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YE_姚 SHI_诗 YUN_韵
CURATED BY ARIELLE LAU

MAKING THE MARK

In the midst of an era defined by artificial intelligence's (AI) ever-growing influence, this exhibition opens a gateway to a contemplation of the artistic impulse. With a simple click, AI generates content within seconds, leaving us to wonder about the authenticity of our pursuits. It's a moment where the writer's craft¹ feels threatened, while at the same time, marvel at the responses of AI systems, like Midjourney² to rudimentary prompts. Originality, a cherished virtue in the world of art, is brought into question by this technological advancement.

My expedition embarks on a dual enquiry – What lies within the process? Of art making, of art collecting?

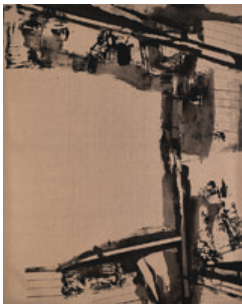
As I dive into the nascent years of Shih Yun's art practice, a progressive process emerges as she challenges the conventional boundaries of ink as a medium. The second path leads us to an intricate process of art collecting through the lens of her dedicated patrons.

Shih Yun's work reflects John Cage's³ aleatoric approach. She fearlessly navigates unpredictability, employing non-conventional tools in her paintings.

**THE RHYTHM OF SPONTANEITY
FORGES A GROUND FOR HER
IMAGINATIVE EXPLORATIONS.
INK CEASES TO BE A MERE
MEDIUM; IT EVOLVES FROM
A MARK TO BECOMING AN
INSTRUMENT OF HER DEFIANCE.**

This spirit of rebellion permeates her art from the very beginning, as she navigates ink's dichotomies on linen – delving into the viscosity of black ink, summoning positive and negative spaces. *Composition Alpha* echoes a traditional landscape painting⁴ with contemporary touch, an element that drew Mr. Koh into its embrace and his extensive art collection of ink and calligraphy works. The delicate equilibrium between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' principles is pivotal. Shih Yun's inspiration from the Western Abstract Expressionists (i.e. Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Motherwell) inspires her to adopt an unorthodox method in painting yet her works exude an intrinsic 'Eastern' charm. It is through constant experimentation that she arrives at a visual lexicon unmistakably hers.





A



B

Her seminal work – *Conversation with Trees*, beautifully straddles the realms of conceptual art, abstract expressionism, and traditional Chinese ink.

Over the past decade, Shih Yun has taken on the technological world with an unyielding spirit. She questions authority and control in her creative process. *The K* gracefully melds ‘chance’ and ‘control’, with some marks created by the robots to overlay the initial layers painted by the artist. The work unveils a nuanced perspective on the intersections and interactions between man and machine, traditional art making and technological innovation, proposing a coexistence within a liminal space.

As we live in a world now dominated by digital experiences, physical paintings stand as timeless relics. They speak of the enduring significance of art collections in tangible form. The collectors’ anecdotes underscore the integral role they play in shaping the ever-evolving art ecosystem. My recent encounter with Marjorie Chu of Art Forum⁵ broadens the discourse. She urges us to abandon terms like ‘collecting’ or ‘investing’ in art as they are better suited for commodities such as ‘collecting newspapers’, while true investment lies in individuality. Her message is unequivocal: “Buy Now!” – a call to action to support art and artists.

墨非: DEFY INK redefines the ink medium and our roles in influencing the discourse and community of contemporary art. It is an invitation to ponder upon the process – of art making, of art collecting – through Shih Yun’s spectacle of defying ink with every brushstroke and revelation in making the mark.

A
COMPOSITION
ALPHA, 2007

148cm × 165cm
Silkscreen ink on linen

Collection of
Mr. Koh Seow Chuan

B
THE K, 2010

50cm × 70cm
Ink on paper

Collection of
Mr. Koh Seow Chuan

1. 2023 Writers Guild of America Strike was a labour strike by writers in the entertainment industry demanding better compensation, improved working conditions, and the restriction on the use of AI (such as ChatGPT) in the writing process
2. Midjourney is an AI-based image generation tool that translates text prompts to an image
3. John Cage was an American composer and music theorist known for his influential contributions to 20th century avant-garde music
4. See *Mountain Landscape* by Dong Qichang, 1617, Collection of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne from <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/53282/>
5. “The Art of Collecting Art” with Marjorie Chu & Friends held at the Art Forum on 28 October 2023

A WORD FROM THE COLLECTORS

ON COLLECTING

ART...

