

Talentspotter**Tsai Yun-Ju**

Tsai Yun-Ju, *Comma* (2025). Courtesy of the artist and Tara Downs, New York.

Who: Tsai Yun-Ju (b. 1998, Taichung, Taiwan)

Based in: London

Gallery: Tara Downs, New York

Why we care: Diasporic Asian artists have been steadily gaining recognition in recent years and among them is Taiwanese-born, London-based Tsai Yun-Ju. Upon completing her studies in Taiwan, Tsai pursued an MFA in painting at the prestigious **Slade School of Fine Art** in the British capital. Soon after her graduation in 2022, she was picked up by New York gallery Tara Downs, which showcased her work at the gallery and the **June Art Fair** in Basel in 2023.

Tsai's distinctive visual language is rooted in her early training in *gongbi*, a realist, detail-oriented Chinese painting genre characterized by meticulous brushwork, and an upbringing steeped in classic Chinese literature, such as the epic 18th-century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*. She reinterprets these influences with expressive, pastel-hued brushstrokes that dance across her canvases, creating carefully crafted pictorial compositions that are layered with symbolism and hidden meanings.

In her latest body of work, which that will on view in an upcoming New York show, Tsai explores **Takashi Murakami's** notion of "Superflat" by subtly weaving motifs drawn from the Japanese artist's iconography into her abstract gestures. One must allow themselves time and headspace to enjoy her mesmerizing paintings, which are like portals to a hypnotic world waiting to be discovered.

Up next: "the sun never sets," a solo exhibition at Tara Downs will run May 9 to 31, with its opening timed to the main New York fair season.

— **Vivienne Chow**



Inside The 2024 Independent Art Fair

At this year's Independent Art Fair, expect a generational transition through many of the booths on-view, as 31 galleries (around 40 percent) are participating in the New York fair for the first time. It's this attention to newness and emerging artists that has long set the fair up as a breeding ground for younger talent to grow, make connections, and spring onto a larger stage.

The 2024 iteration includes 77 exhibitors in a May 9-12 run at Spring Studios, aligned one week after Frieze and NADA touch down and overlapping with TEFAF.

A special portion this year will honour the fair's history – "15 x15: Independent 2010-2024", organised by founder and CEO Elizabeth Dee alongside founding curatorial advisor and White Columns chief curator Matthew Higgs. Galleries contributing to this project will include Canada, Kasmin, Anton Kern Gallery, Lehmann Maupin, Tilton Gallery, and Nicola Vassell Gallery.

Read below for Elephant's list of galleries to watch at this year's event.



Tsai Yun-Ju, *The Scent Index*, 2024. Oil on canvas, 47.25x70.75 in. Courtesy of the artist and Tara Downs.

The selection of work by Tara Downs' namesake gallery is perhaps one of the most current in theme at the fair. Tsai Yun-Ju throws sprays of pastel colours, grassy greens, aqua blue, and various other bright shades across four canvases referencing technology, nature, and diverse historical lineages of art. Her style has evolved from darker iterations of these works, including the particularly moving *Self Portrait* (2020), while maintaining the emphasis on delicate brush strokes and thoughtful movement. About the works, Yun-Ju said:

"I have found that I'm not only attracted to the concept of conflict but also fascinated by watching life's dramatic, ever-changing process of beauty and ugliness, temperance and obscenity, refinement and vulgarity."

Written by Sam Falb

International Review Since 1913

**NEW
TALENT**

**20
ARTISTS
TO WATCH**

+

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NEW PAINTING**

**—
ARTISTS VS. AI**

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KERRY JAMES
MARSHALL
MIXES IT UP**

**& ART IN
SPACE!**

SUMMER 2023

COVER ART: DRAKE CARR

Art in America



TSAI YUN-JU

BORN
1998
BIRTHPLACE
TAICHUNG, TAIWAN
CURRENTLY BASED
LONDON



First Day of Four Day Interlude, 2023.

During a recent visit to New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Tsai Yun-Ju found herself mesmerized by a work by Henry Darger. Crowded with the outsider artist’s folksy Vivian Girls, the layered panorama reminded Tsai of traditional Chinese ink paintings. “There’s no single view or perspective,” she said. “My mind can wander inside and out freely.”

Tsai was in town in February for the opening of her first solo exhibition in the United States, “A Mirror for the Romantic,” at Tara Downs gallery, where the London-based artist was surrounded by her own painted abstractions. Her work in pencil and oils invites us to wander between marks that boomerang freely across the canvas, with hard-edged lines and brisk smudges wending through eddies of flamboyant color. Her compositions are dense and seemingly limitless in dimension. They sweep you up in their relentless fervor.

