

# ARTFORUM



Leah Ke Yi Zheng, *Untitled (Fusée disappearing)*, 2023, mineral pigments and ox-bone glue on silk over pine artist stretcher, 10 1/4 x 8 7/8".

CHICAGO

## Leah Ke Yi Zheng

4TH WARD PROJECT SPACE

5338 S Kimbark Ave

March 19–April 16, 2023

Leah Ke Yi Zheng's recent paintings thematize the vanishing act. In *Untitled (rose island)*, 2021–23, a neon structure radiates before a deep-sea-colored ground and depicts an isometric projection of the

Republic of Rose Island: a man-made, autonomous micronation on stilts dreamed up by Italian engineer Giorgio Rosa during the late 1960s. Located in the Adriatic Sea, Rosa's political yet deeply utopian project was dissolved by outside authorities—and eventually demolished—barely two months after it opened. The fleeting saga of this artificial principality corresponds with the precarious state of Zheng's imagery.

Earlier in her career, Zheng collaborated with other artists to interrogate image-making traditions and their accompanying myths. In her solo exhibition here, the artist foregrounds the material principles of painting itself to ask, what makes a painting a painting? Guided by this inquiry, Zheng subtly undermines the conventions of her medium across five works crafted from silk and canvas stretched over uneven hardwood supports—their imperfect surfaces are buckled and creased. The pictorial content is strikingly evanescent: The artist's fine strokes merely dust her diaphanous grounds. For instance, you can see through *Untitled (Fusée disappearing)*, 2023—the white of the wall illuminates a faint rendering of a timekeeping mechanism, while the edges of the composition are warmed by the foggy contours of the work's pine stretcher bars.

Across the gallery, *Untitled, 2023*, forgoes direct representation; its staccato marks in crimson and magenta form quasi-figurative curves. These wispy delineations echo the dents and folds of the intentionally crumpled yellow-silk ground. The broken lines appear to flutter, evoking a picture in the midst of its dematerialization. Finding fertile territory in these graceful yet destabilizing experiments, Zheng's paintings suggest that even the most enduring of images can always fade away.

— Alexandra Drexelius