



REXY TSENG

Born in 1986, Taipei, TW
Lives and works in Berlin, DE

Rexy Tseng 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 Kunsthall 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 ChunShan 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.

fakewhale
February 7 2024

fakewhale

Rexy Tseng, Mouthful of Dirty Copper, Magenta Plains, New York

"The world is made of decaying materials, of structures that slowly collapse, of time accumulating on things."

A phrase that could easily belong to Rexy Tseng, if only we could find it somewhere. But that's exactly how we feel standing in front of his paintings, as if the world weren't crumbling in some grand, spectacular explosion, but disintegrating little by little, with no one bothering to pick up the pieces.

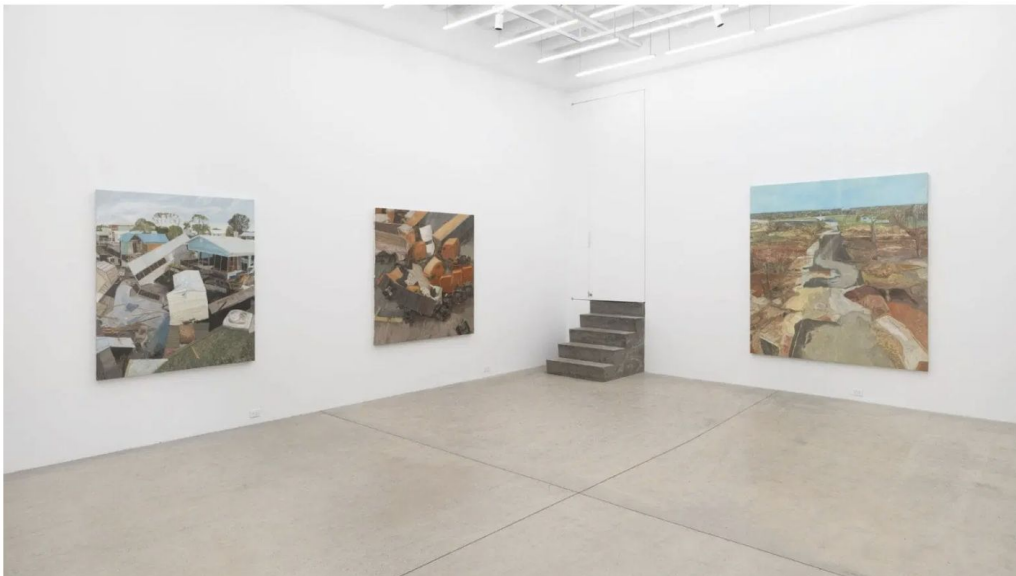
Stepping into the **Lower Level** of **Magenta Plains**, we immediately sense a strange familiarity, like walking into a space that should make sense but doesn't. The perspectives, the colors, the compositions, everything feels slightly off-kilter, teetering between recognition and unease. **Rexy Tseng's** exhibition, *Mouthful of Dirty Copper*, is an ode to unspectacular destruction, to those structural failures that don't make headlines but speak volumes about a world in perpetual disintegration.

We live in an era of synthetic images, everything is smoothed out, polished, AI-optimized to fit a predefined aesthetic. But Tseng pushes in the opposite direction. His paintings aren't "clean," they don't seek to seduce with formal perfection. They are **dense, raw, insistently material**, packed with details that bear the weight of time.

There's an unsettling energy in how he renders materials, the way a metal roof buckles, the way a wall splinters into jagged shards. **This isn't Hollywood-style destruction, it's slow, inevitable decay.** His painting breathes and accumulates, a process that stands in direct opposition to the instantaneity of AI-generated imagery. These aren't pixels arranging themselves into a snapshot, these are layers of paint, decisions made and remade over time.

There's something vertiginous about his compositions, often viewed from above, as if we were drones surveying post-industrial landscapes. The comparison to **Luc Tuymans** makes sense, there's that same photographic detachment, but with a material density that won't let us off the hook. **Francis Bacon** is there too, in the latent tension, in that sense of space pulsing beneath the surface. And then there's **Chaim Soutine**, with his visceral brushwork that turns architecture into something almost fleshy, on the verge of decomposition.

