

The approach

Olivia Jia *Faun*

17 September - 31 October 2026

Preview: Wednesday 16 September, 6-9pm

The Approach is pleased to present *Faun*, the debut solo exhibition at the gallery by Philadelphia based artist Olivia Jia. The show takes its title from the flora and fauna that recur within the show: decorative vases and ceramics embellished with motifs from nature, lattice windows from Chinese Gardens, alongside ornaments in the form of animals or flowers.

Jia's own identity as the child of Chinese immigrants to the United States deeply informs the work, blending images of traditional East Asian ephemera with historical artefacts sourced from Pennsylvania - the American state in which Jia was raised. She draws from museum archives, images found online, family photographs, combined with invented imagery based on memories and family stories to construct a personal history told through objects. Subject matter includes, among others: a painting by Raphaele Peale (an important Philadelphia painter from the 1800s); Siebold's magnolia (a flower native to East Asia); an 18th Century Chinese figure of a swallow; an 18th century Pennsylvanian-German tin lantern, a carved lacquer dish, and a silver snuff box shaped as a book, etched with flower motifs. Exhibited together, these images form a constellation where different paintings speak to one another and reflect how identity can be formed through objects and belongings that might otherwise seem at odds. Neil Clements explains that, "what is being honed in these paintings is an iconographic system, one that reflects on the points at which individual experience intersects with collective accounts."¹

Her ongoing interest in the history of Chinese gardens forms an important lens through which to understand Jia's work. She sees these gardens as artworks in their own right: self-contained worlds, where landscape is represented through a series of apertures and fixed paths and nature is fused with the human. Meredith Sellers notes that these ornamental gardens are better understood as "facsimiles of nature, reflecting a fantasy of the natural world rather than preserving its reality."² This idea is carried through more broadly in Jia's world, where her paintings are caught in a self-referential system of images and their re-presentations: paintings within paintings, recurring motifs, windows as apertures, bookpages as framing devices.

Jia's distinctive dusky palette is present in *Faun*. Looming shadows and dark backgrounds maintain the crepuscular feel of her paintings, though deep reds and pinks join her more familiar blues and greys. This 'nocturnal' palette, as Jia describes it, enables the paintings to feel at times dreamlike, bordering at the cusp of sleep where thoughts lose distinctness and become ungraspable. This drowsy state mirrors the conceptual terrain of Jia's work, occupying the space between worlds: between waking and dreaming, image and representation, memory and imagination, and, more personally, between Chinese and American identities. Rather than resolving these dualities, her paintings inhabit the uncertainty between them, allowing one state to bleed into another.

Many of the paintings continue Jia's employment of fictional books and pages that contain found images, evoking museological catalogues or indexes. The act of archiving is a way of preserving memory through time, allowing one's history to inform their present

¹ Neil Clements, *Perimeter* exhibition text on Olivia Jia, 2023

² Meredith Sellers, *The Garden-Labyrinth and the Unified Self: Olivia Jia, Mirror Stage* at Margot Samel, Sensus, 2025

