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Yue Minjun's haunting laughter

by Anthony Daniels

Chinese artist Yue Minjun speaks out about China's problems in his paintings.



Yue Minjun, Execution, 1995; Oil on canvas, 59.05" × 118.11"

Sometimes short phrases suggest vast hinterlands of meaning. Such is the case with the title of a novel, *Compulsory Happiness*, by Norman Manea, a Rumanian writer now living in the United States. Happiness, of course, cannot be coerced: though expressions of it most certainly can. Manea's title, then, perfectly captures the absurdity and menace of Ceaușescu's Rumania: First destroy the possibility of human happiness and then make everyone smile, laugh, and proclaim their joy under threat of punishment if they refuse to do so. There is no better way for a dictator to subdue his people, to...

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