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New York-based Chinese ‘curves’ artist Yuan Fang has her eyes set on Hong Kong this month

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COVER Yuan Fang (Photo: Tatler Hong Kong/Christopher Smith)

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Shenzhen-born artist Yuan Fang's 'curves' paintings are sought after by galleries in New York, London, Shanghai and Sydney; now the 28-year-old is coming to Hong Kong to show the works that have mesmerised the art world

Overlapping curved strokes evocative of turbulent winds or oscillating waves, painted in vibrant shades of red, purple and ultramarine with an outburst of energy similar to that of abstract expressionist [Jackson Pollock](#)—these characteristics have come to be a signature of Yuan Fang's paintings.

She may have only started her art career in 2018, but the 28-year-old, [Shenzhen](#)-born painter has already exhibited around the world: Skarstedt Gallery in London, New York's Half Gallery, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas, Beijing's Hive Center for Contemporary Art, Foshan's [He Art Museum](#) and Sydney's Coma Gallery, to name a few. Last year, she became the youngest person to have a solo show at Shanghai's Long Museum, the largest private museum in mainland China. In 2023, Fang, a graduate of The School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York, sold a 2022 painting titled *Expanse (Mask)* for US\$88,900 (about HK\$700,000). A year later, she made it onto Forbes Asia's 30 Under 30 list for her achievements in and influence on the art world



ABOVE Yuan Fang wears a Chloé outfit and a Messika cuff

This month, she is set to head back to Asia to showcase works in Hong Kong. She will exhibit five large-scale oil and acrylic paintings, as well as two drawings on paper, created between 2021 and 2024, at *Tatler's ARTable*, an event co-

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hosted by DBS bank and *Tatler* celebrating the visual and culinary arts. Later in March, her works will be presented at Art Basel Hong Kong.

“It’ll be a broad range of works. I want to give people a more comprehensive understanding of my practice,” Fang says. “My works are abstract and contain a lot of layers, curved lines and shapes. I want to use the interaction between each layer in the painting to dictate a turbulent, chaotic relationship between them to create a metaphor for the living condition of human being. That’s the whole concept of my art.”



ABOVE ‘Doomed Crazy Flower’ (2023) by Yuan Fang (Image: courtesy of the artist)

Fang’s style is a far cry from previous generations of Chinese-born, New York-based modern artists, such as Xu Bing, Wenda Gu and Zhang Hongtu. Their works are imbued with stories about the Chinese diaspora, memories of the country’s political history or influences of traditional Chinese styles, such as [ink art](#) and calligraphy. A mix of eastern

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and western aesthetics and concepts, their creations offered the western art market in the 1980s and 1990s a glimpse of the Chinese identity.

But Fang, who has been based in New York for the last ten years, decided that she would forge her path a little differently. “I don’t want to brand myself too much as a Chinese artist here, because I’m not really into playing the identity politics game,” she says, referring to how there can sometimes be more focus on a Chinese artist’s heritage than their art.

“In terms of art, I’m like a ‘banana’,” she says, using a colloquialism that refers to someone who is of Asian heritage and had a western-style upbringing. “I had all of my art education [outside] China. So when I was in Shanghai for Art Week [last] November, I felt unfamiliar with the setting, artists and galleries. I felt like a foreigner. But when I’m back in New York, I feel like I belong in the art scene here more than when I’m in China.”



ABOVE Yuan Fang wears St Agni top and pants and Ganni boots

Fang’s artistic awakening came at the age of 11 when she went on a family trip to [Paris](#) and Spain. “I saw a lot of [Monet](#) and [Picasso](#) for the first time, and I got interested in art,” she recalls. “[Since then,] I always knew that I wanted to be an artist.” But realising that dream would not be easy. Shenzhen at the time was a manufacturing and tech hub and something of an art desert compared to its current status as a centre for exciting new art spaces; and while her father was interested in design, art and architecture, her parents were “very Chinese and never supported

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me being an artist. They just wanted me to go to the US, study at an Ivy League college and then get a banker job at JP Morgan.” She was sent to a boarding school in Shenzhen, where she “didn’t have time or opportunity to practise drawing or painting”, and, as university applications approached, where she spent her weekends studying for the US SAT college entrance exams.

