

**21:37**

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**Artist Statement**

I saw her at 21:37 one spring night of 2020, near a high-end mall affiliated with the most expensive hotel in Shenzhen. Though the mall was closed, some lights remained on, illuminating the white, feminine, and elegant gypsum ladies in the display case, modelling for an American luxury brand I couldn't remember. Next to the mannequins, *she* walked by, dragging a full trashcan, not once stopping to admire or wonder at them. As her footsteps passed me and faded into the empty hallway, I stood thinking of economic growth models, white feminism, progress, civilization, "survival of the fittest," and other neoliberal miracles I learned at school—perhaps *she* didn't work as hard as the figures—yet none gave me an explanation to the question that we avoid raising in this country and around the world: is this woman the intended consequence of, a worthy sacrifice for, or a careless mistake made by economic liberalization? As affluent and educated writers of loquacious opinion pieces raise the false hope that economic, social, and political inequality will be eliminated by growth, either acknowledging that efficiency will inevitably cause inequality, or hoping the disadvantaged will be satisfied with increasing material entertainment, this woman, next to the inanimate, idealized ladies, labors in silence, unacknowledged and uninvited to the debate.

This work is the second in my series called "Progress," which contains snapshots of my personal life, offering a glimpse that gives context and complexity to the well-acclaimed liberalization of the Chinese economy. The first painting features a food delivery worker on the road at five in the morning the day after the beginning of the Spring Festival. In a time when another delivery worker injured at work can find no employer legally responsible for reimbursement, I was moved to make the piece and the series in contemplation of the supposed economic and social empowerment the neoliberal economic model brings to the people of China, especially the ones whose lived experiences are unheard of by proponents of the model.



**Media:** Oil painting on canvas  
**Size:** 50cm (width) x 60 cm (height)