One painting in particular stops us cold, an oblique view of a half-destroyed building, its roof caving under some invisible weight. The color palette is muted, earthy, interrupted by streaks of blue and orange, hints of a humanity that has long since vanished. This is a **post-disaster scene**, but without the usual theatrics, no flames, no smoke still rising from the wreckage. Just the slow erosion of time.



Installation view, Remy Tseng, Mouthful of Dirty Copper, Magenta Plains, New York, NY, 2024.

Tseng doesn't paint **apocalypse**, he paints **gradual collapse**, the kind that usually goes unnoticed. And that's where his work separates itself from both photojournalism and AI-generated simulation, **in its ability to hold time, to accumulate traces of human presence without ever making it explicit.**

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of his work is how it embodies time. A digital image is generated in an instant, a Tseng painting **carries the history of its making.** Up close, we see revisions, corrections, layers upon layers of decisions. **His surfaces hold time the same way the landscapes he depicts do, through accumulation, through erosion.**

In an age of instant, algorithmically perfected images, Tseng's work **reminds us why painting still matters, and why it is necessary**. It cannot be compressed into a template, it cannot be generated through code, it cannot be reduced to a formula. It is messy, complex, and **fundamentally human**.

At the end of the exhibition, we find ourselves staring at one last canvas. It's an aerial view of a fractured cityscape, but we can't quite tell if it's being rebuilt or falling apart. **And maybe that's the essence of Tseng's work, not to give us answers, but to keep us suspended between past and future, between ruin and the possibility of renewal.**

If the digital revolution has trained us to expect images that are seamless, immediate, and disposable, *Mouthful of Dirty Copper* is an act of defiance. It reminds us that the world isn't made of pixels, it's made of **matter that breaks, accumulates, transforms**. And above all, that painting remains one of the most powerful ways to capture what it means to be alive in the midst of it all.

Magenta Plains, New York | January 16 – March 1, 2025



Installation view, Remy Tseng, *Mouthful of Dirty Copper*, Magenta Plains, New York, NY, 2024

STIRworld
February 6 2024



The ambivalence of images: Remy Tseng at Magenta Plains

In his first New York presentation, Tseng parses our relationship to pictures of disaster and destruction.