When it was time to choose her university, the headstrong young woman told her parents that she “needed” to attend an art school. They finally agreed to send her to the School of Visual Arts in New York for a bachelor’s degree in visual and critical studies; she followed this with an MFA at the same institution and graduated in 2022. “New York was my first choice, and I bet it’s most people’s if they want to be artists in America,” she says.



ABOVE Yuan Fang wears Prada

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ABOVE Yuan Fang

But the American dream wasn't as rosy as she expected. "When I went to see all the blue-chip galleries like Pace or Gagosian, or even smaller galleries in New York, barely any of them were showing Chinese artists. [In 2019], I saw a [Liaoning-born artist] Jia Aili show at Gagosian, but that was not something that you'd see every month," she says. "So I thought, 'It doesn't look good. If those people aren't getting a show in New York, how could I?'"

This was why, in the first year of her undergraduate degree, she focused on photography instead of painting. "I had tried [to convince myself not to be] an artist because it wasn't a very realistic job, and I hadn't received any formal training in art, so I wasn't sure if I'd be good at it," she says. "But as I got older, I realised I couldn't do anything else [except paint]."

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ABOVE Yuan Fang at her studio in New York

She began spending her free time in art institutions such as New York's [Museum of Modern Art](#). "The museum and gallery visits were how my art education started. I learnt so much more from what I saw outside school," she says. "I saw a lot of abstract expressionism paintings like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. And I was very inspired by Lee Krasner. I was deeply attracted to that movement. That was also how I decided [at last] that I wanted to be a painter, because I just felt deeply connected to it."

Traces of abstract expressionism can be observed in her works, and Fang further draws inspiration from her life and the world around her to create her unique style. "I'm just trying to create a contemporary, new version of abstract paintings," she says.

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PHOTO 1 OF 2 'Seabed' (2025) by Yuan Fang (Image: courtesy of the artist)



PHOTO 2 OF 2 'Galloping 02' (2023) by Yuan Fang (Image: courtesy of the artist)

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For instance, the powerful paintings in *Dangerous Waters*, an exhibition that ran in London's Skarstedt Gallery from May to July last year, allude to a sense of resistance as a woman. "I receive a lot of microaggressions in the US, such as manspreading on the subway, which I find very annoying. People usually think Asian women are very soft and not aggressive. I'm not that, and that creates a lot of confusion when people first get to know me," she says. Instead of direct confrontations, the artist turns this frustration into a source of motivation in her art and creates "large paintings as my way of 'womanspreading' against those stereotypes of Asian women". She explains that while the curves in her paintings mimic the "desirable" female body, they also add complexity to the structure of the pieces and reflect Fang's emotional state at the time of painting—this implies that the female identity isn't always what it appears to be. "Our female desire isn't straightforward at all. It can be powerful. I want to convey this message in my work," she says.

The curves are a recurring motif in her work, but that is all she knows she'll use when she begins. "I don't start with a sketch; I'm spontaneous and improvise when I paint. There are a lot of unpredictable factors in the process, which I find [reflective of] the world we're living in: there are wars going on; and three years ago, there was the pandemic. So we don't really know what's going to happen in the future," she says. "My work conveys these uncertainties."



PHOTO 1 OF 2 'Nest of Snakes' (2024) by Yuan Fang (Image: courtesy of the artist)

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PHOTO 2 OF 2 ' After that Night' (2023) by Yuan Fang (Image: courtesy of the artist)

In coming years, the artist plans to visit her home city and Hong Kong more often to gain more exposure to the Asian art market. Her first introduction to Hong Kong's art landscape was a visit to Art Basel in 2014. "It was my first time seeing so many international galleries and this kind of [art fair]," she says. "Then last summer, I visited Hong Kong again and went to [M+](#), the new location of [contemporary art centre] Para Site and Wong Chuk Hang [known for its independent galleries]," she says. "I don't know what they'll be just yet, but I'd like to do more projects in Hong Kong."

With such an international presence at a relatively young age, Fang hopes to inspire the next generation of artists. "These days, I also give a lot of practical advice to artists younger than me on their career and what galleries to work with and whatnot. Hopefully, in the future, they can see that more institutions or galleries are willing to support Asian artists, and that'll give them the confidence to go after their dreams."

With a blissful, certain smile—and a hint of modesty— she says: "Even though I don't really have commercial success [yet], I really enjoy my work. And being an artist is just fine."