**COMPILED WITHIN THE PAGES
ARE PERSONAL ANECDOTES AND
PERSPECTIVES OF COLLECTING
CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS
BY MR KOH SEOW CHUAN,
MR ESMUND CHUA,
MR LOW NGUAN KIANG,
MR TOH EE LOONG AND AN
ANONYMOUS COLLECTOR.**

**TOGETHER, THEY DEMONSTRATE
THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS
BETWEEN THE ARTIST,
THEIR CREATIONS, AND THE
COLLECTORS, UNFOLDING THE
NARRATIVES THAT DRIVE THEIR
JOURNEY - WHAT MOTIVATED
THEM TO STEP ON THE PATH OF
COLLECTING, AND WHAT DREW
THEM WITHIN THE ARTISTIC
REALM. THE COMPENDIUM
ACCENTUATES THE ROLE OF
COLLECTORS ALONGSIDE
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS IN
THE VOLATILE LANDSCAPE
OF CONTEMPORARY ART.**



C

2005

MR KOH SEOW CHUAN

FOUNDER OF DP ARCHITECTS & PHILANTHROPIST

Mr. Koh first met Shih Yun and her circle of artist friends in early 2000s. He saw great promise in their paintings and was deeply moved by their collaborative work from the *Exit* series.

The experience marked the beginning as he spent the next decade (up to around 2016) building a collection of her works.

At the same time, he was acquiring and amassing a collection of works by modern Singapore artists, including pioneer artists of the 60s and 80s, such as Cheong Soo Pieng, Lim Tze Peng and Wong Keen, among others.

DESPITE TAKING A STEP BACK FROM COLLECTING ART IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS, HE FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT SHIH YUN'S RELENTLESS EXPLORATION OF NEW EXPRESSIONS IN INK WILL CONTINUE TO SHAPE THE EXCITING COLLECTION OF SINGAPORE ARTISTS OVER THE NEXT ONE TO TWO DECADES.



D

2008

C EXIT #1

In collaboration with Wyn Lyn Tan

120cm x 30cm
Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Mr. Koh Seow Chuan

D KLEIN BLUE

61cm x 152.5cm
Mixed media on canvas

Collection of Mr. Koh Seow Chuan



E

2012

ANONYMOUS

The collectors were initially drawn to Shih Yun's unique visual perception and how she integrates Chinese and Western techniques, style and media into abstract art. She stood out for her meticulous attention to the process of creating.

E
REMEMBER

120cm × 152 cm
Mixed media on canvas

Private Collection

**THEY REMEMBER SHIH YUN
SPEAKING ANIMATEDLY ABOUT
HER QUEST FOR THE PERFECT BRUSH
FOR THIS PAINTING. THE SELECTION
OF BRUSHES AND TOOLS, EVEN THE
ACT OF SEARCHING, SEEMS TO HOLD
AS MUCH SIGNIFICANCE AS THE
COMPLETED ARTWORK ITSELF.**

It brings them joy when they look at the painting at home, appreciating how the work evolves and acquires character as it ages. 'Time' as a variable adds layers of significance when viewed today compared to fifty or another hundred years from now.

While experiencing art online offers great accessibility, the tangible nature of physical art contributes an extra dimension to the viewing experience. The texture of a painting or mixed media artwork comes to life when seen in person. An undeniable ambience and presence are created by a body of work shown in a space. Installations, paintings and performance art make a lasting impression when shown in different settings or times of the day.

While the financial value of art may fluctuate, the intrinsic connection to an artwork remains constant.



F

MR TOH EE LOONG

WINE MERCHANT

Ee Loong prefers buying artworks from artists he has conversed with, as it adds contextual depth to the artworks.

Shih Yun once brought Ee Loong to her mentor, Mr. Chua Ek Kay's art studio at Mount Emily, as she knew of his interest in his artworks after spending long hours with numerous pieces during a summer internship with an international bank. Mr. Chua advised Ee Loong on the potential of supporting and collecting works from young artists.

F CONVERSATION WITH TREES

450cm x 150cm
Silkscreen on linen

Collection of
Mr. Toh Ee Loong

“TRADITIONAL INK ARTISTS HAVE ALWAYS INNOVATED, WHETHER IT PERTAINS TO THE SUBJECT MATTER, LIKE THE NANYANG SCHOOL OR THE INFLUENCE OF PAINTING ON CALLIGRAPHY AND VICE VERSA... SHIH YUN'S PAINTINGS ARE AN EXTENSION OF THIS ESTABLISHED TRADITION OF INNOVATION.”