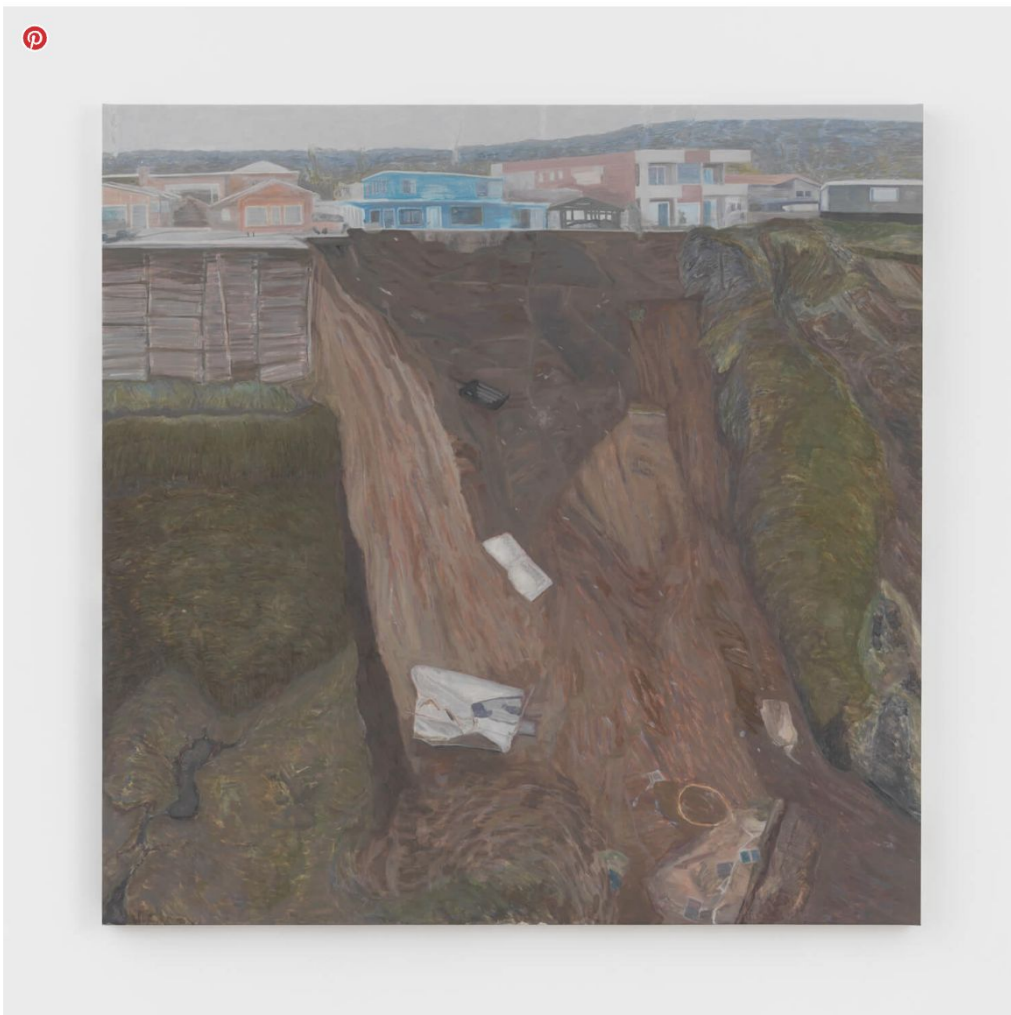
by Leah Triplett | Published on : Feb 06, 2025

Remy Tseng's *Mouthful of Dirty Copper*, his first **exhibition** in **New York**, now on view at Magenta Plains from January 16 – March 1, 2025, is a concise series of seven **paintings**, all portraying cataclysmic disasters—like car accidents, mudslides, plane crashes—from a bird's eye view. Painted with a soft, muted palette, each work renders catastrophe with a careful precision of brushwork, with Tseng's attentive strokes drawing the viewer into his mostly **large-scale art**. The largest here is *Scars and Pores* (2024), which presents an asphalt road and steel posts severed and mangled by mud in various shades of skin tones. An idyllic blue sky presides above this calamity, with colour, shape and linework incongruent with the haphazardness of destruction pictured. This coalescence of the formal, the pictorial and the somatic is the strength of Tseng's work, which ultimately parses the ambiguities and ambivalences of images—from news media or art history alike—in the 21st century.



Scars and Pores, oil on canvas, 2024, Remy Tseng
Image: Courtesy of Object Studies

A reverence for recent **art history** and the medium of painting extends throughout the exhibition. Tseng's debt and esteem for **painters** like Luc Tuymans (b.1958) is evident in both his palette and perspective. But more canny is his formal and thematic relationship with 19th-century landscape painters like Caspar David Friedrich (1774 – 1840), 20th-century Expressionists like Chaïm Soutine (1893 – 1943), or even **Pop artists** like **Wayne Thiebaud** (1920 – 2021). Tseng uses an omnipresent aerial perspective with brushy strokes of paint applied in expansive passages of colour, with formal elements that emphasise the independence between artist, subject and viewer, as well as the materiality and essential objectness of painting.