Tsai describes herself as a narrator of motions, with a special concern for “the tension of searching back and forth.” This dynamic registers in her gestures’ trajectories, which morph wildly and resolve into harmony. Although her paintings offer no clear stories, they are as eventful as any drama. *Word without End I Saw* (2022) is a riotous encounter of pastel daubs that flit around a wispy spiral of purple, with exacting curves and ciphers subtly punctuating the chaos. Looking at the verdant *First Day of Four Day Interlude* (2023) feels like a fit of spring fever.

Tsai, 24, draws influences from lyrical texts of traditional Chinese literature, in particular the classic epic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, written in the 1750s by Cao Xueqin. Growing up in a large family in Taiwan, she was attracted to the book’s story about the rise and decline of a royal family and its evocation of imagery and metaphors to delineate complex interpersonal relationships. Her ongoing

fascination with the 120-chapter tale’s “ever-changing process of beauty and ugliness, temperance and obscenity, refinement and vulgarity,” as she put it, materializes in her approach to mark-making. She often begins by piling up paint on the edges of her canvas and then spreading it across the surface, drawing over certain layers, and obfuscating others with gesso. When she describes this process, she uses words like “distort,” “destroy,” and “re-create.”

This method of working laterally stems from Tsai’s training in *gongbi*, a realist style of traditional Chinese ink painting that she studied in high school. She adapted her skill in executing fine yet fluid brushstrokes in oil paint at the Taipei National University of the Arts, but turned to abstraction at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, where she received her MFA in 2022.

She was, and remains, interested in pushing spatial relationships and seeking layered emotional states: just as the diction and rhythm of a pithy Chinese idiom can impart a figurative meaning, so can the precise choreography of gestures on canvas unfold a nexus of events. “They’re all constructing and bringing to the viewer a broad worldview and inner spiritual space,” she said.

—Claire Voon



Print insert:
Tsai Yun-Ju: *The Wasp's Smile*, 2023.

Tsai Yun-Ju's Flamboyant Abstractions Draw on Lyrical Chinese Epics

By [Claire Voon](#) 🌐 May 2, 2023 12:38pm



Tsai Yun-Ju: *I Often Think about Things in the Bath*, 2021.
Courtesy Tara Downs, New York/Illustrated Portrait by Denise Nestor

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Tsai Yun-Ju: *The Wasp's Smile*, 2023, a special pull-out print created for *Art in America*.
Photo Ollie Hammick/Courtesy Tara Downs, New York

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Advisory Perspective

Spotted at NADA Miami: Advisory Selections

By [Annabel Downes](#) | Miami, 6 December 2022



Tsai Yun-Ju, *July* (2022). Oil on canvas. 200 x 150 cm. Courtesy Downs & Ross, New York.

Tsai Yun-Ju at Downs & Ross

Slade graduate, Tsai Yun-Ju, who was taken on by the young [New York](#) gallery Downs & Ross, is an artist to watch.

July (2022) was one of two works showing with the gallery in Miami, and is a great introduction for those unfamiliar, beautifully exemplifying the brilliance with which she works the paintbrush around the canvas, in an oscillating, delicate motion.

Her almost highlighter-toned colour palette is the most immediate takeaway. Yet, it is rendered with a subtlety that avoids appearing too garish—softened with whites, while blending colour until it disappears into the bare canvas behind.

Her work will be the subject of a solo exhibition in New York with the gallery in February 2023.

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Advisory Perspective

London's Graduates: Five Artists to Watch

London, 28 July 2022

Looking back at London's recent graduate exhibitions across the Slade, Royal Academy Schools, and Royal College of Art, *Ocula Advisory* highlight some of the artists that caught their attention.



Tsai Yun-Ju, *Harmony Everywhere, Rainstorm Hits Butterflies* (2022). Oil on canvas. 200 x 140 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Tsai Yun-Ju at the Slade

Tsai Yun-Ju's swirling canvases of colour were a major highlight at the Slade's graduate exhibition.

The artist presented eight large-scale oil paintings, each imbued with a fantastical sense of movement and lightness of touch. Despite their busy surfaces, made up of fine gestures of vibrant colour, each panel has a sense of harmonious unity.

Born in Taichung, Taiwan, Tsai Yun-Ju now lives and works in London.