His inclination towards ink art stems from a prior experience with the medium during his youth. Having received the art teacher's nurturing guidance during the traditional ink painting and calligraphy lessons as a child, Ee Loong fondly recalls how his parents would frame and display his works proudly at home, even though he did not find the works particularly pleasing. To this day, he knows and feels on both intellectual and visceral levels how difficult it is to execute just one stroke. What truly fascinates him is the nature of the traditional ink medium – how it restrains substantial revisions, yet the artist makes it seem effortless. “These childhood lessons, coupled with my teacher's and parents' encouragement, laid the foundation for my appreciation and enjoyment of ink works today,” Ee Loong reflected.

He truly enjoys viewing paintings under natural light as they reveal qualities and bring about new dimensions. He shares three collecting principles he learned of in his early collecting journey: First, only buy what you like; you must be happy to look at it often and hopefully for a long time. Second, it should be prominent (大), not in size but in terms of presence, have weight (重) in terms of values it holds and finally, strange (怪), a mysterious or enigmatic factor that puzzles you.



G

2014

MR LOW NGUAN KIANG

Mr. Low was a museum docent at the Singapore Art Museum in 2012 for the exhibition – *Lyrical Abstraction*. Shih Yun's incorporation of elements of nature, such as twigs and the influence of the wind in her works, intrigued him.

He was first introduced to the world of visual art during his time working overseas. The experience rendered him the opportunity to visit museums and art galleries, which honed his eye for art. Though he does not classify himself as a serious collector, he has an affinity with the world of black and white art and photography in monotone, like the works of Ansel Adams, or the calligraphic lines and strokes of Toko Shinoda. Partial to abstract art, he was naturally drawn to her works.

Over the years, he has witnessed how Shih Yun has evolved and grown in complexity, as her paintings in the last decade become more intricate, integrating technology in the form of robots and introducing a broader spectrum of colours. *Mountain & Waterfalls* is a prized possession.

"The ink wash in the background sets the stage for the spectacular cascade of waterfalls into what appears to be a water body below. The judicious use of blue softens the overall impact of the cascading black, while the sense of balance in the composition is achieved through negative space at the bottom and the top-right corner of the painting."

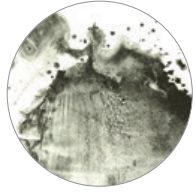
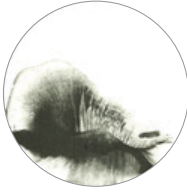
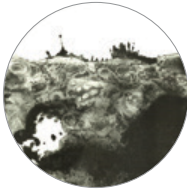
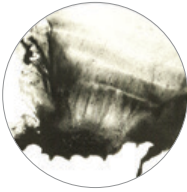
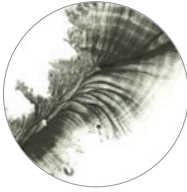
"THE SENSE OF MOVEMENT, THE CONTRAST OF INK APPLICATION, WHETHER INTUITIVE OR DELIBERATE, THE LAYERS OF INK TEXTURES AND THE VIGOUR IT EXUDES SETS THIS PAINTING APART."

Shih Yun's works have given him fresh perspectives on contemporary art, culture and our world. He believes in acquiring pieces that he genuinely enjoys as the presence of art holds an immediacy that enhances dialogues with artworks. To him, engaging with art is a continuous journey.

G MOUNTAIN & WATERFALLS

61cm x 91cm
Acrylic and
screenprint on canvas

Collection of
Mr. Low Nguan Kiang



H

2015

MR ESMUND CHUA

ENTREPRENEUR

For Esmund, aesthetics and originality are his criterion in collecting art. Over the years, his appreciation of the arts has evolved. He spends more time understanding the artist and the motivation behind each creation these days.

He was drawn to Shih Yun's unwavering determination to push the boundaries of how art is defined. Her practice resonates with Esmund deeply. It refutes the fixed mindset that traditional ink is only a medium associated with calligraphy, manifesting how deviance can bring forth unimaginable breakthroughs. The fact that each piece entails a long and arduous process in its creation naturally touches him.

