

LISSON

YU HONG



BIOGRAPHY

A painter of epic scenes and intimate moments, Yu Hong constructs modern-day fables and complex, allegorical compositions by channelling historical, narrative-driven art through a fiercely contemporary lens. Yu Hong's protagonists are caught in extremis: floating on clouds, climbing vertiginous mountains or walking through flames as if to hell – all variously suffering the ecstasies and tribulations of existence. Yet her fantastical worlds are inhabited by real people, featuring portrayals of friends, acquaintances and family members, revealing a personal and touching dimension to the sweeping cycles of paintings that she produces over long periods of time. Her lifelong autobiographical project, *Witness to Growth*, begun in the 1990s as a series of diptychs, charts her own life juxtaposed with news clippings from each era, now with the addition of her daughter's milestones running alongside her own.

As well as elevating people and their bodies to otherworldly, uncompromising and often female celestial beings, Yu Hong's sitters are also subject to the intense lows of depression, urban deprivation and social alienation, as in her apocalyptic *Earth and Heaven* (2014), or when tumbling from her *Ladder to the Sky* (2008). The latter image not only borrows from a medieval precedent (*The Ladder to Paradise* in the Egyptian Monastery of St Catherine), but utilises a gold background, which she has employed since 2010, in order to iconise and foreground her cast of modern-day characters. Yu Hong's painterly references take in the styles, ideologies and ambitions of both Eastern and Western Old Masters, from cave paintings to Renaissance altarpieces, recently echoing Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, for the piled-up mound of humans and animals in *Pyramid* (2022), or Brueghel's *Blind Leading the Blind*, across

three panels of her blazing *Night Walk* (2023). Her handling can also scale down to the depiction of an individual lost in thought, or to a pair of hands locked in a gesture of tender internalisation.

Yu Hong was born in 1966 in Xi'an, China. In 1984, she studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing and graduated from the oil painting department in 1988. Since 1988 she has been a teacher at CAFA. Yu Hong's first major exhibition in Europe, 'Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust' opened at the Chiesetta della Misericordia in Venice as a special offsite exhibition of the Asian Art Initiative of the Guggenheim Museum, New York in April 2024. Her first major American museum show was held at SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA, in 2023 and her work was featured in 'Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World' (2017) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Recent solo exhibitions include: 'Islands of the Mind' (2024) at Lisson Gallery, London; 'The World of Saha' (2019) at Long Museum, Shanghai; 'Garden of Dreams' (2016) at the CAFA Art Museum, Beijing; 'Concurrent Realms' (2015) at the Suzhou Museum; 'Golden Horizon' (2011) at the Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai and 'Golden Sky' (2010) at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing.