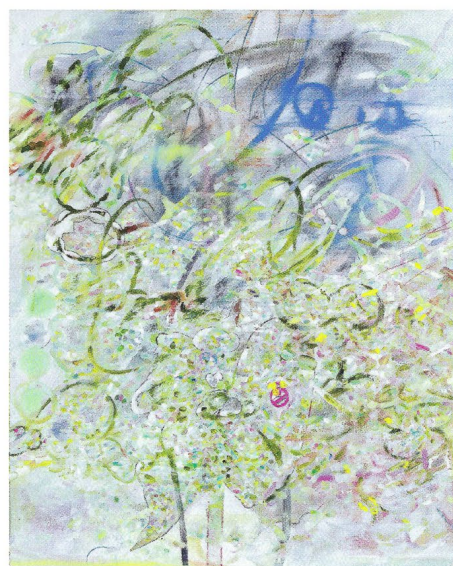




TSAI YUN-JU

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

I Often Think about Things in the Bath, 2021.



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

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SUMMER 2023

COVER ART: DRAKE CARR

Art in America

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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HYPERALLERGIC

Art

When Will the Independent Art Fair Grow Up?

At Tribeca's trendy Spring Studios, I found an art fair in denial.



Hakim Bishara May 10, 2024

The Independent is 15. Hip, chic, and so boutique, the Manhattan art fair doesn't want to grow up. It wants to stay lean and taut, focusing on mid-size galleries and new talent. It prefers jeans and leather jackets over three-piece suits, a vape over a Cuban cigar, cushy sofas and hanging chandeliers over sterile white boxes. Yes, it cares about sales, but that's not what it's all about. It's about the fun, the vibe, the scene, the hype. The Independent's dream is to stay forever young.

But we all get old; we take fewer risks and become middle-class and tame. We stop detesting money-making and start seeking security and comfort. The wiser among us realize that the longer we cling to youth, the sadder the whole thing looks from the outside.



The Independent is celebrating its 15th year.

At Tribeca's trendy Spring Studios, I found an art fair in denial, desperately putting off this next stage of its life. It's like grey hair dyed a bit too dark. Maybe when the Independent turns 30 it'll finally accept itself as a trade fair.

This year's edition also includes an inaugural talk series about such weighty issues as persecuted artists, art activism (without specifying which kind), and big-tech art censorship. Tickets cost up to \$50. I wonder what makes the Independent the right venue for these solemn conversations. It's akin to corporate-style Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives that are designed to put a pretty face on an ugly system. No salvation will ever come from a pricey art fair.

It is this inflated pretentiousness, combined with piles of mediocre and objectionable art, that laid the foundation for my displeasure with this year's Independent.

But it wasn't all bad. I encountered some great work, such as vanessa german's cobalt blue mother-goddess sculpture, Amanda Baldwin's enchanting landscapes, Ryan Mrozowski's paintings of orange trees with an optical twist, Glenn Goldberg's elating dotted paintings of pigeons, and more. Join me for a tour through the fair's four floors in the photos below.



Cushy sofas for a casual ambience



Inside The 2024 Independent Art Fair

Fresh Take
10 May 2024

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.



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

OCULA

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.

OCULA

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.



THE ABSTRACT AND FLUID PROCESS OF TSAI YUN-JU'S WORK COMPELS VIEWERS

JANUARY 28, 2024 | INTERVIEWS | ART OF CHOICE

Tsai Yun-Ju (b. 1998, Taichung, TW) lives and works in London. Her abstract paintings combine iridescent color and intense movement, evoking intense motions reminiscent of nature.



Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from originally and when did art first enter your life?

I was born in a traditional extended family in Taichung, Taiwan, now based in London. In order to shape my early outlook, my mom enrolled me in calligraphy and ink painting classes when I was young.

Has your work always taken on the style it currently embodies?

I began with more of a focus on figuration, and then between 2019-2021 there was a clear process of transformation in my work. I think that currently, my abstract brushstrokes come from the organic texture with which I depicted every character in my previous, surrealistic paintings.

What's a day in the studio like for you?