"The digital creations, on the contrary, have the 'soul' or 'human' element missing in them. Somehow, the feeling is cold. I am certain I am not the only one who may share such sentiment." says Esmund.

MOST OF US ARE ALREADY DEEPLY IMMERSSED IN THE DIGITAL REALM WITHIN OUR WORKSPACES. THUS, THESE PHYSICAL ART COLLECTIONS OFFER ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO DIVERT OUR GAZE FROM THE SCREEN. "ISN'T THIS A GREAT REASON FOR YOU TO BEGIN YOUR ART COLLECTION?"

In his words, all works of art are priceless. As the adage goes, 'beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder'; it is invaluable as long as you like the piece. The most rewarding aspect for him is getting to know the artists behind the art and collecting, to Esmund, is an expression of his deepest respect for them.

H

WE ARE SINGAPORE

30cm diameter
UV print on plexiglass

Collection of
Mr. Esmund Chua

YEO SHIH YUN

ARTIST

Yeo Shih Yun (1976) is a highly regarded Singaporean artist whose innovative approach to ink painting has garnered international acclaim. After obtaining a Bachelor degree in Business Administration from the National University of Singapore in 1998, Yeo pursued a Diploma in Communication Design at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts in 2001, followed by the Post Baccalaureate Programme in painting at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2002.

YEO'S EXPERIMENTAL FUSION OF TRADITIONAL INK PAINTING WITH CONTEMPORARY MEDIUMS SUCH AS NEW MEDIA AND PERFORMANCE ART HAS RESULTED IN DYNAMIC AND UNPREDICTABLE WORKS THAT CHALLENGE CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS OF THE MEDIUM.

Her unique creative process has earned her recognition, including a 2011 commission by the Singapore Art Museum and the People's Choice Award for *Conversation with Trees*, which was nominated for Sovereign Asian Art Prize Finalists in 2012 and auctioned by Christie's Asia.

She has also won the UOB Painting of the Year Competition (Distinction in Abstract Category) twice, in 1999 and 2007. Yeo has held exhibitions in major cities including Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Shanghai, Tokyo, and New York. Notable exhibitions and commissions include *My Ink-credible Adventure*, 2020 National Gallery Singapore, *Chance Encounters*, 2021, *Generative Art and the Future* hosted by Poly Auction China, and *NFTs + The Ever-Evolving World of Art*, Tezos exhibition at Art Basel Hong Kong 2022, *Digital Baroque* exhibition and auction curated by 4ART NFT+ marketplace and minted on Palm network.

姚诗韵(1976年)是备受尊敬的新加坡艺术家,她在水墨画方面的新创方法赢得了国际赞誉。在1998年获得新加坡国立大学商业管理学士学位后,她随即于2001年与2002年分别在拉萨尔艺术学院(LASALLE College of the Arts)和旧金山艺术学院(San Francisco Art Institute)获得传媒设计文凭及参与绘画后学士课程。

姚诗韵将传统水墨画与当代媒介(如新媒体和表演艺术)进行实验性融合,创造出了充满活力和不可预测的作品,挑战传统媒介的常规观念。她独特的创作过程广泛受到认可,包括2011年新加坡艺术博物馆(Singapore Art Museum)的委托作品,以及《与树木对话》(Conversations with Trees)获得的人民选择奖(People's Choice Award)。该作品在2012年被提名为亚洲主权艺术奖(Sovereign Asian Art Prize)的决赛入围作品,后由佳士得亚洲(Christie's Asia)拍卖。

该艺术家曾于1999年和2007年两次获得大华银行绘画年度大奖(UOB Painting of the Year Competition)抽象画组优秀奖(Distinction in Abstract Category)。姚诗韵曾在新加坡、香港、台北、上海、东京和纽约等主要城市举办过展览,并完成了许多委托项目,包括新加坡国家美术馆(National Gallery Singapore)的《我的墨迹探险》(My Ink-credible Adventure)以及她在2021年于滨海艺术中心(Esplanade)举办的个人展览《偶遇机缘》(Chance Encounters)。她颇具开创性的作品们曾在由保利拍卖中国主办的《生成艺术与未来》展览中展出,并于2022年5月参加巴塞尔艺术展香港展会《NFTs + 艺术不断进化的世界》Tezos展览。另外,姚诗韵还受邀参加了由4ART NFT+市场策展并在Palm网络上铸造的《数字巴洛克》展览和拍卖会。姚诗韵对水墨艺术的创新在新加坡和国际上都产生了重大影响。她在艺术领域的贡献得到了广泛认可,也将持续以独特的方法和实验性技巧拓展着这一媒介的界限。

