

Yao Qingmei: Steel Garden

Opening Reception: 13 December 2025, 4pm

Exhibition Period : 13 December 2025 – 15 February 2026

Singapore, November 2025 — ShanghART Gallery is pleased to present *Steel Garden*, a solo exhibition by Paris-based artist Yao Qingmei, marking her first major presentation with the gallery. Known for an interdisciplinary practice that bridges performance, video, photography, and installation, Yao examines how bodies move through—and are shaped by—structures of power, public ritual, and the choreography of collective life.

At the heart of the exhibition is *Steel Garden*, her latest two-channel video installation. The work draws from the grand floral displays erected annually during moments of national celebration. Through a series of precise and lingering images—close-ups of flowers, birds foraging among cracks, weeds growing between paving stones, the varied postures of visitors, and the synchronised gesture of crowds during the flag-raising ceremony—Yao reveals the subtle relationships between individual action, collective ritual, and the constructed natural landscape.

This multi-chapter video work begins with news reports on specially cultivated festival flowers and culminates in a floating, dust-like vocal poem from the artist's own perspective. Drawing upon the concepts of the “moving garden” and the “third landscape” by French gardener Gilles Clément, the work also references descriptions of pain and hallucination experienced by the soldier Pavel Korchagin in the Soviet novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1934) to reveal the biopolitical framework that underlies this monumental ritual.

The exhibition also brings together works spanning more than 10 years, offering a contextual understanding of Yao's sustained inquiry into symbolic gesture, embodied practice, and moving-image construction. Beginning with early public space interventions and documented performances, Yao initially used video as a means of recording her embodied actions. Over time, she has increasingly turned toward filmic construction, developing a more deliberate cinematic language that positions her both in front of and behind the camera.

This evolution is visible in works such as *The Third Internationale in Monaco* (2012) and *Dance! Dance! Bruce Ling!* (2013), in which Yao performs as a protagonist navigating staged situations that parody ideological choreography. In more recent projects, including *Prelude to Love* (2023), she adopts the role of a director, shaping narrative, movement, and mise-en-scène to investigate how collective identities are formed, reinforced, or unsettled.

Across her body of work, Yao Qingmei articulates a distinctive, incisive voice within contemporary art—one attuned to the shifting dynamics of patriotism, spectacle, everyday life, and public space in the twenty-first century. *Steel Garden* offers a focused yet expansive lens into her practice, foregrounding an artist whose observations of ritual, power, and lived experiences resonate far beyond their point of origin.

About the Artist

Yao Qingmei (born in 1982 in Zhejiang) currently lives and works in Paris. Her practice focuses primarily on performance, video and related installation, incorporating elements of scenography, costumes, texts, lectures, games, sound poetry, and contemporary choreography. By intervening in specific spaces, she disrupts established rules, explores the symbols of everyday life, and examines how bodies nurtured by these symbols gain or lose power, breaking the boundaries between performance and its setting.

Her works often use displacement, metaphor, and allegory to question the mechanisms of political and social issues, revealing a tension of confrontation rooted in serious critique yet tinged with burlesque and lightness. She seeks to stimulate collisions between different modes of language, body movements, and perspectives by exploring the loosening of the body and the unique spontaneity of the individual, thus touching the interstices of established frameworks and seeking forms of resistance.

Yao Qingmei entered École Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Limoges in 2007, and graduated in 2013 from École Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Villa Arson Nice with DNSEP (Master) degree in Fine Arts. In 2014, she won the Jury Special Award at the 59th Salon de Montrouge and received the AIC Individual Creation Fund from the Limousin region in France. In 2017, she won the inaugural Porsche "Young Chinese Artist of the Year" award in Shanghai. In 2018, she was selected and awarded the 68th "Jeune Création" Prize in Paris. In 2022, she received the Asian Cultural Council New York Fellowship and the AIC Individual Creation Fund from the Île-de-France region.

Yao Qingmei has held solo exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo in Paris and the West Bund Museum in Shanghai, and has exhibited and performed at institutions such as Whitechapel Gallery in the UK, Haus der Kunst in Munich, Shanghai Biennale, Biennial of Jeune Création européenne, Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, UCCA in Beijing, Musée d'art contemporain de la Haute-Vienne, and Para Site in Hong Kong. Her works are part of public and private collections, including Centre Pompidou, Fonds Municipal d'Art Contemporain de la Ville de Paris, Direction des Affaires Culturelles de la Ville de Marseille, Guangdong Museum of Art, Taikang Space in Beijing, Kadist Art Foundation in San Francisco, and other institutions.

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, LI Shan, LIANG Shaoji, 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.

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