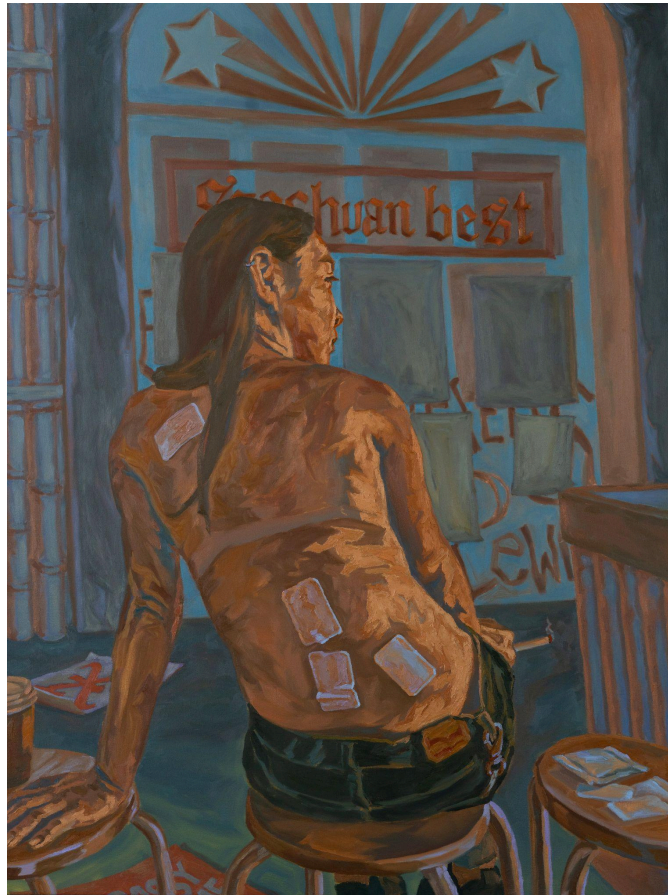


Cantor Arts Center

Livien Yin: Thirsty

August 21, 2024–February 2, 2025

The artist's first solo museum exhibition merges archival research with contemporary and historical subjects to create speculative portraits of Asian American communities across time



(JUNE 20, 2024—STANFORD, CA) – The [Cantor Arts Center](#) at Stanford University is pleased to present *Livien Yin: Thirsty*, the first solo museum exhibition of Brooklyn-based Chinese-American artist and Stanford MFA '19 alum **Livien Yin**. On view from **August 21, 2024** to **February 2, 2025**, the exhibition features new and recent paintings by Yin that reflect their research-driven approach to creating imaginative reconstructions of contemporary subjects alongside historical Asian Americans and their environments. *Livien Yin: Thirsty* is one of three 2024 exhibitions of the **Asian American Art Initiative (AAAI)**—a cross-disciplinary, institutional commitment at Stanford University dedicated to the study of artists and makers of Asian descent—curated by AAAI co-founder, Associate Curator **Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander** with **Kathryn Cua**, curatorial assistant for the AAAI.

“This exhibition perfectly exemplifies the interdisciplinary scope of the Asian American Art Initiative, as Livien Yin received their MFA from Stanford in 2019; has been inspired by archival material in Stanford Special Collections; and now makes their institutional debut at the Cantor with their first solo museum

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exhibition” says **Veronica Roberts, John and Jill Freidenrich Director at the Cantor**, “The museum is so proud to shepherd in this full-circle moment for Yin and celebrate their work.”

Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, AAI co-director and Robert M. and Ruth L. Halperin Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, comments: “Livien Yin stands out as one of the most exciting young artists working today, and we are thrilled to be presenting their inaugural museum solo show. Their innovative approach to interweaving personal stories with historical narratives, particularly highlighting the presence of Asian Americans in the Bay Area, enhances our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Supporting an artist at this pivotal stage in their career aligns with the mission of the Asian American Art Initiative, and we are honored that Yin has chosen to collaborate with us on this project.”

Featuring Yin’s evocative painting series *Paper Suns*—which reexamines narratives about Chinese migration to the U.S. during the era of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943)—alongside new works capturing the enduring intergenerational connections within the Asian diaspora, the exhibition pays tribute to the radical resilience of Asian American networks across time. Yin’s paintings create spaces of possibility, unfixing the past while focusing on everyday practices of transformation often ignored or suppressed within historical narratives.

Developed over several years, *Paper Suns* takes the form of fictional portraits inspired by the Chinese-born “paper sons and daughters” who entered the U.S. by obtaining forged documents stating they were children of U.S. citizens. Drawing from archival sources, including those in **Stanford Special Collections**, Yin’s canvases stage speculative histories in the absence of extant visual documentation, using the gaps in the historical record as fertile ground to envision the joys, pleasures, and pains of these individuals—capturing the indescribable and ephemeral elements of the so-called “paper” identities.