ARIELLE LAU

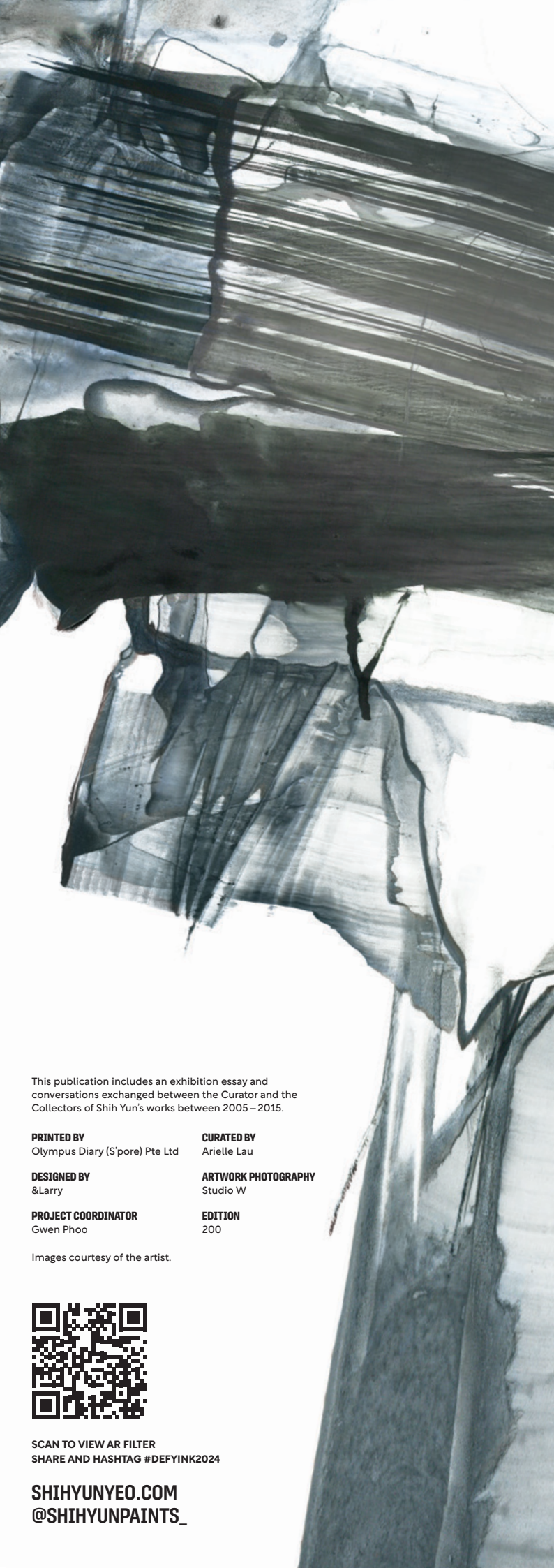
CURATOR

Arielle Lau is a cultural worker based in Singapore. Drawn to a transdisciplinary approach, she works between and across disciplines of Contemporary Asian Art & Design, and has managed more than 20 art exhibitions and curatorial projects.

AT THE CORE OF HER PRACTICE LIES AN ASPIRATION TO AWAKEN CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES; BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN IMAGINATION AND INSTRUCTION, PRESERVATION AND PROLIFERATION.

She was the co-curator for the inaugural multifaceted design event – *SingaPlural 2012*, and has most recently curated *Goh Beng Kwan: Time & Again* at Straits Gallery, 2023.

刘慧柠是一位驻新加坡的文化工作者。受跨领域吸引，她横跨当代亚洲艺术与设计行业，并且策划了 20 多个艺术展览和策展项目。她的实践核心在于唤醒观众对文化身份的批判意识；弥合想象与指导、保留与传播之间的鸿沟。她曾担任 2012 年首次举办的多层次设计活动 SingaPlural 的联合策展人，并且策划了最近 2023 年在 Straits Gallery 举办的《Goh Beng Kwan: Time & Again》。



This publication includes an exhibition essay and conversations exchanged between the Curator and the Collectors of Shih Yun's works between 2005 – 2015.

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EDITION
200

Images courtesy of the artist.



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