

Asian Art Initiative

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PRESS RELEASE

The Asian Art Initiative of the Guggenheim Museum, New York, Announces a Special Off-Site Exhibition *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust*

Chinese Painter of Supernatural Realism Has First Major Exhibition in Europe

Exhibition: *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust*

Venue: Chiesetta della Misericordia, Canaregio, Venice, Italy

Date: April 20–November 24, 2024

(NEW YORK, NY– January 30, 2024) The Asian Art Initiative of the Guggenheim Museum, New York, announces the first major exhibition in Europe of contemporary artist Yu Hong. *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust* will take place in the Chiesetta della Misericordia, Canareggio, Venice, concurrently with the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, April 20–November 24, 2024. The presentation is curated by Dr. Alexandra Munroe, Senior Curator at Large, Global Arts, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation.

Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust will feature new figurative and narrative paintings that respond to the architectural and cultural context of the Chiesetta della Misericordia. The site-specific cycle of paintings depicts the arc of the human experience—birth, life, and death—and combines the raw crudeness of social reality with pictorial conventions drawn from Byzantine and Italian Baroque painting to forge a style that may be called “supernatural realism.” Yu Hong borrows images of people, mostly women and children, in writhing poses expressing mental anguish or imminent physical danger, both real and fantastical, from the internet and social media. Set against a gold ground and shaped as large tondos or arched panels, the figures presented in *Another One Bites the Dust* confront and upend the epic themes of sacred art while not shying away from the role of painting to portray the sorrows of the human condition.

The title of the exhibition references the 1980 ballad of the same name by the popular rock band Queen. The lyrics highlight the everyday and eternal human struggles of death, defeat, and despair. The phrase is originally from the King James

Bible and is used by Lu Xun, the early-modern progressive whose writings inscribe Chinese reality as “the tragic recurrence of past experiences.” Yu Hong’s narratives in *Another One Bites the Dust* describe details of everyday lives yet each scene is tinged with existential terror; images of the feet of cadavers recur throughout the cycle. Through her lushly painted but dark compositions, Yu Hong considers the massive social changes that China’s globalization and speed of transformation have wrought, and the precarity of meaning in the face of calamitous disruption.

Yu Hong is one of the most vigorous and important realist painters of her generation. She won early critical acclaim as a member of China’s New Generation artists, famous for illustrating the psychological displacement of individuals in the throes of rapid change; she is one of the group’s few female artists. Yu Hong was trained in the socialist realism style dominant in Chinese art academies in the 1980s and her work expresses its productive critical legacy. A voracious appropriator, she has consistently drawn from European painting, as well as from the complex lineages of modern and contemporary art, including conceptualism, in China. She is recognized for her large-scale works and multipart series that interpret the raw and often absurd conditions of contemporary life, through the position of the female Chinese body. More recently, as seen in the featured nine-meter-long painting, *The Ship of Fools* (2021), Yu Hong engages with surreal scenes of ecological ruin, mass migration, and human and animal despair, extending the implications of her epic narratives from a nation to the planet.

Yu Hong’s work has been presented in Venice before. In 1993 Yu Hong was included in the exhibition section *Passage to the East*, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva with Helena Kontova, at the Giardini Di Castello in the 45th Venice Biennale, and in 1997 she was featured in the group presentation in the China Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale.

Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust is a program of the Guggenheim’s Asian Art Initiative that is supported by the museum’s Asian Art Circle. It will be accompanied by a major publication published by the Asian Art Initiative of the Guggenheim Museum, New York with essays by Dr. Alexandra Munroe and Dr. Loredana Grazzana, Curator, Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples; a conversation between Yu Hong and Kenyan-British artist Michael Armitage; and a text by American composer Nico Muhly, whose immersive soundscape composed for the exhibition will premiere at the venue on June 2 and run through the end of the exhibition. Further exhibition and public program details will be released later in 2024.

Naomi Beckwith, Deputy Director and David and Jennifer Stockman Chief Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation, said: “The Guggenheim is thrilled that the Asian Art Initiative is presenting *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust* as a special, off-site program, demonstrating our commitment to expand the contextual histories and discourses of our time through sustained engagement with

artists from Asia. We are grateful to the Asian Art Circle for its leadership in the realization of this curatorial project.”

Dr. Alexandra Munroe, Senior Curator at Large, Global Arts, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation, remarks: “I have always envisioned staging a show of Yu Hong’s work in Italy, where the power of her art can engage and contest with the humanist themes of the Italian Baroque, itself a historical source of the socialist realism styles that shaped the artist’s foundation. The cycle of paintings in *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust* depicts both the personal and planetary trauma of societies in the throes of globalization, wars, and climate crises, and should further establish the artist as one of the most ambitious and accomplished realist painters of her generation.”

Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust at the Chiesetta della Misericordia of Art Events is supported by Lisson Gallery, and the Leadership Committee of *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust*, with special thanks to the Simian Collection.

About Yu Hong

Yu Hong was born in 1966 in Xi’an, China. From 1984 to 1988, she studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing, and has taught in the oil painting department since her graduation in 1988. Yu Hong is known for her large-scale realist paintings that depict the experiences of societies in the midst of globalization and ecological crises, often cast as fabulous metaphorical scenes beyond the here and now. Recently, Yu Hong has received recognition for her narrative works using virtual reality technology. Yu Hong’s first major American museum show opened in September 2023 at SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA, and her work was featured in *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2017). Recent solo exhibitions include *The World of Saha* at Long Museum, Shanghai (2019); *Garden of Dreams* at the CAFA Art Museum, Beijing (2016); *Concurrent Realms* at the Suzhou Museum (2015); *Golden Horizon* at the Shanghai Art Museum (2011), and *Golden Sky* at UCCA, Beijing (2010). Yu Hong’s work has been featured in every major museum survey of contemporary Chinese art in Greater China, North America, and Europe and in several biennial and triennial exhibitions including the 45th Venice Biennale (1993); 47th Venice Biennale (1997); Guangzhou Triennial (1990); First Beijing Biennale (2003); and Shanghai International Biennale (2004). Yu Hong’s works are in major private and public collections across Asia, North America, and Europe.

About the Asian Art Initiative

In 2006, the Guggenheim Museum, New York, launched the Asian Art Initiative and established a senior curatorial position dedicated to modern and contemporary Asian art, the first of its kind in the West, cementing its commitment to integrate the study, research, and presentation of Asian art into its exhibition, education, and acquisitions strategies. Since that time, the Guggenheim has developed a robust Asian Art Initiative that includes solo retrospectives, thematic surveys, and commission-based

contemporary art exhibitions—all advancing the initiative’s central goal to promote understudied art, artists, and movements from Asia within critical discursive frameworks that expand and multiply the histories of art of our time. Previous Guggenheim research, acquisitions, and exhibition programs linked to the Asian Art Initiative are the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative and The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Chinese Art Initiative.

The initiative is supported by the Asian Art Circle, a dynamic group of art collectors dedicated to furthering the Guggenheim Museum and Foundation’s mission of collecting, preserving and interpreting the art of our time in a global context. The group raises awareness and support for Asian art acquisitions, exhibitions, and programs at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.

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