

## Superposition. Jinny Yu

June 5 – August 24, 2025

Curators: ART/AROUND, in collaboration with Georgiana Uhlyarik

A concept in quantum physics, superposition refers to the ability of a system to be defined in multiple different states, and it is possible for it to exist in more than two.

Jinny Yu's work is philosophical, musing over abstraction, painting, and positionalities. For this exhibition, she chose the title after conversations with the quantum physicist, Shohini Ghose. The concept of superposition offered a timely semantic alignment to engage with her concerns about power dynamics, spatial configurations and coexistences. With colour and composition, Yu hints at alternate dimensions, confounding our perceptions and encouraging us to reconsider how we understand the world around us. By doing so, she inspires us to move beyond the fixed limitations of Cartesian perspectives and, instead, embrace a multi-dimensional worldview where we coexist in multiple states simultaneously.

Yu moved to Montreal from Seoul in 1988 and studied with Guido Molinari and other important artists at Concordia University, all of whom influenced her sensibilities, formal explorations, and modes of production. The exhibition at the Guido Molinari Foundation presents her latest series *Inextricably Ours* (2021–ongoing) alongside significant works from the past decade. Yu consistently probes aesthetic and ethical questions, engaging the viewer's senses and prompting introspection.

Since 2015, she has been navigating political themes more directly in her work. Her soundwork *Don't You Like Us?* (2016) emerges from her immersive

painting installation *Don't They Ever Stop Migrating?* (2015), delving into the polarizing debate on mass migration across the Mediterranean Sea. The soundwork incorporates remixed lines from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), weaving them into a soundscape of collaged voices. Laden with suspicion and hostility, these voices confront the listener:

Who are you? What are you? Where did you come from? I think you are the cause of all this! You're frightening the children. Don't you like us?

This piece relies solely on sound to address the violence of otherness.

Conscious of the socio-political shift that was happening around the world, Yu's video work *Not Even Silence Gets Us Out of the Circle* (2017) is about release and uncertainty. The ritualistic paper burning, with ashes dissipating into the air, serves as a metaphor for material impermanence.

In the series of paintings *why does its lock fit my key?* (2018), Yu explores spatial axonometry with oil paint on aluminum. Triangles or trapezoids dialogue with the surrounding space. Hung askew, there is always a line that is perpendicular or parallel to the walls. So, the frame of painting is simply a section of reality—our perception of it—which is expressed as straight. There are many other realities elicited in these multistable paintings that enable Yu to hint at the idea of a pluri-dimensional world, as later developed through cuboid *kippbilder*<sup>1</sup> images.

In *Perpetual Guest* (2019), Yu investigated the relationship between the painting and the surrounding space. Gazing downward at paintings placed on the floor instead of on a wall, viewers needed to acknowledge the floor, hence the land, below, through the transparency of non-tempered glass. When one of these panels was stepped on accidentally, mirroring colonial

aggression upon Indigenous land, the artist responded by repairing what was broken by turning the work into *Perpetual Guest 2019/2022 Impossibility of Repair* (2023). Yu explains:

I came to realize that repairing my work was possible because it had an original state in good condition. In contrast, Indigenous-settler relationships cannot be repaired, as there never was a good original state to begin with. It is our responsibility to build a mode of harmonious cohabitation, rather than attempting to repair what was never whole.<sup>2</sup>

How do we then coexist? The title of her series *Hôte* (2020)<sup>3</sup> in the form of an artist's book featuring prints of forty-two drawings, was inspired by Jacques Derrida's reflections on the ethics of hospitality.<sup>4</sup> Like the French Algerian philosopher, Yu questions how we deal with the sense of belonging, especially when one is not invited by the original inhabitants of the land. How can we really reconcile?

I was exploring what it means for me to live here as a settler/immigrant on the unceded territory of Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation [Yu lives in Ottawa]. I was invited by the colonial power to come and settle here. I was not invited by the original inhabitants of this land, the real host.<sup>5</sup>

The motif of a door and its dynamic relationship with the space around it allows Yu to reflect on the discrepancy between being a welcomed versus unwelcomed guest, and the sense of responsibility that being a guest and host entails. While initially, the positions of guest and host were clearly defined in the drawings, they became more complex, transitioning visually from black on white to grey and grey, as the series progressed.

Yu's formal and conceptual evolution culminates in *Inextricably Ours* (2021–ongoing), her latest paintings on

aluminum and works on paper. As we flip our gaze back and forth between receding-and-protruding forms, we are entranced in a cerebral play of perceptual reversal. Coalescing as one *and* many at the same time, these shapes become effective visual metaphors for Yu's existential multi-paradigms and her quest to scrutinize the positions of host and guest and what it means to belong.

As her cuboids evolve into more open structures that shift to the sides losing their centrality and expand beyond the physical limits of the pictorial frame, we are reminded of the importance to fathom what exists beyond the visible. Her shapes suggest just that. She plays with the space and our intellectual boundaries, challenging our grasp of reality, while trying to make sense of her own. With their layered, colorful planes paralleling quantum superposition, Yu's paintings offer us multi-dimensional spaces, where coexistence seems possible in various forms and realities.

A manifest to Yu's intellectual curiosity, social activism and formal mastery, the works in this exhibition open portals through which, albeit briefly, the artist allows us to stare at uncertainty *and* at a potential gestalt.

– ART/AROUND

- 1 "Kippbilder" (German for "tipping pictures" or "flip pictures") refers to multistable images or ambiguous images that can be perceived in two or more distinct ways, depending on the viewer's focus or perspective.
- 2 Jinny Yu quoted in Cheryl Sim (2024), "Perpetual Questions in the Art of Jinny Yu", in Robert Tombs et al., *Marina Roy, Jinny Yu & the Painted Object*, Ottawa: The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, p.47 [with modifications from personal communication with the artist, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025].
- 3 The drawings are now in the collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
- 4 In his two-year seminar series at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris delivered between 1995 and 1997, Derrida asked a series of related questions about responsibility and "the foreigner" that were then published under the title *Hôte (Hospitality)*.
- 5 Yu, Jinny (2021), "Studio Visit with Jinny Yu, *Hôte*", [video] <https://www.jinnyyu.com/blog-wells/korean-culture-centre-canada-studio-visit-with-jinny-yu>