

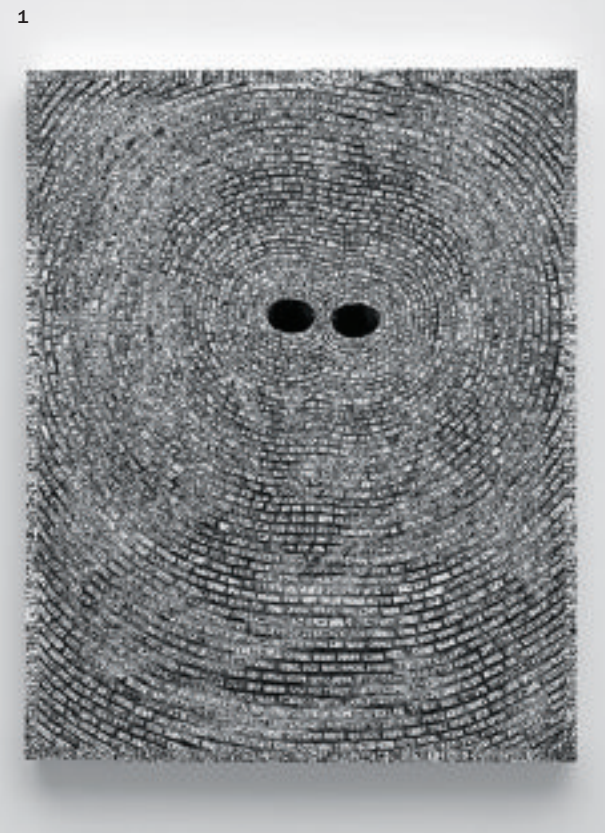


# PAULINE J. YAO

PAULINE J. YAO IS AN INDEPENDENT CURATOR AND WRITER BASED IN HONG KONG AND THE FORMER LEAD CURATOR FOR VISUAL ART AT THE CITY'S M+. SHE RECENTLY COCURATED THE 2025 M+ SIGG PRIZE EXHIBITION AND CURRENTLY CHAIRS THE COLLECTION COMMITTEE OF THE SHANGHAI-BASED DE YING FOUNDATION.

1

**JACK WHITTEN (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK; CURATED BY MICHELLE KUO WITH HELENA KLEVORN, DANA LILJEGREN, AND DAVID SLEDGE)** For me, as someone who has had very limited opportunities to see Whitten's work, this exhibition featuring six decades' worth of it was a true feast. I found canvases that simultaneously illuminated and appeared as if illuminated from within and straddled realms of both painting and sculpture. *Self Portrait: Entrainment*, 2008, with the artist's embedded sunglass lenses, was one of my favorites, suggesting a need to be shielded from the extreme luminosity his own canvases exuded. The works had a lofty, mystical quality, but thanks to the addition of bottle caps, tire treads, and other debris, they were also distinctly tethered to the street.



2

**"MONSTROUS BEAUTY: A FEMINIST REVISION OF CHINOISERIE" (METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK; CURATED BY IRIS MOON)** Whatever qualities we may associate with the ceramic medium—fragile, delicate, lightweight—were ably countered by the curatorial heft of this exhibition, aided by a powerhouse lineup of works by contemporary Asian and Asian American artists including Lee Bul, Patty Chang, Heidi Lau, Candice Lin, Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Jen Liu, and Yeesookyung. A standout of the show was Chang's newly commissioned raw porcelain massage table (*Abyssal*, 2025), its punctured surface a poignant reminder of how wounds from the past continue to inflict the present.

3

**ZHANG PEILI (RED BRICK ART MUSEUM, BEIJING; CURATED BY ZHANG GA/TAIKANG ART MUSEUM, BEIJING; CURATED BY TANG XIN AND HU HAO)** Two overlapping shows of this pivotal artist afforded a rare opportunity to consider the full breadth of his oeuvre, from early paintings, videos, and conceptual works from the 1980s and '90s to his more recent forays into kinetic installations. Newly commissioned works at Red Brick featured scores of propane tanks being spun, dragged, and dropped from tall heights as if they were toys. The bouts of thunderous noise and sense of threatening doom were enough to shake one's body and conscience to the core.



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**WANG XINGWEI (GALERIE URS MEILE, BEIJING)** Wang is one of China's most mature painters, yet also probably one of its least understood, especially outside of his native country. His reworkings of socialist realism are often interpreted as cartoonish satire, and his shape-shifting style—moving fluidly from surrealistic figuration to Photorealism to forms of commercial illustration—is often dismissed as derivative when it is in fact his superpower. This latest body of work addressing intergenerational relationships and aging in Chinese society demonstrated Wang's deftness with tongue-in-cheek theatricality and his ever-elusive take on the construction that is painting.

5

**HO TZU NYEN (KIANG MALINGUE, HONG KONG)** Transforming the three floors of this gallery's renovated outpost in Wan Chai into three realms—the netherworld, earth, and the heavens—Ho's exhibition "Three Stories: Monsters, Opium, Time" offered a fantastical journey from dark to light. Although conceived as independent works, the three realms worked in concert as a layered meditation on history and myth, rendered via different optical strategies. The forty-three screens comprising in *Timepieces*, 2023—aka Heaven—were the real highlight, forcing us to encounter cultural conceptions of time rather than linear ones.

