

Tsai Yun-Ju

*The Sun Never Sets*

May 09/May 31, 2025

Looking at the empty sky, I ask myself if it ever did really exist. That mesh of leaves and twigs of fork and froth, minute and endless, with the sky glimpsed only in sudden specks and splinters... embroidered on nothing, like this thread of ink which I have let run on for page after page, swarming with cancellations, corrections, doodles, blots and gaps, bursting at times into clear big berries, coagulating at others into piles of tiny starry seeds, then twisting away, forking off, surrounding buds of phrases with frameworks of leaves and clouds, then interweaving again, and so running on and on and on until it splutters and bursts into a last senseless cluster of words, ideas, dreams, and so ends.

– Italo Calvino, *The Baron of Trees*

Tsai Yun-Ju's exhibition of new works, *the sun never sets*, marks a significant evolution in the artist's already sophisticated practice, showcasing a series of paintings that are among her most ambitious to date. Large-scale compositions continue to interweave global histories of abstraction with more playful cartoonish forms of imagery, on a grand scale. The Twombly-like "swarming multiplicity" of her haptic brushwork, the signature gesture of earlier works, not only endures here, but nearly crescendos, threatening to overtake, operatically, paintings executed across multiple panels.

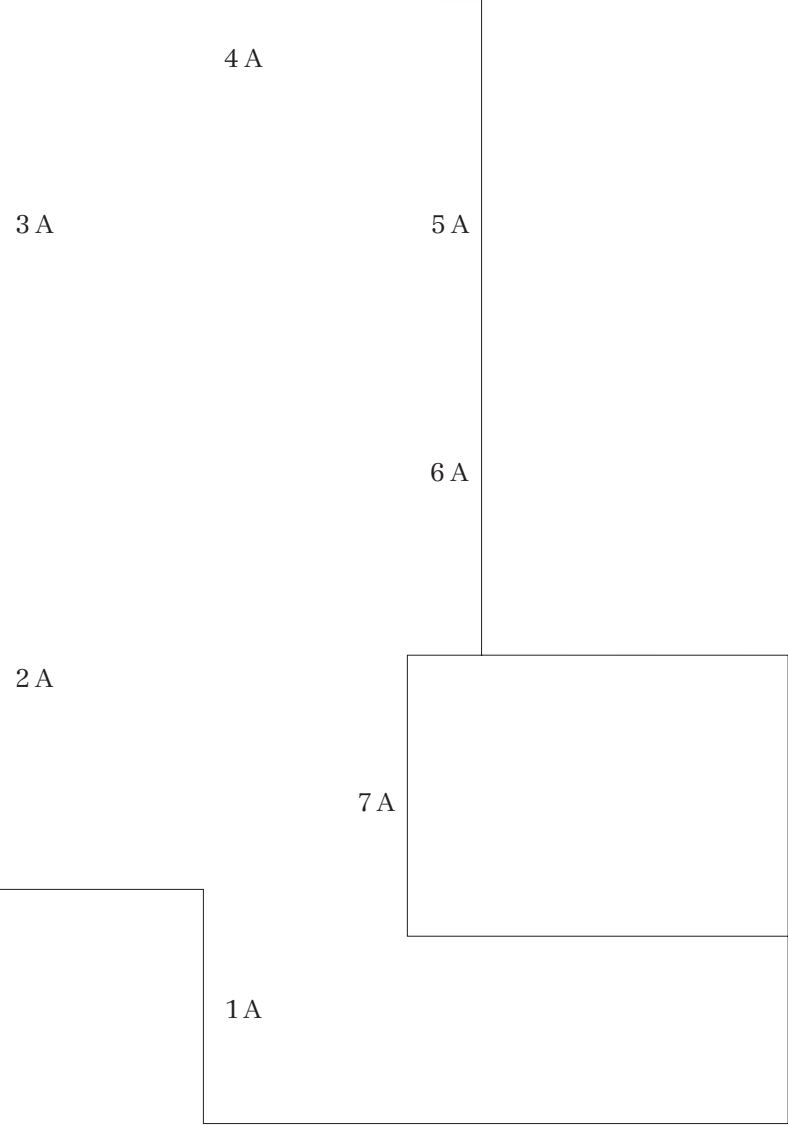
Toggling between minute gesture and vast composition, between abstraction and economically distilled suggestions of representation, Tsai opens a compelling, although unexpected, dialogue with Takashi Murakami's concept of the "superflat," which draws upon legacies of flatness in Japanese art, but remains, per Murakami, open-ended, fundamentally indefinable and endlessly adaptable. If Murakami's preliminary "superflat" amplified or exaggerated the artifice of contemporary life and the superficiality of a culture engendered by consumerism, Tsai's oblique and embedded reworkings of some of Murakami's most recognizable motifs – graphically-rendered flowers, checkerboard hearts, multiply-pupiled eyes – demonstrate how our experience of the natural order is already mediated by cultural memory and popular visual culture. Maybe, too, these paintings evince how patterns in nature may already appear to the artist as the inciting call to free association and ornate worldbuilding.

