

## Han Mengyun: Jewels of Impermanence

Opening Reception: 31 May 2025, 4pm

Exhibition Period : 31 May – 27 July 2025

Singapore, May 2025 — ShanghART Singapore is pleased to present *Jewels of Impermanence*, London-based artist Han Mengyun's first solo exhibition in the gallery's Singapore space. The title is borrowed from a poem the artist penned amid the unsettling spring of 2020. The show gathers a selection of paintings and drawings made between 2020 and 2025, providing a scintillating, at times enigmatic, glimpse into the artist's pandemic-era turmoil and the spiritual composure she forged through an aesthetic meditation on impermanence.

Han's images stage an encounter between Dutch *vanitas* paintings and Buddhist depictions of skeletons and skulls. Whereas *vanitas* and *memento mori* traditions expose worldly vanity, Buddhist "meditations on repulsiveness" confront impermanence as a precondition of enlightenment. Interweaving iconographies through a repertoire of skulls, hourglasses, and other emblems of transience, Han constructs mandala-like configurations, printed with woodblocks she has collected across Asia. The mandala serves as a phenomenological prism—an architectonic map through which both the macrocosm and the psyche can be apprehended. Such material and visual hybridity stages a tension between sensuous surface and metaphysical aspiration. Works such as *Spaß und Tod*, with its skeletal hands poised in play, recall the late-medieval *danse macabre* and Tibetan *thangka* of the *citipati*, acknowledging death as a kinetic partner in the continuum of life and the catalyst of existential transformation.

The series marks the artist's return to oil painting which she rejected for almost a decade in search of the alternative to 'the Western'. "In the prospect of grim uncertainty", the artist says, "I felt an urgent craving for the corporeal lusciousness of oil, the exhilarating violence of the brush, the humble endurance of canvas—capacities ink and rice paper cannot sustain. In this existential aporia, I understood for the first time the Heideggerean *Sein-zum-Tode*, being-toward-death—the unflinching awareness of finitude makes life infinitely possible."

## Jewels of Impermanence

*In the silent altar of the mind,  
the soul awakens to whisper words of truth.  
That's the gift from disasters,  
a garland of quietude.  
There is neither past nor future.  
The present is forever present.  
That is also my present.  
May the song of birds break the dawn.  
May fear manifest itself as mere illusion.  
The siege of clouds fails to capture  
the night-dwelling moon, whose mission  
is to reveal the veracity of light and compassion.  
My mind becomes clear and still,  
like a pond holding moonlight,  
like a mirror polished in the river.  
The ancient Persians wear poetry like jewelry,  
I take impermanence as treasury of light  
shedding on the vicissitudes of life.*

~ Han Mengyun

## About the Artist

**Han Mengyun** (b. 1989 in Wuhan, raised in Shenzhen, China) is an interdisciplinary and multimedia artist, comparatist, filmmaker, poet and mother currently based in London. She received her BA in Studio Art from Bard College and has pursued the study of Sanskrit at various institutions such as Kyoto University before she completed her MFA at the University of Oxford with a research focus on Classical Indology and Indian aesthetic theories. Her practice is metaphorically divided between *Day* and *Night*, exploring a wide range of themes from the decolonisation of Eurasian transcultural hybridisations to personal experiences as a woman and mother.

During the "day," Han Mengyun focuses on painting, diverging from Eurocentric frameworks—both classical and contemporary—to delve into the complex historical ties within the profoundly intercultural context of Eurasia's past and present. Initially trained in the Western tradition of oil painting, she shifted towards embracing the complexities of historical ties and

intercultural dialogues that have shaped the continent's history. The broad focus of her research covers interdisciplinary manifestations of cultural dialogue and polyvocal aesthetic conversations—from religion, philosophy and mythologies, to trade, vernacular crafts, textile and bookmaking.

During the "night," Han Mengyun explores her personal, emotional and psychological experiences as a woman and a mother. Her affinity for the night developed from an uncontrollable desire to write poems in darkness during episodes of postpartum depression. The night emancipated her and inspired her *écriture féminine*. Her feminist awareness and radical solidarity were kindled by Gayatri Spivak's critical concern for the subaltern, the contradictions of existence as double binds caused by colonialism and modernity, and creative play as non-compliance. From writing and filmmaking to painting and textile installation—often merging these forms—her *Night* practice examines women's experiences, utterances, and art forms in transgenerational, transcultural, transhistorical, and inter-religious contexts, probing the roots of subalternity and the possibilities of liberation.

Recent exhibitions include (the upcoming) "Recipes for Broken Hearts" Bukhara Biennial, Uzbekistan (September–November 2025); "Lining Revealed – A Journey Through Folk Wisdom and Contemporary Vision" Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile, Hong Kong (2025); "Tracing Impermanence" AlUla Arts Festival, Saudi Arabia (2025); "Unknownness is the Way" Delfina Foundation, London, UK (2024); "Seeing in the Dark" Busan Biennale, South Korea (2024); "What Migrates Shall Remain" Zhi Art Museum, Chengdu, China (2024); "Poetry by the Barbarian" ASE Foundation, Shanghai, China (2024); "The Threshold under Turbine Vents" Sunblanket Foundation, Seoul, South Korea (2024); "The Unending Rose" ShanghART Shanghai, China (2023); "Painting Unsettled" UCCA Edge, Shanghai, China (2023); "SIGG: Chinese Contemporary art from the Sigg Collection" SONGEUN Art and Cultural Foundation, Seoul, South Korean (2023); "Bordercrossing: Possibilities and Interactions" Forbes China Contemporary Young Artists, Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China (2023); "Night" esea contemporary, Manchester, UK (2022); "A Place for Concealment" Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing, China (2022); "The Dwelling Place of the Other in Me" Power Station of Art, Shanghai, China (2021); "Diriyah Biennale: Feeling the Stones" Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2021); "Splinters of Jade" A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu, China (2019); "In Between Island" Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2013) etc.

## About ShanghART

ShanghART Gallery was established in Shanghai in 1996. It has since grown to become one of China's most influential art institutions and a vital player in the development of contemporary art in China, working with over 50 pioneering and emerging artists, including DING Yi, HAN Mengyun, LI Shan, LIN Aojie, Arin RUNGJANG, SUN Xun, Melati SURYODARMO, TANG Da Wu, Apichatpong WEERASETHAKUL, XU ZHEN®, YANG Fudong, ZENG Fanzhi, and ZHAO Renhui Robert.

ShanghART Singapore was established in 2012 as the gallery's Southeast Asia wing, located in the contemporary art cluster Gillman Barracks. The gallery's first overseas space serves as a platform to introduce Chinese contemporary art to the region while developing collaborations with Southeast Asian artists, facilitating cross-cultural dialogues and enriching artistic exchanges within the global art community.



@shanghart.singapore

For interviews & enquiries, please contact:

Goh Chun Aik

T: +65 6734 9537 | chunaik@shanghartgallery.com

## ShanghART Singapore

Wednesday to Sunday, 12pm – 6pm,

other hours by appointment only

9 Lock Road, #02-22, Gillman Barracks, Singapore 108937

+65 6734 9537 | infosg@shanghartgallery.com

shanghartgallery.com | FB & IG: @shanghart.singapore

---

GILLMAN BARRACKS