

# MAKE ROOM

## Astra Huimeng Wang

*in my experience the spider is the smallest creature whose gaze can be felt*

October 22–December 3, 2022



*We Were Always Loyal to Lost Causes, 2022.*

Flock, acrylic, and acrylic medium on birchwood panel, 60 x 60 in.

Make Room Los Angeles is pleased to present Astra Huimeng Wang's first solo exhibition with the gallery, *in my experience the spider is the smallest creature whose gaze can be felt*. Conceived over the past year, this new body of paintings and sculptures is the result of Wang's continued dialogue with 19th and 20th century literature, which she mines for descriptions of a "mysterious" Orient collectively imagined by Western writers, seeing them as portals into the realm of fiction. Taking its title from a line in Iris Murdoch's novel *Under the Net*, the exhibition deals with the conflicted, contradictory nature of desire and how a system of fantasy and obsession shapes our perception of culture, class, and social reality.

The unique hand-flocking technique that Wang has developed over the years to produce her paintings and sculptures has its origin in ancient China where it was prized for its ability to transform an object's surface by giving it a certain depth and richness. In Wang's practice, flocking becomes a way to signal the theatricality of the situations depicted; it serves as an enacted metaphor for the complicated ways in which art relates to life: embellishing it, distorting it, hiding it, revealing it.

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Wang's compositions combine imagery drawn from memory and literature, as well as archaeological artifacts, advertising, media, and the mass-produced kitsch found on sites like eBay and Taobao, to create new conceptual constellations guided by her dark sense of humor and a fascination with the rituals that codify the experience of love, death, and hygiene in Western culture (such as weddings, funerals, and dentist appointments). While these ceremonies ostensibly celebrate life, beneath them lies another reality, one riven by decay and crisis.

Wang pulls apart and recombines these symbols using a critical, intuitive process that harkens back to the early days of Dada and Surrealist collage. By arranging them as motifs in her compositions, Wang arrives at a point where these images, which are meant to encapsulate desire, cease to be so familiar and take on the sinister strangeness—the sense of suddenly illuminated obscurity—captured by the show's title: *in my experience the spider is the smallest creature whose gaze can be felt . . .*

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**Astra Huimeng Wang** creates events and circumstances to study the manufacture of truth and identities, collaborating extensively with orchestras, poets, actors, and sometimes strangers. In her diverse practice across media, 21 people tattooed different words onto their bodies and collectively formed a short poem of hers; a choir sang and chanted variations of Ode to Joy in security cages; a piano was shot 400 times in the California desert; and a three-day chocolate fountain party attended by hundreds went terribly wrong as intended. Wang's work draws inspiration from literature, cinema, and her own biomedical background, with recurrent elements of desire and conflict, and a lingering sense of crisis. Wang received her M.F.A. in Studio Art from San Francisco Art Institute and B.E. in Biomedical Engineering from Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. A Macdowell Fellow, she has also received fellowships and held residencies at Millay Arts, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, and Wilhardt & Naud, among others. Selected exhibitions and performances include those at Make Room (Los Angeles), Simon Lee Gallery (London), Christie's (New York), CFHILL (Stockholm), Woaw Gallery (Hong Kong), Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture (San Francisco), the Pennsylvania State University, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

Established in 2018, **Make Room** is a contemporary art gallery owned and directed by Emilia Yin. The 2500 square foot gallery is situated at the heart of Hollywood, made up of two exhibition spaces with an outdoor courtyard and garden. Make Room has positioned itself as a cutting edge incubator for emerging artists actively engaging with cultural identity, conceptual practices and global perspectives. Make Room has had the privilege of exhibiting some of today's most exciting contemporary artists, and its relationship with established collectors and institutions both locally and internationally have resulted in placements in major private and public collections, including the Hammer Museum, Columbus Museum of Art and the Yuz Museum in Shanghai, among others.