

## Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## YAN LI: NEW YORK WAVE

On View: September 8 – October 31, 2016

<http://www.wmingart.com/exhibitions/yan-li-new-york-wave/artworks>



Yan Li, (b. 1954), *Urban Love Song*, 城市戀曲, 1986, Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 96 inches (134 x 244 cm),

We are pleased to present the works of the Mainland Chinese artist Yan Li. Yan Li is a painter and poet born in 1954. He now lives in Seattle, New York, Beijing, and Shanghai. Never an official student either of art or writing, Yan Li nonetheless communicates extraordinary verve in his paintings and verse; the latter is popular in the best sense of the word.

A member of the famous *Start Art Group*, the artist writes: "I consider myself first of all to be a thinker on social issues." He also follows his own path; despite the obvious accessibility of his work, both in writing and painting, Yan Li says, "my art is primarily about personal experiences. I don't

chase after trends.” This is evident in the universality of the artist’s works, which don’t specifically address Chinese concerns so much as they emphasize the humanity of us all.

The exhibition *New York Wave* features over sixty paintings and installations made by Yan Li from 1985 to 1989 and some recent works. Yan commonly uses acrylic and vinyl records to create works. The theme of this exhibit “New York Wave” narrates the story of a group of Chinese artists who left Mainland China around 1982. *New York Wave* reflects 85 *New Wave*, the birth of Chinese Contemporary Art that happened simultaneously in Mainland China. At that time, Chinese artists in New York are deeply inspired by multicultural art environment and methods in the West. Artists such as Zhang Hongtu, Ai Weiwei, Chen Yifei, Lin Lin, Yuan Yunsheng, Chen Danqing, Zhang Wei, Ma Kelu, Xing Fei and Zhao Gang either changed their artistic techniques to draw or explored new materials to use. These Chinese artists were experiencing their own “New York Wave,” active primarily in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Yan Li was deeply inspired by new environment after settling down in New York as well. After visiting many exhibitions in different museums, he realized possibilities to use different objects from daily life, such as frame wood and aerosol can be add onto creation of artworks. Later on, he started to use vinyl records, and this material has become one of the most noticeable elements of his works. At that time, as Yan Li said: “because vinyl records were widely displaced by the more compact cassette, it is quite convenient to get abandoned record on the streets directly.”

Yan Li’s works are exuberant, irreverent, and free. There is a joyful aspect to his art, which is repeated in the offhand insights of his free verse. Bright colors abound; the pictures often feel like collaged paper pieces building to a single image. In the series entitled “The Form and Color of Music” (1988-1989), we see usually large spheres (long-playing records, actually) whose surfaces are broken and punctuated by black spiky masses. Here, the combination of complete and fragmented forms gives a good sense of what music is like. At the same time, the inclusion of actual records literalizes the materials addressing the topic expressed in the series title. Yan Li is interested in experience, in the immediacy of life, and this comes through with high spirits in his art. Other paintings, with poetic titles like “Flower Robbery” and “Moonlight Song” celebrate a lyric view of things, one in which melancholy is an active partner. This may well be the poetic side of his imagination.

It is important to remember that the career of Yan Li represents an overview of the rebelliousness of the Stars Art Group to the freedom, both physical and intellectual, attendant to the artist’s current efforts. This exhibition offers an excellent opportunity for the public to retrace the group’s history. As an inhabitant of four cities—two in China and two in America—Yan Li is a truly cosmopolitan citizen. The patterning in some of his pictures seems to come from graffiti origins; one painting of a blue sky with a strange helical set of unrecognizable objects attached to a guitar,

is called Internet Fantasy. Yet something of the Chinese love of nature comes through; a beautiful dark-blue sky, filled with billowing clouds acts as a background and lyricizes an otherwise eccentric image. His work makes emblems of nature—as Allen Ginsberg said, “The natural object is always the adequate symbol.” Yan Li, born in the Mainland, has now become an inhabitant of the world. His vivid imagination is both classical and street smart, and this combination gives him the freedom to actuate his open embrace of life. In this sense, he is not only a formalist, but also a brilliant painter of experience. His body of work pays homage to personal freedom and its concomitant high spirits.

## Yan Li

Yan Li was born in Beijing, China in 1954. His works has exhibited at Musée d’Art Contemporain de Dunkerque in France, Hanart Gallery in Taipei, Hong Kong (1990), and at UI Museum of Art and Independent Thinking 7 New Media Foundation in New York (2003). Li also participated in group shows at the Today Museum in Beijing (2007), Yishihousu Museum in Nanjing, and Group show at the Yanduqu Museum in Jiangsu, China. From 1987 to present, he is the Editor in Chief at *First Line*. Yan Li has won many poetry awards in China, such as Poetry Prize, awarded by The Poetry Reference Magazine in Beijing (2011), Poetry Prize, awarded by Chang’an Poetry Festival in Xi’an (2011), The Best Poem for 2004, awarded by Poem Selected Magazine (2005), New Poem Prize for “Cloudless to the Horizon” by The Writer Magazine (2000). His works have also been collected by Shanghai Art Museum and other major private international collections.

## W.Ming Art

W. Ming Art is a private art advisory and consulting company founded in 2010 by Xiaoming Zhang. W. Ming represents artists for exhibitions and sales, and provides private sales and art advisory services for private and institutional clients globally. W. Ming has professional team members in Europe, America, and Asia; the company specializes in international modern and contemporary art, especially in the field of Asian modern and contemporary works. W. Ming has two office spaces, one in Beijing and the other in New York.

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