

(Date)

10 Nov 2022 – 8 Jan 2023

(Location)

Qiao Space, 2555 Longteng
Avenue, Xuhui District, Shanghai

(Contact)

office@kiangmalingue.com
+852 2810 0317

(Media Enquiries)

Yiyun He
yiyun@kiangmalingue.com
+86 18912799660

(All Other Enquiries)

Ella Liao
ella@kiangmalingue.com
+852 2810 0318

"Yuan Yuan: Understory" is
presented by Kiang Malingue and
Qiao Space

乔 QIAO
空间

Such is our way of thinking—we find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates. A phosphorescent jewel gives off its glow and color in the dark and loses its beauty in the light of day. Were it not for shadows, there would be no beauty.

— Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*

Kiang Malingue and Qiao Space present Yuan Yuan's exhibition *Understory*, showcasing seven recent paintings created by the artist in the last two years, and a series of paintings created between 2012 and 2017. This is the Berlin-based artist's first exhibition in Asia after *Irregular Pearl* at Kiang Malingue's Hong Kong gallery space in 2020. By juxtaposing a number of artworks from different periods and inspired by different realities, the exhibition presents the artist's ever-deepening painting practice since 2008, revealing Yuan's keen insight as he navigates through the complexities of the representational realm.

Yuan Yuan's recent large-scale paintings include *Private Submarine* made in 2022. Faithful to an absurd reality, the artist's signature meticulous approach avoids direct depiction of objects, focusing instead on "the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness" that arise between them, constructing the interior of an improbable submarine. At the centre of the composition is an old-fashioned staircase that winds up sinuously, and a blue water slide that flushes down - the two produce a double helix that not only distorts the center of the image, but also indicates the strange sense of speed that moves through this enclosed space, and the alternation of heaviness and lightness in this "underwater room". The dark, dusty atmosphere brought by the bunk beds and kitchen clutter contrasts with the unreasonably moist cartoon frog, appearing out of thin air. This odd development emphasises the childishness of the title, allowing for the free dissolution of the political, military and social significance of the subject in the picture.

Another topical work is *Al Capone's Cell*, also made in 2022. Just as *Private Submarine*, the thematic aspect of the new painting is captivating; it is rendered in a classic Tintoretto perspective, reinforcing the claustrophobic sense that often emerges in Yuan Yuan work. By further enclosing the interior space, the composition resists the desire to overspill colors and to expand — or the desire of the room's notorious owner to escape and regain his freedom. Yuan once visited the cell in Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary; he has transformed in the painting this privileged cell into a space akin to a Halloween playground, as if the ruthless Al Capone would get up at any moment to open the door and hand out candies to children — just like his public persona of a philanthropist had it. The mirror on the right reflects lavish decorative paintings from other dimensions, while the only other way out of the heavily adorned room is suggested by the narrow cell skylight above. *Understory*, a new work that shares the exhibition's title, also flushes light down from directly above, with delicate brushstrokes revealing a multitude of details between light and dark that signify tranquility and danger.

Recent works such as *Museum's Restaurant* and *Folded into a Mattress* produce asymmetrical and flattened compositions with a unified, dark palate, demonstrating once again Yuan Yuan's ability to obscure, expose, and fabricate extraordinary details. These images, which seem to be both visual alibis and nameless, threatening occupations of objects, encourage the viewer to examine the relationship between spatial dimensions through eerie perspectives — Yuan Yuan the animist warps the breathtaking moment in which painting slowly unfolds itself.

Also included in *Understory* is a selection of previous paintings that resonate with the recent works in various aspects, clarifying the main strands of Yuan Yuan's artistic exploration since 2012. *Beast in the Cage* from 2017 not only simulates the confinement of a powerful master-slave as in *Al Capone's Cell*, but also theatricalises the pictorial tension through the repeated and rigorous use of triangular and inverted triangular projections. Reminding one of Ilya Kabakov's anti-monumental installations, *With the Effort of All We Will Win* from 2015 depicts revolutionaries in the jungles of South America: in this ruined scene, a couple of comrades march solemnly forward under a canopy — or are camouflaged into what seems to be an improbable aquarium.

Kiang Malingue

馬凌畫廊

kiangmalingue.com

10 Sik On Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong
香港 灣仔 適安街10號
(Follow) @kiangmalingue

(About the artist)

Hangzhou-based artist, Yuan Yuan, has earned international critical acclaim through his distinctive paintings, executed with impeccable technique and conveying a unique atmosphere. He studied in the Oil Painting Department of the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, where he gained a Bachelors and later a Master degree in Fine Arts in 1996 and 2008 respectively. His subjects are often interiors; some are grand structures such as great halls with neo-classical arches, others from more modest structures such as entrances and corridors of old apartment buildings. These are based on real places, but with imaginary elements added to impose Yuan Yuan's own system of design. All share a sense of abandonment, offering just a glimpse of their former glory. Yuan has had solo exhibitions at Palazzo Terzi, Italy (2018), and Galerie Malingue, Paris (2015) among others. Group exhibitions include Gropius Bau, Berlin(2019), The 12th Shanghai Biennale (2018); and White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney (2014), among others.