




Art

Gallerist Emilia Yin Is Making Room for Asian Diasporic Artists in Los Angeles

stephanie mei huang Apr 12, 2022 5:16pm   



It is Emilia Yin's eighth year in Los Angeles and her fourth since founding Make Room, a gallery that champions artists of the Asian diaspora, along with other underrepresented and emerging artists.

The initial beginnings of Make Room occurred in 2016 when Yin began to notice the apparent lack of Asian diasporic artists exhibiting in L.A. Raised between Hainan, China, and Hong Kong by parents in the cosmetics industry, Yin relocated to Los Angeles to attend undergraduate and, later, graduate school at the University of Southern California. "I started to think of all these great artists that I know and they don't really get a show," Yin said in an interview with Artsy. "So, I started a gallery in the beginning of 2018—I was 25."



Make Room initially established its roots in Chinatown in the hopes of being closer to community and paying homage to the early 2000s L.A. art scene. Last year, amid rising rent, Yin moved the gallery to Hollywood—a difficult decision as Chinatown has been an epicenter of many disparate things, from cultural heritage and contemporary art to gentrification and violence.

In moving west, Yin seeks to continue championing underrepresented artists and artists of the Asian diaspora within L.A.'s expanding contemporary art ecosystem. "We want to put these artists we believe in into the mainstream conversation," Yin said with urgency. As David Zwirner plans to open a new location nearby—joining Make Room's current gallery neighbors Jeffrey Deitch, Morán Morán, and Matthew Brown—Yin is aware that she is "making room" as a young gallerist and Chinese woman in a neighborhood full of galleries founded by white men.



Xin Liu

Potato Purple Baby, 2021

Make Room

Contact for price

Dedicated to the longevity of their artists' careers, Make Room regards institutional acquisition as a key priority. In the last six months alone, the gallery has placed works by Asian diasporic artists into six museums. For instance, paintings by Guimi You were acquired by the Hammer Museum, the Columbus Museum of Art, the Yuz Museum, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, following the Korean artist's solo show at Make Room last fall.

In the storage room at the back of the gallery were two of You's unreleased, ethereal oil paintings ready to be transported to their respective institutions. In the artist's deeply pigmented yet limited color palette, disembodied femme figures, protected from the viewer's gaze, appear within a Northern Californian landscape.



Guimi You

Point Reyes, 2021

Make Room

On hold



Guimi You

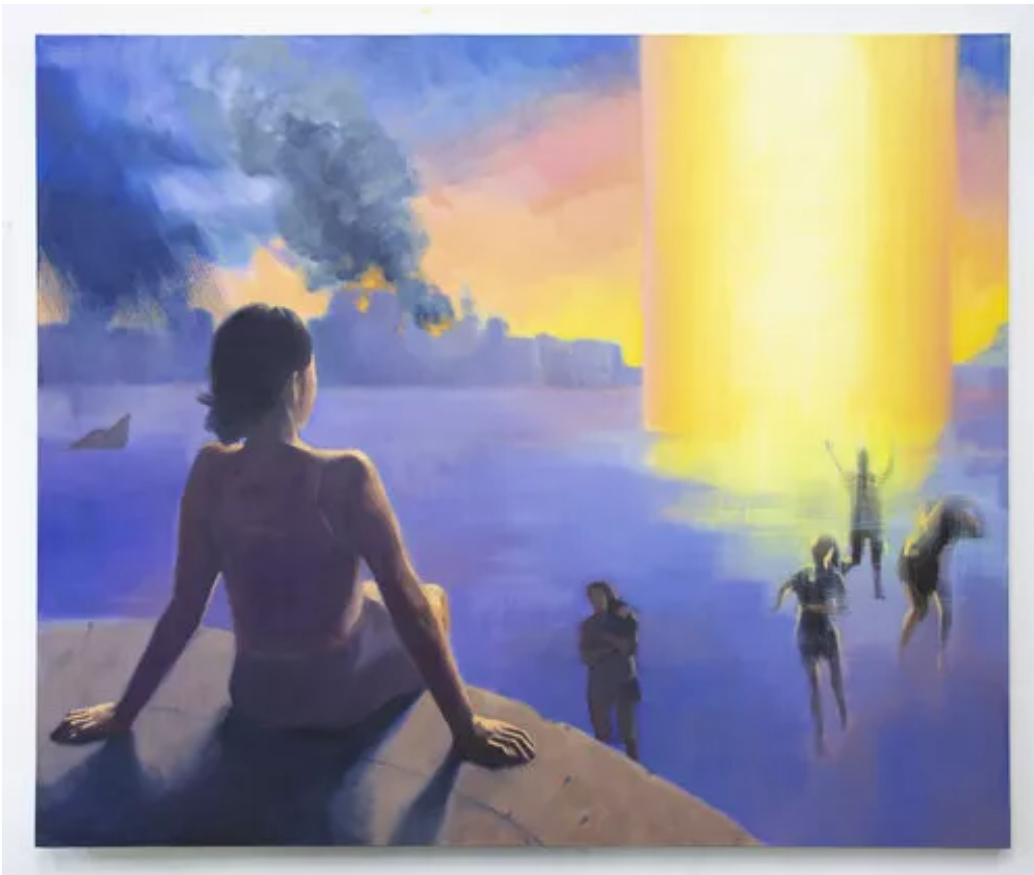
Your Time, 2021

Make Room

Contact for price

Since showing with Make Room, You's works have gotten significantly larger in recent years. At 80 inches long, these were her two largest paintings to date. "Previously, I had only thought about my canvas and myself, but Make Room really showed me how much my art involves other people," You told Artsy. "Their energy and influence really brought my canvas to life." At Make Room, artists are physically taking up more space.

"Since we started showing more Asian artists," Yin said, "we see more artists of the Asian diaspora showing in the U.S. and being collected by institutions—which jointly helps us get more institutional recognition." Make Room has exhibited works by contemporary artists of Asian descent since its beginning, including that of Mitsuko Brooks, iris yirei hu, Xin Liu, Catalina Ouyang, Hiejin Yoo, and Yuri Yuan.



Yuri Yuan

Sea of Dreams, 2020

Make Room

Contact for price

When asked if she feels that there is now adequate representation of Asian diasporic artists in L.A., Yin responded, “There’s never enough. If it’s enough, then the hate crimes wouldn’t happen. There’s so much work to be done.” In March 2021, Make Room organized “We Stand Together to Stop AAPI Hate,” a fundraising exhibition that benefited Support the AAPI Community Fund and the organization Stop AAPI Hate. More than 40 artists participated, including Judy Chicago, Kat Lyons, Pixy Liao, Dominique Fung, and Susan Chen.



Catalina Ouyang, installation view of "marrow" at Make Room, 2019. Photo by Yubo Dong. Courtesy of the artist and Make Room, Los Angeles.



Joeun Kim Aatchim

Still life with An Alone time, A Candy Bar, an Ember Cup, and Poet's Da odil, Over Mother's...Make Room
Contact for price

While expressing her fear of pigeonholing artists, Yin underscores the expansiveness Make Room has fostered. "I remember talking to an artist in New York, and one time, a gallery said their painting wasn't Asian enough," Yin remarked. "That's the last thing I want my artists to feel, that they're not enough. There shouldn't be any limitation."

In representing Asian diasporic artists, Yin is careful to present their work comprehensively, both in material and in concept. Storytelling is imperative for the gallery, and as Yin emphasized, it's how artists want their stories told.