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**SEVERANCE, SEASON TWO (APPLE TV+)** Is “What happened to Gemma?” this generation’s version of “Who killed Laura Palmer?” Once every few years a TV series comes along that ignites new obsessions in our popular psyche, introducing a host of words into our daily vocabulary—innies and outies, melon and waffle parties, ORTBOs and MDEs—and uniting people over existential dinner party debates. The much awaited (three years!) second season did not answer all our questions as much as prompt new ones, but I for one am hooked and can’t wait until the next season, whenever it arrives, to scratch that itch.

7

**“STAY CONNECTED: NAVIGATING THE CLOUD” (TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY, HONG KONG; CURATED BY PI LI AND YING KWOK)** It’s telling that this survey of contemporary Chinese art is the most significant to take place in Hong Kong since the 1993 show “China’s New Art, Post-1989,” a landmark presentation that opened the floodgates for experimental Chinese art, enabling it to reach a significant international audience—and market—for the first time. Now, after another period of isolation, art from the mainland returns to Hong Kong. This time around, in the first half of a two-part survey, “Stay Connected: Art and China Since 2008,” over fifty works by more than thirty-five artists and groups give us a glimpse of an artistic generation responding not only to ideological change but also to the complex social and economic impacts of digital culture and manufacturing. Examples range from Ye Funa’s participatory reprisal of “gaudy aesthetics” to Lin Ke’s screen-based performance videos to Sun Yuan and Peng Yu’s industrial robot arm locked in endless toil.

On view through January 4, 2026.



8

**ZARNA GARG, *THIS AMERICAN WOMAN: A ONE-IN-A-BILLION MEMOIR* (BALLANTINE)** It’s not often that a brown woman breaks into the world of comedy at age forty-four, and even less likely after escaping an arranged marriage at fourteen, fleeing to Akron, Ohio, and spending sixteen years as a stay-at-home mom to three children on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Garg’s new memoir chronicling this incredible journey from the streets of Mumbai to become, in her words, an “Indian immigrant wife, mom, lawyer, screenwriter, producer, stand-up comedian and all around nosey, overbearing Indian auntie” is truly a joy to read. Filled with unparalleled honesty and reflecting its author’s determination to exist as an independent woman, the book shows why Garg is an inspiration to all.

9

**“LAURA LIMA: BALÉ LITERAL” (TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY, NEW YORK)** Happening upon this “exhibition in motion” in Chelsea was an unexpected treat. Originally performed as a one-time event on the streets of Rio de Janeiro, *Balé Literal* (Literal Ballet) involves a choreography of fabric sculptures and adorned found objects moving through space on a pulley system powered by a human on a modified bicycle. The gallery setting afforded an opportunity to peer behind the scenes to witness the cyclist-operator selecting each object and determining the timing sequence, making the invisible labor visible and reminding us of the boundaries between man and machine.

10

**JANUARY 2025 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FIRES** I mention this not as a highlight of the year to celebrate but as a painful reminder of the weather whiplash that is here to stay. It’s been close to a year since a series of catastrophic fires rained destruction down on Los Angeles, killing at least thirty-one people and leaving multiple communities in ruin. The news cycle may have moved on, but we should not forget that many, if not most, area residents are still recovering from devastating loss. □



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**1.** Jack Whitten, *Self Portrait: Entrainment*, 2008, acrylic and sunglass lenses on canvas, 29½ × 23". **2.** Lee Bul, *Monster: Black*, 1998–2011, fabric, fiberfill, stainless-steel frame, sequins, acrylic paint, dried flowers, glass beads, aluminum, crystal, metal chain, 85½ × 73½ × 67½". **3.** View of “Zhang Peili: 2011.4.27—Permanent,” 2024, Taikang Art Museum, Beijing. **4.** Wang Xingwei, *Chinese Soccer Fans*, 2024, oil on canvas. Installation view, Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing, 2025. **5.** Ho Tzu Nyen, *Night March of Hundred Monsters—100 Mini Monsters*, 2025, three-channel video (color, sound, 16 minutes 30 seconds), LED screen, projections on glass, soundbar. Installation view, Kiang Malingue, Hong Kong. Photo: Kwan Sheung Chi. **6.** *Severance*, 2022–, still from a TV show on AppleTV+. Season 2, episode 10, “Cold Harbor.” Helly R. (Brittney Leigh Lower). **7.** Lu Yang, *Material World Knight*, 2018, three-channel video, color, sound, 22 minutes 15 seconds. Installation view, Tai Kwun, Hong Kong, 2025. Photo: Kwan Sheung Chi. **8.** Cover of Zarna Garg’s *This American Woman* (Ballantine Books, 2025). **9.** Laura Lima, *Balé Literal; Martelo com vestido à grega* (Literal Ballet; Hammer with Greek Dress), 2025, metal, wood, fabric, 11' 1½" × 5½" × 2¾". **10.** Remains of building burned by the January 2025 Eaton fire, Altadena, CA, July 7, 2025. Photo: John Lazenby/UCG/Universal Images Group via Getty Images.