Initially trained in gongbi, a realist of Chinese painting style known for its meticulous brushwork and fine detail, Tsai draws this traditional foundation into contention with her more expressive impulses. Rather than abandoning the conventions of landscape painting altogether, she disassembles them—dismantling and reassembling its precepts through a lens that is at once reverent and seditious. And in paintings like *Nautical Promises*, 2024, she

appears to deconstruct her own self-conceived schema, exposing, through cross-like formations, the procedural accumulation of layers, the assembly of spatial dimension, within the work. These breaks and compartmentations may also begin to suggest the introduction of narrative – Tsai’s process always begins in writing, in notes, observations, and translations, which are then translated again, back into painting – but it is, in a sense, a cubist narrative: we view all facets simultaneously, continuously, unmoored from any linear sense of temporality.

Yet as much as Tsai’s paintings stage such perpetually unfolding encounters, they are also studies in color – iridescent, vernal palettes that recall both the shifting tones of spring and the artificial vibrancy of digital aesthetics. They are concerned with the conveyance of blank space and maximalism, but also harmony; in the work for which the exhibition is titled, the sun never sets, 2024, for instance, moments of darkness – amethyst purple, orange, and red – counteract the prevailing resonance of canary yellow. Effervescent hues collide, harmonize, and ricochet across the canvas, establishing complex spatial relationships that refuse to settle into an easy sense of depth or its opposite. Instead, space in Tsai’s paintings remains in flux, a shifting field animated by a dance of brushstrokes and chromatic interplay. As Claire Voon aptly noted in *Art in America*, Tsai orchestrates a “choreography of gestures,” and it is this sense of fluid movement – at once painterly, historical, and bodily – that animates the sun never sets. In these paintings, the expressive energies of abstraction, the visual lexicon of animation, and the historical gravity of Chinese landscape painting coalesce, supernova-like, before expanding out once more. What results is not a kind of synthetic amalgamation, but rather, after the title of one painting on view, a catalyzed reaction – an eruption of auratic, indexical experience.

*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: “The Sun Never Sets”, Tara Downs, New York, US (2025); “A Mirror for the Romantic,” Tara Downs, New York, US (2023). Selected group exhibitions include: “Notes Towards a Shell,” Tara Downs, New York, US (2024); “The Big Chill,” Bernheim, London, UK (2023-2024); “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.



- 1 A      Tsai Yun-Ju, 人間 Live, 2024
- 2 A      Tsai Yun-Ju, Nautical Promises, 2024
- 3 A      Tsai Yun-Ju, 離恨天外 Beyond The Heaven of Parting Sorrow, 2025
- 4 A      Tsai Yun-Ju, 天涯共此時 Scythe, 2024
- 5 A      Tsai Yun-Ju, Catalyst, 2024
- 6 A      Tsai Yun-Ju, Comma, 2025
- 7 A      Tsai Yun-Ju, The Sun Never Sets, 2025