I'm usually in the studio from 11am – 8pm, sometimes when I get to the studio, I'll stare at the part I finished the previous day for a while then start painting, and maintain a process of repeatedly thinking about various possibilities throughout the day, but sometimes I'll just pick up the brush immediately and continue to create complex structures or color mixtures directly on the canvas.

What's next for you?

I will have paintings in a group show at Tara Downs which will open on March 21, followed by a solo presentation at Independent New York in May.



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From where do you draw inspiration?

Starting in 2019 and continuing to the present moment, my main inspiration comes from my imagination and connecting my childhood experiences to literature, especially *The Dream of the Red Mansion*, I found that I'm not only attracted to the concept of conflict or the rhetoric full of images and metaphors, but also fascinated by watching this dramatic, ever-changing process that combines refinement, ugliness, temperance and vulgarity. It affects my pursuit of morphing images and brushstrokes in my painting, I want to bring this kind of fluid transformation into my work, to create a complete cycle of viewing from the colorful surface of my works, to their core of restlessness, to a kind of harmonious coexistence.

Have you always painted in the style your work currently inhabits?

I think when I did the surrealistic ink or oil paintings before, I put more focus on narratives and creating an atmosphere. In those works, I always used more classical or somber colors, and used the Gongbi technique from ink painting to depict details of hair or the effect of rendering. During this kind of meticulous process where few accidents occurred, I found that I started trying to shift some of the orbital that were originally expected. And this displacement gradually shaped an abstract viewing perspective in my current work. Now my process of painting entails creating many countless oppositions until an image is formed that is interesting and delicate to me.



What source material do you base your work off of?

I like to follow the feelings, or a passage of words, verses and idioms, just read from a book that is full of imagery for me.

Does your work reference any Art Historical movements?

My brushstrokes and some working habits I have are influenced by my traditional ink painting training and studying art history, however I rarely refer to specific art historical movements during the painting process, more thinking about painting itself, I'm obsessed with every decision and establishing an inward trajectory.

What is your process like? How do you begin a work?

I usually pile up the paint or Gesso at the edge of the canvas layer by layer at the beginning, or by using pencil to add some thin lines to depict a rough figure or scenery. For me, the base of the work allows me to think about how I should build multi-events and multi-spaces in images step by step, with a line of escape or rupture — or creating spatial contrast between tiny brushstrokes that keep changing like a kaleidoscope and the sharp, large strokes/ scratches with a sense of speed. At this moment when all “events” are booming at the same time, I begin to enjoy the process of making various decisions. Sometimes I need to destroy the unsatisfactory parts and create new perspectives, sometimes I just need to follow my previous actions and things will fall into place, so images in the work are also revealed in this process of self-dialogue.

At the end of every interview, we like to ask the artist to recommend a friend whose work you love for us to interview next. Who would you suggest?

Tom Waring, it was very fascinating when he once shared with me his mixing and research of paints.



Tara Downs at Palai

28 Jul — 26 Aug 2023 at the Palazzo Tamborino Cezzi in Lecce, Italy

29 JULY 2023



Tara Downs is pleased to participate in this year's edition of Palai, a group exhibition that will take place for the second time this summer at Palazzo Tamborino-Cezzi in Lecce, Italy, with works by Jiang Cheng, Kim Farkas and Tsai Yun-Ju. The project brings together ten galleries from around the world to exhibit together, opening on July 28.

Tara Downs is dedicated to presenting developments in contemporary art for audiences worldwide. The gallery supports a roster of international artists at all stages in their careers, and hosts forward-thinking, multigenerational programming at its distinctive Broadway location. Beyond this, Tara Downs also promotes large-scale exhibitions, interdisciplinary projects, and collaborations by its artists in museums, biennials, and other exhibition platforms.

