. He is currently a participant in the BPA// Berlin Program for Artists.

Tseng has exhibited in Armenia, Belgium, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Russia, South Korea, Taiwan, the U.K., and the U.S. Highlights from his exhibition record include institutional group exhibitions at venues such as Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, DK (2024, 2022); the Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (2023, 2022); the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, CN (2022, 2021, 2019); the Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art, Yerevan, AM (2022); the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Goyang, KR (2022); the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, CN (2022); and the Museum of Siluva, LT (2021).

He has received awards and recognition from Allegro Prize, Charlottenborg Foundation, Li Chun-Shan Foundation, Taipei Art Awards, Tomorrow Sculpture Awards, and others. Tseng has participated in artist residencies internationally, including Boghossian Foundation, Brussels, BE; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE; Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA; the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Goyang, KR; the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, CN and more. In 2025, Tseng has solo exhibitions at Magenta Plains, New York, NY, KeYi Gallery, Hefei, CN, and at the Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art, Yerevan, AM. Tseng currently lives and works in Berlin, DE.