LISSON

YU HONG
Field of Asura

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION DATES:
4 NOVEMBER 2026 – 9 JANUARY 2027
504 WEST 24TH STREET, NEW YORK

OPENING: 4 NOVEMBER, 6 – 8PM



"My work deals with mental and physical violence, pain, human depravity... It's the power of art, to express what I observe and experience by means of painting. To some extent, it's the mark of existence, and that's what painting is to me, recording everything I see and experience."

For her debut at Lisson New York, entitled *Field of Asura*, Yu Hong presents a monumental exhibition of new and recent paintings that extend her touching, allegorical and apocalyptic approach to contemporary life. Anchored by a suite of major large-scale works, the presentation includes newly completed multi-panel compositions inspired by the structure of classical European altarpieces, alongside selected mid- and small-scale paintings. With sweeping brushwork and heightened corporeal intensity, the works depict figures bound by vulnerability, endurance, and mutual dependence. Personal experience, collective history and painterly tradition converge through the human figure, which remains central to the artist's ongoing practice.

Yu Hong draws equally from historical examples of classical painting and Buddhist iconography, while employing both ferociously honest and impossibly metaphysical forms of realism, in one exultant and turbulent suite of paintings. The titular work is an arched altarpiece in three sections depicting a swirling tower made up of figures either being swallowed up or held aloft on a column of clouds, seemingly indifferent to their vertiginous fate. The *Field of Asura* being referred to here (*xiu luo chang* in Chinese) is an astral realm of eternal struggle found in both Buddhist and Hindu lore, representing an incessant conflict between various demigods and deities for supremacy over heaven and earth. This is perhaps an apt metaphor for the constant trials and tribulations of our non-stop, combative modern world in which entire societies, nations, competing interests and systems are caught in perpetual conflict and entanglement.

This new body of work reveals an ever-fluid, tumultuous painterly landscape, populated by anxious, elongated and contorted bodies. From the mournful descent of a naked corpse into a funereal shroud for *Lament,* (inspired by Rogier van der Weyden's *The Descent from the Cross*, 1435) to the ethereal sunset gathering of nymphs in *Wind Rising*, Yu Hong explores the gamut of human agonies and ecstasies. Her refusal to look her subjects in the eyes heightens the sense of alienation in their postures while also focusing the compositions on the close physical intimacy between figures, all expressing their states of being through corporeal and gestural means. The only pre-existing work, *Night Walk* (2023), references Pieter Breugel the Elder's *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1568) in a grisly procession from light to dark and from fire to brimstone.

Whether locked in battle or embrace, Yu Hong's painterly arenas each attain a spiritual or pictorial balance between the painful reality of our chaotic, everyday earthly struggles and the possibilities of flight and freedom in the upper atmospheres of dream-space.

This show will be accompanied by a new book, featuring essays by Prof Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, O Munsterberg Chair of Asian Art, Emeritus at Bard College, and Susie Ferrell, Associate Curator of Chinese Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The exhibition follows Yu Hong's first major US solo museum presentation at SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah in 2023, curated by Daniel Palmer, and her first major exhibition in Europe during the 2024 Venice Biennale, organised by The Asian Art Initiative of the Guggenheim Museum, New York and curated by its Senior Curator at Large, Alexandra Munroe.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

A painter of epic scenes and intimate moments, Yu Hong constructs modern-day fables and complex, allegorical compositions by channelling historical, narrative-driven art through a fiercely contemporary lens. Yu Hong's protagonists are caught in extremis: floating on clouds, climbing vertiginous mountains or walking through flames as if to hell – all variously suffering the ecstasies and tribulations of existence. Yet her fantastical worlds are inhabited by real people, featuring portrayals of friends, acquaintances and family members, revealing a personal and touching dimension to the sweeping cycles of paintings that she produces over long periods of time. Her lifelong autobiographical project, *Witness to Growth*, begun in the 1990s as a series of diptychs, charts her own life juxtaposed with news clippings from each era, now with the addition of her daughter's milestones alongside her own.

As well as elevating people and their bodies to otherworldly, uncompromising and often female celestial beings, Yu Hong's sitters are also subject to the intense lows of depression, urban deprivation and social alienation, as in her apocalyptic *Earth and Heaven* (2014), or when tumbling from her *Ladder to the Sky* (2008). The latter image not only borrows from a medieval precedent (*The Ladder to Paradise* in the Egyptian Monastery of St Catherine), but utilises a gold background, which she has employed since`2010, in order to iconise and foreground her cast of modern-day characters. Yu Hong's painterly references take in the styles, ideologies and ambitions of both Eastern and Western Old Masters, from cave paintings to Renaissance altarpieces, recently echoing Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, for the piled-up mound of humans and animals in *Pyramid* (2022), or Brueghel's *Blind Leading the Blind*, across three panels of her blazing *Night Walk* (2023). Her handling can also scale down to the depiction of an individual lost in thought, or to a pair of hands locked in a gesture of tender internalisation.

Yu Hong was born in 1966 in Xi'an, China. In 1984, she studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing and graduated from the oil painting department in 1988. Since 1988 she has been a teacher at CAFA. Yu Hong's first major exhibition in Europe, 'Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust' opened at the Chiesetta della Misericordia in Venice as a special offsite exhibition of the Asian Art Initiative of the Guggenheim Museum, New York in April 2024. Her first major American museum show was held at SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA, in 2023 and her work was featured in 'Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World' (2017) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Recent solo exhibitions include: 'Islands of the Mind' (2024) at Lisson Gallery, London; 'The World of Saha' (2019) at Long Museum, Shanghai; 'Garden of Dreams' (2016) at the CAFA Art Museum, Beijing; 'Concurrent Realms' (2015) at the Suzhou Museum; 'Golden Horizon' (2011) at the Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai and 'Golden Sky' (2010) at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing.

ABOUT LISSON

Lisson is a global gallery dedicated to shaping the art of today. Creating meaningful dialogues and robust markets between artists and audiences across six venues in the UK, US and China, Lisson exhibits the most engaging and challenging work, adding value and narrative through decades of experience and innovation.

Building significance and reputation with our artists, Lisson nurtures and amplifies their vision at every turn, supporting opportunities to show beyond the gallery's walls in museums, the public realm and through international partnerships. The gallery's heritage and its foundational role in contemporary art since 1967, allows for a deeper perspective and more thoughtful relationships when furthering the career and voice of an artist.

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