Tsai Yun-Ju (b. 1998, Taichung, TW) lives and works in London. She received her BA in Fine Arts from National Taipei University of the Arts, Taiwan, in 2020 and her MFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 2022. Solo exhibitions: "A Mirror for the Romantic," Tara Downs, New York, US (2023). Selected group exhibitions include "Eyes, Dusk, Phantasmagoria," RupturXIBIT, London, UK (2022); "Why Don't We Dance," ASC Gallery, London, UK (2022); "Whirl, Bounce, Sway," Safe House, London, UK (2022); "All the Guilty Thing," Kiosk N1C, London, UK (2021); "Walls All Around, Fusion Unit," Nottingham, UK (2021); "Reconnect," Fiztrovia Gallery, London, UK (2021); "Test! Test! Test!," Taipei, TW (2020); and "Overgrown," CAA Xiangshan Art Commune, Hangzhou, CN (2019). Her work is included in the permanent collection of ICA Miami.

Tsai Yun-Ju at Tara Downs

March 4, 2023



Artist: Tsai Yun-Ju

Exhibition title: A Mirror for the Romantic

Venue: Tara Downs, New York, US

Date: February 2 – March 11, 2023

Photography: all images copyright and courtesy of the artist and Tara Downs, New York

Staggering in scale and technique, Tsai Yun-Ju's recent paintings propose a contemporary sublime, a transcendent cartography built from broad strokes, lyrically cursive lines and the gradual accumulation of slight gestures. Although Tsai is evidently a remarkable colorist, a skillful proponent of a soft pop palette, it is the artist's play of indexical gestures — pointillist marks, sketch-like contours, smudgy moments of erasure — that animates *A Mirror for the Romantic*, the artist's first solo exhibition in the United States. This exhibition comprises a collection of eruptive compositions, alternately coalescing or collapsing, an unending series of minor events writ large.

Tsai's practice is obliquely informed by Cao Xueqin's sprawling *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a Qing Dynasty-era novel first published in China near the end of the 18th century. While this literary work, one of the four classics of Chinese literature, is so expansive that an entire field of study is devoted to its interpretation, the novel's dense constellation of characters and events ultimately orbit around the human reincarnation of a divine stone, Jia Baoyu (賈寶玉). Amidst a plethora of family drama and period detail, the novel retains its essential form as a bildungsroman, the narrative of Baoyu's sentimental education. A paratextual tale informs us that Baoyu, born with a fragment of precious jade in his mouth (a vestige of his form as a heavenly stone) has come to earth seeking to experience the pleasures and tribulations of the terrestrial world. The exhibition draws its title from an earlier version of the novel, referencing a magical two-sided mirror. And as this connection between the divine and earthly might suggest, a procession of complex entanglements unfold, porous boundaries between seemingly binary notions, between reality and illusion, or daily life and dreams. "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true," Cao notably, mesmerizingly wrote. "Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real."

It makes some sense that the vast cosmology of the novel would find an analogous form in painting, and in Tsai's series of paintings particularly. This series of works each seem to culminate in a "swarming multiplicity," as Roland Barthes once described Twombly's canvases. Something of his *tabula rasa*, the scraped tablet, returns in the works on view, in the artist's frequent explications of contingency, expressive articulations of making, remaking, unmaking. In maximalist compositions such as *玻璃世界 Break into the Middle Chapter Twice*, 2022, white washes mask past maneuvers and vigorous strokes of hot pink compete with cartoonish action lines, or elsewhere enclaves of contoured forms break from pure abstraction and begin to suggest a veiled vernacular of pearls, stones, atomic structures, or pictorial signs.

Yet the oscillations indicative of Tsai's practice – between abstraction and representation, between mark-making and image production, between finely-wrought deliberation and haptic exertion, between micro- and macrocosm – emerge as well from the long tradition of Chinese literati landscape painting, a tradition that fell into abrupt decline, with the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, just as pure abstraction came to the fore in Western Europe. While Tsai's large-scale paintings eschew any direct formal engagement with this historical juncture, these are precisely the sort of temporal and spatial conflations her works both evoke and manifest so well. They envision a perpetually unfolding narrative, a constant state of becoming, the rapture of unceasing transformation: Tsai's canvases are paradoxically like history paintings in that they always arrive to us in *media res*, in the present-tense. They are elegant dispatches from a chaotic present, reminders of events transpiring omnipotently around us, delighting us, ultimately, in our disorientation.

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