Open Wound, oil on canvas, 2024, Remy Tseng
Image: Courtesy of Object Studies

For instance, *Open Wound*(2024) legibly riffs on Soutine's renderings of meat, with the pinks, browns, blacks and yellows of Tseng's central mudslide a textural, fleshy swath of thick paint consuming most of the composition. That Tseng includes abstracted debris (largely white or blue-ish hunks lost in the sweep of sienna) further entices us to study the materiality of the paint, just as Soutine's inclusion of elements from life, such as rope, bowls or fruit troubles the balance between abstraction and figuration in his rendition of meats. Tseng's insistence on the materiality of paint, as well as a **documentary** impulse that ambiguously questions artificiality, is obliquely reminiscent of Thiebaud's cakes and candies or, more directly, later works like *Canyon Mountains*(2011 – 2012). Likewise, Tseng's almost crisp delineation of red, blue and white houses along the horizon line of *Open Wound* recalls Fredrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*(1818), in which we see a single figure looking outwards at the horizon of a turbulent seascape. Like Fredrich, Tseng is concerned with the relationship between humans and nature and how each affects the other; like many modern and contemporary painters, he is assiduous in dissecting the truth or falsity of images. In this pursuit of tracing the distortion of veracity and specificity, he stresses the thingness of painting in his play with texture and brushwork or the size and scale of his canvases.



Despite omitting the human figure in these seven paintings, Tseng nevertheless emphasises a somatic experience of images. Throughout these paintings, the body is referenced in titles and forms throughout these paintings (a stomach or heart-like shape in the centre of *Scares and Pores*, the fleshy feel of *Open Wound*), and the show comprehensively stresses a bodily experience. Visitors either descend a narrow staircase or take a sterile **steel** elevator to see the exhibition within Magenta Plains's lower gallery space, imparting a feeling of depth. This contrasts with the aerial perspective that Tseng uses, destabilising the viewer, while simultaneously reinforcing their physical relationship to these works in particular and images in general. All of the forms here originate from news media and are thus transcriptions of real-life events that some visitors to *Mouthful of Dirty Copper* may have already seen or be familiar with.



Wet Walls, oil on canvas, 2024, Remy Tseng
Image: Courtesy of Object Studies

Indeed, there's nothing inherently specific to place or incident in these works, as the jackknifed trucks, splintered houses or flames of a plane's explosion could (tragically) be any place from any recent time. But that these scenes seem so familiar or even ubiquitous further imposes a feeling of distance and distortion, as we feel both removed and involved in the devastation they depict. These images feel current but almost timeless, as they could be from any time in the last few decades. Shouldn't we be able to place the disasters? What if that were our flooded house or neighbourhood pictured in *Wet Walls* (2024) or *Whimper* (2024)? Or our car or truck in *Return to Senders* (2024)? What have we done to stave off such destruction from nature? How are we indirectly implicated through our **carbon footprints** as we participate in the industrial complex? Sadly, the exhibition's timing amidst fatal wildfires in **LA** and in-flight accidents on the East Coast make this exhibition all the more topical and expedient.



Whimper, oil on canvas, 2024, Remy Tseng
Image: Courtesy of Object Studies

Likewise, the title 'Mouthful of Dirty Copper' references a newspaper headline discussing the side effects of the **COVID-19** medication Paxlovid, in which patients reported feeling a metallic taste despite its alleviation of the virus. But as in his paintings, Tseng has uncoupled the specificity of this reference in the title, instead conjuring a weight of metal to be felt viscerally, if still distastefully. Our bodies are caught between the universality of natural and manmade disasters, which are, in turn, always specific and experienced individually, even though they impact everyone, everywhere, collectively. Images make us aware of this interdependent and interspecies relationship between the personal collective; even though they can be fictive or altogether false, images have the potential to connect us across time and place, and what and how we present, treat or manufacture imaginatively is a reflection of societies.



Cosmic Rejection, oil on canvas, 2024, Remy Tseng
Image: Courtesy of Object Studies

Nowhere is this better communicated than in the mirrored installation of the sizeable *Scares and Pores* (2024) with the pairing of the small-scale *Cosmic Rejection* (2024) and *Stealing from Heaven* (2024), the latter both paintings of aeroplanes wrecked onto the ground. *Scares and Pores* is substantial and dominates the gallery's longest wall; the two smaller paintings are positioned on the opposite side. At the gallery's centre, we are caught between Tseng's portrayals, literally the middle of tragic scenes large and small, and figuratively amidst the enormity of nature, industry and personal experience.

'Mouthful of Dirty Copper' is on view from January 16 – March 1, 2025, at Magenta Plains, New York.