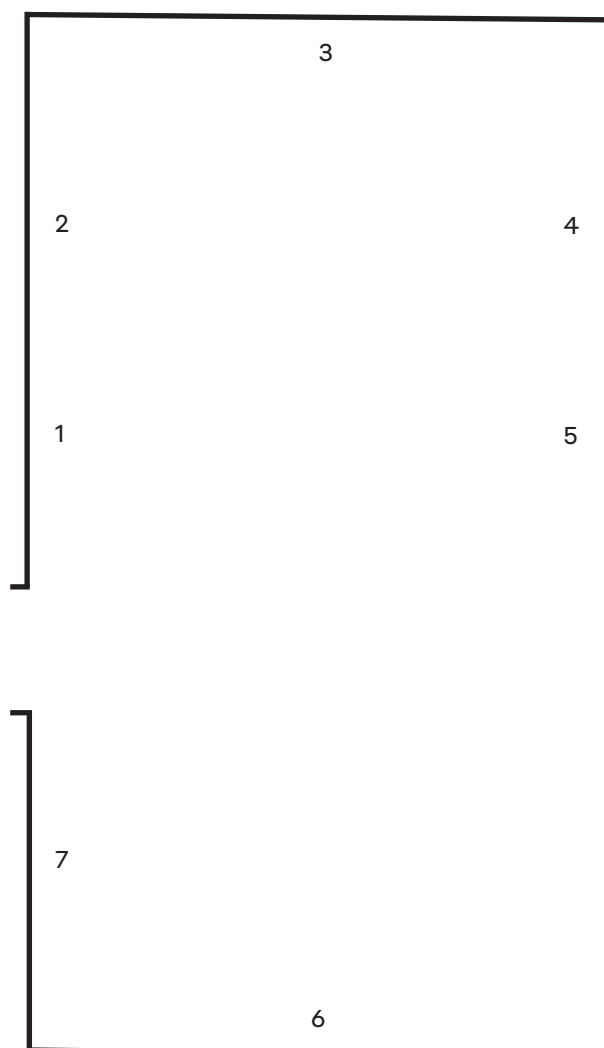
identity. Clements believes that what these bookpages also highlight “is how affect can be produced through combinations of such factual information.”¹ Jia’s paintings might even be understood as an epistolary world: a collection of fragments, images and objects that seem to arrive from elsewhere, carrying traces of other times and places that intersect with her own individual narrative. By drawing from both sides of her cultural inheritance, Jia creates a space where different histories coexist and are reassembled, allowing her to reconcile an identity shaped by both Chinese and American culture.

Olivia Jia (b. 1994, Chicago, USA) lives and works in Philadelphia, USA. She received a BFA from the University of the Arts, Philadelphia in 2017. She was awarded the Ellen Battell Stoeckel Fellowship to attend the Yale Norfolk Summer School of Art in 2015 and the President's Award at the University of the Arts, as well as two grants from The Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation (2023 & 2026).

Recent solo exhibitions include *Garden Path*, 12.26, Dallas (TX), USA (2026); *Nocturnes*, BANK, Shanghai, CH; *Mirror stage*, Margot Samel, New York (NY), USA (both 2025); *Nine Motifs*, Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia (PA), USA; *Perimeter*, Margot Samel, New York (NY), USA (both 2023); and *Ex Libris*, Workplace, London, UK (2022).

Selected group shows include: *CONDO 2026 hosting Margot Samel*, The Approach, London, UK (2026), *Solar Music / Lunar Revel*, Uffner & Liu, New York (NY), USA; *Inside*, Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia (PA), USA (both 2025); *Thank you, I'm rested now. I'll have the lobster today, thank you*, Pangée, Montreal, CA & Margot Samel, New York (NY), USA; *With yourself*, Gaa Projects, Cologne, DE (both 2024); *Apricity*, 12.26, Dallas (TX), USA; *Untold Stories: Six Women Artists in Conversation*, Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, New York (NY), USA; *The Blue Hour*, Workplace, London, UK (all 2023); and *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Margot Samel, New York (NY), USA (2022).

Her work is in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Palm Springs Art Museum, California; The Bunker in West Palm Beach, Florida; H+ Museum in Suzhou, China and the Zuzeum Art Center, Riga, Latvia.



1. *Page unfolded (magnolia sieboldii)*, 2026
Oil on panel
27.9 x 21.6 cm
2. *Night reading (export silver snuff box in the shape of a book, snuff bottle with two women reading)*, 2026
Oil on panel
12.7 x 17.8 cm
3. *Night reading (Yu Yuan door panel carving, Peale's apples, moon through a garden window)*, 2026
Oil on panel
20.3 x 25.4 cm
4. *Page unfolded (glazed porcelain bottle with motif of a deer, 16th century)*, 2026
Oil on panel
27.9 x 21.6 cm
5. *Page unfolded (dish with long-tailed birds and flowers, carved lacquer, 14th century)*, 2026
Oil on panel
27.9 x 21.6 cm
6. *Night reading (Pennsylvanian tin lantern, Yu Yuan garden window with sculpture of a bird)*, 2026
Oil on panel
30.5 x 40.6 cm
7. *Portrait of my grandmother with prune blossoms*, 2026
Oil on panel
15.2 x 10.2 cm