

# 'I Want To Go Down in Art History'

Berlin-based Chinese artist Xiyao Wang talks gender, power, and art ahead of her first solo show in New York: "I want to give the audience in America a surprise."



JOSIE COX

22.11.2023



Share



Xiyao Wang at her solo show at Perrotin Seoul, photo by M2 Studio, courtesy of Xiyao Wang and Perrotin

*Dear readers—I've been writing this newsletter for about seven months now. It's been nothing short of thrilling to see my subscriber numbers inch higher. Thank you to everyone who has supported me and my writing, and to those of you who have challenged me with questions and criticism along the way. That's what this is all about. So here's a gift; a thank you for your loyalty: an off-schedule interview with someone who has something to say about women, money, and power.*

Xiyao Wang is a Berlin-based Chinese artist who creates large-scale, immersive paintings that combine various influences and inspirations: Taoism and post-structuralism, ancient Chinese pictorial traditions, bodywork, dance, martial arts, and the canon of Western art history.

In the world of art, women are an enduring minority: overlooked, undervalued, and marginalized. One study found that art produced by [men made up 96% of art sold](#) at auctions around the world between the years 2000 and 2017. Xiyao's on a mission to change that. I sat down with her to talk about her upbringing, her path through the art world—which she describes as “long and it was not always easy”—and the future. Her solo shows, in London, Berlin, Zurich, Paris and Seoul, received critical acclaim.

Her first solo show in the U.S. opens in January at [Perrotin in New York City](#).

**Thank you for taking time to speak to me, Xiyao. Tell me a little bit about your childhood, upbringing and background. How did you forge a career in the world of art?**

*I lived in China until I was 22, I come from a small town on the Yangtze River next to Chongqing. After I came to Germany, I realized that there is much more difference between China and Europe than I thought. The contrasts between the cultures and also the different landscapes give me a lot of inspiration.*

*Physical exercise also inspires me a lot. I have practiced many sports since my early childhood, such as traditional Chinese dance and swimming, and later ballet, tango, yoga and boxing. Through all this different training I discover different states of strength and body. You can see and understand this well in the lines of my paintings.*

*I have studied art both in China, Germany and the U.S. (at the State University of New York at Purchase). I have a BA from the Sichuan Fine Art Institute, China and a BA and MA from the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg, Germany. After more than ten years studying in art academies I moved to Berlin. It took a long time to find my way through the art world outside of the academies and there are many, many interesting stories to be told on how I*

*managed to develop my career. My way through the art world has been long and it was not always easy.*



Xiyao Wang Studio, photo by Zuzanna Glod, courtesy of Xiyao Wang and König Gallery

**What does your art mean to you and what should it mean to your audiences around the world?**

*Actually, I use my painting as a form of meditation to be either present here and now or to transit to another world. While painting I get a feeling of total freedom. Basically, I'm exploring the state of weightlessness and boundlessness, this is the main idea of my art.*

*My paintings are utopian worlds I have built for myself and for everyone who is looking at it. Everybody is welcome.*

**Have you ever experienced gender or to be a barrier to your professional pursuits? And if so, how have you overcome these?**

*As a woman, I was often underestimated. And Chinese artists generally have quite a hard time entering the Western system. Overall, less than 1% of all contemporary artists manage to start an international career here anyway.*

*When I was starting, I didn't have any connections or money. I also had to become fluent in both English and German. But I never gave up, concentrated on my work and always wanted improvement. And through my work I slowly managed to build a network and to gain more attention.*



Xiyao Wang in front of her painting at her solo show at König Gallery in Berlin, Photo by Roman März, Courtesy of Xiyao Wang and König Gallery. Painting: On the way to Penglai Island No.1, 330x680cm, 2023

**Women's art appears less frequently than men's at auctions and in galleries. Investment in women's art is also a fraction of investment in men's art. Why do you think that imbalance is still so strong and how do you think it can be fixed?**

*Yes, unfortunately it is true, that is also why I am trying so hard. For me there should be no difference between male and female artists and if you are good enough you will become part of the art world. For example Marina Abramović, Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois are all great artists and will be part of art history.*

**You've got a solo exhibition coming up at Perrotin in New York. Tell us a little bit about that.**

*I am very excited about it as it will be my first solo show in the U.S and Perrotin is one of the top ten galleries in the world. They have more than eleven exhibition spaces in different countries. And they also have a beautiful exhibition space in their own building on the Lower East Side.*

*I am working on a new series of works now that has never been shown anywhere before. I want to give the audience in America a surprise. You are all welcome to visit my exhibition.*

**What are your ambitions going forward, both for yourself and for women artists more generally?**

*I wanted to achieve long-term success in the art world and thus go down in art history with my name.*

---

**“If you are good enough you can now take your rightful place in the art world.”**

---

*I had time to try, to make mistakes and to improve. After many years of creating, I managed to find my artistic language and consistently paint at a stable level, my goal always being to progress even further in my development. This is a process that will never end for me. To all women artists I want to say: The quality of the work is the most important thing of all. Focus on your own work, if you are good enough you can now take your rightful place in the art world.*

**Thank you so much, Xiyao!**

**Xiyao Wang's solo show opens on January 12 at Perrotin, 130 Orchard St, New York, NY 10002.**

**Thank you so much for reading and subscribing. Comments, questions and criticism always welcome. And please feel free to share this newsletter with**

*others who you think might enjoy it.*

*Ps: This newsletter does not generate a significant portion of my income. But creating it takes time, energy, and effort. So if you enjoy reading my work and can afford to, I would love for you to consider upgrading to a paid subscription. For those of you who already pay, thank you! You're what keeps this publication going.*

## Comments



Write a comment...

---

© 2023 Josie Cox · [Privacy](#) · [Terms](#) · [Collection notice](#)  
[Substack](#) is the home for great writing