



Clockwise from left: Yifan Jiang, *Pelican*, 2023, oil on canvas, 60 x 72 in.; Yifan Jiang, *Pool*, 2023, oil on canvas, 60 x 72 in.; Yifan Jiang, *Fall*, 2023, oil on canvas 38 x 38 in. All courtesy of the artist and Meliksetian|Briggs.

THE MAGICAL REALISM OF YIFAN JIANG

An emerging Chinese Canadian artist articulates feelings of fleeting moments at Meliksetian|Briggs.

BY TERRI PROVENCAL

A difficult relation to conceive—since one eye, one hand, are capable of vision, of touch, and since what has to be comprehended is that these visions, these touches, these little subjectivities, these “consciousnesses of ...,” could be assembled like flowers into a bouquet, when each being “consciousness of,” being For Itself, reduces the others into objects. Excerpted from *The Intertwining—The Chiasm* by Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty



Yifan Jiang in the studio

Drawing from the essay by the French philosopher and existentialist Merleau-Ponty, artist Yifan Jiang examines “one’s relation with themselves and their own thoughts” in a new exhibition, *A bouquet of senses*. On view at Meliksetian|Briggs April 15–May 20, the solo exhibition includes new paintings and a new animation work, for which she is known.

“In retrospect, I realized [the excerpt] perfectly encapsulates the whole show. It addresses what both the animations and the paintings are getting at,” imparts Jiang, a Chinese Canadian artist who is a current fellow at the Core Residency at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. Besides this, she says it’s also about, “one’s relationship with their body and how the body is the medium, the conduit through which one experiences the world.”

Jiang is a traditionally trained painter who learned calligraphy growing up in China, through which she discovered “the spirit, speed, and control.” She earned her BFA from Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver, the Canadian city her family immigrated to when she was 12. “The influence of Emily Carr is always there—the paintings will always look wet.” Painting to her is a performance. “The traces get left there.” But to her it’s also about exploring what is possible. “It’s not that different from science...the vanguard push on the possibilities being dreamed up.” She went on to earn an MFA from Columbia University, where she also taught drawing.

As a student of philosophy, she found it difficult to express concepts in one painting, so she taught herself animation to make the images move. “It’s possible to integrate digital means into painting,” says Jiang. *Neighbors*, a two-channel installation with a twist, will be on view alongside paintings in the gallery. In *Neighbors*, investigating the paradoxical structure of the mind, one video shows the view of an inhabitant in an apartment across the street, at the same time, in the other video, someone is watching them. “The voyeur will become the one that is being watched, and the one that is being watched will become the voyeur,” says Jiang. Played simultaneously on a loop, the two channels will be projected on facing walls in the gallery. She says it’s about grappling with your experience of yourself. “When you think to yourself in your inner voice, who’s the

one that’s listening?”

Her animations are a series of paintings that inform the cinematic quality of her oeuvre,” says Anna Meliksetian. Movement is vital too in her paintings, where a giant pink pelican swoops down from the night sky—a memory recalled from a lonely time during her Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program in New Mexico. “I had barely talked to anyone in three months, and you stop thinking to yourself. You stop hearing yourself. You become see-through, transparent, and the landscape becomes much more apparent.” She describes the landscape in Roswell as having a gravitational pull. “The more figurative pieces are trying to articulate those feelings.”

In creative isolation she says, “The highlight of my week while living in the desert was going to the mailbox. So I was sort of stuck in space. I was going to the mailbox one day and a gigantic truck zoomed by. The truck was almost pink. I kept on thinking about the pink truck. Why is it there? All the speed and motion. Power towers, pink dots...it’s not necessarily about what you’re seeing.” These unlikely characters in her practice recall a moment passed, that familiar feeling, memory... The experience led to *Pelican*, a large-scale painting, which will be on view at the Dallas Art Fair at the Meliksetian|Briggs booth.

It was at Meliksetian|Briggs that Jiang held her first show in Los Angeles, where collectors were beguiled by her work. “You see reality in the work, but there are these fantastical elements in the everyday,” says Meliksetian. “Even a small painting of butterflies overtaking a landscape erases the banal and brings enriched elements to the ordinary world.”

Bouquet of the senses, Jiang says, is “a show about sensuality, about living in your own body,” where humanoid and animal forms grace the canvas. It’s this constant mining, fueled by her grasp of multidisciplinary channels, that makes this artist one of today’s top young talents. “I’d like to be on that edge of discovery. It doesn’t matter what discipline or which knowledge system you use to make that discovery. It’s more about that forward push, for me, that is curiosity.”**P**



Yifan Jiang, *Neighbors*, 2023, two-channel video installation/animation. Courtesy of the artist and Meliksetian|Briggs.