In *Coaching Notes* (2021, 2024), for example, Yin captures the historical significance of seemingly mundane acts. Specifically, the means by which the “paper sons and daughters” clandestinely memorized details of their forged backgrounds—from village maps to family trees—outlined on paper notes which were smuggled in everyday food items like fruit, pork buns, and peanuts, as the artist’s compositions zoom in on the individuals’ hands and the papers themselves. By contrast, *Dreaming Host* (2022) zooms out to investigate the context and political resonances of a public as opposed to private event, as Yin’s painting reimagines the enigmatic figure known only as the “Chinese Beauty,” who often dozed off during her appearance at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. By enlisting a friend dressed in contemporary attire to portray the woman succumbing to sleep before a backdrop of expectant onlookers in period clothing, Yin invites viewers to consider the implications of this widely circulated incident. In doing so, Yin suggests that the “Chinese Beauty” may have feigned sleep as an act of defiance in the face of exploitation.

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Yin's newest works extend their exploration of Asian American history by poignantly chronicling cross-generational connections. Portraying their friends and collaborators in vibrant, intimate portraits, the artist crafts a visual tapestry highlighting the transnational experience of assimilation, the rediscovery of ancestral knowledge, and the sharing of critical histories of defiance. By foregrounding their community, Yin reveals the networks necessary for propagating shared wisdom and compassion across generations.

Juxtaposing a scene of the artist and a friend in contemporary garb playing pool against a backdrop of men in mid-century dress, *Manang* (2024) exemplifies the intergenerational conceit of Yin's recent work. Paying tribute to the history of the International Hotel (I-Hotel) and its significance in Asian American activism in the Bay Area, this painting draws inspiration from a farewell party at the Lucky M Pool Hall, a famous hangout spot for the I-Hotel residents, before its closure. Primarily housing low-income elderly Filipino and Chinese men—many of whom were lifelong bachelors due to immigration bans on Asian women—the I-Hotel became a symbol of resistance for Asian Americans when its future was threatened by eviction. Yin's blending of timelines and figures—current friends and community ancestors—reflects and celebrates the enduring impact of the I-Hotel's legacy.

Amid a far more contemporary scene of moving boxes and a suitcase, *The Comma Between* (2024) similarly features a friend of the artist, seen shortly after relocating to a temporary living situation. A mirror perched atop the suitcase offers a second view of their friend's profile. Reflecting on the process of bifurcation, redefinition, and growth, this work encapsulates the artist's own evolving and increasingly nuanced definition of home, rooted in friendship and proximity to loved ones.

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ABOUT LIVIEN YIN

Livien Yin (b. 1990, Boston, MA; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY) received their MFA in Art Practice at Stanford University and their BA in Studio Art at Reed College. Recent solo exhibitions include *Ka-la-fo-ne-a*, Friends Indeed, San Francisco (2022) and *Paper Suns*, The New Gallery, Calgary (2021). Notable group exhibitions include *Expanding the Collections*, New-York Historical Society (2023); *The Descendants*, curated by Melanie Lum, Micki Meng, and Kevin Poon at K11 MUSEA, Hong Kong (2023); and *Wonder Women*, curated by Kathy Huang at Jeffrey Deitch, New York and Los Angeles (2022). Yin has completed residencies at Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Denniston Hill, Shandaken Projects, Silver Art Projects and Headlands Center for the Arts, among others. Their work is in the permanent collections of the Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University; New-York Historical Society; Imina Paula Museum; Brazil; and ICA Miami.

ABOUT THE ASIAN AMERICAN ART INITIATIVE:

Based at the Cantor Arts Center, the Asian American Art Initiative (AAAI) is dedicated to the study of artists and makers of Asian descent. Co-founded by Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, Robert M. and Ruth L. Halperin Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, and Marci Kwon, Assistant Professor of Art History at Stanford, and announced in January 2021, the AAAI encompasses a range of activities, including collecting and exhibiting works of Asian American and Asian diaspora artists; preserving archival materials; fostering undergraduate and graduate education; and cultivating community collaboration and dialogue through public programming.

The AAAI aims to establish Stanford as a leading academic and curatorial center for the study of Asian American and Asian diaspora artists. Rather than a discrete identity category, the AAAI approaches the term “Asian American” as a diverse and relational term that signifies the interplay of social inclusion, exclusion, and racialization, as well as connections among East, Southeast, and South Asia; the Pacific Islands; and the Americas. The AAAI strives to foster innovative, interdisciplinary research into the work by Asian American and Asian diaspora makers.

ABOUT THE CANTOR ARTS CENTER:

Serving the Stanford campus, the Bay Area community, and visitors from around the world, the Cantor Arts Center provides an outstanding cultural experience for visitors of all ages. Founded when the university opened in 1891, the historic museum was expanded and renamed in 1999 for lead donors Iris and B. Gerald Cantor. The Cantor’s collection spans 5,000 years and includes more than 41,000 works of art from around the globe. The Cantor is an established resource for teaching and research on campus. Free admission, tours, lectures, and family activities make the Cantor one of the most visited university art museums in the country.

IMAGES:

Image 1: Livien Yin (b. 1990, Boston, Massachusetts; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY). *All You Can Ache*, 2022. Oil on canvas. Collection of Suzanne Modica and Brandon McGregor, New York. Image courtesy of the artist and Micki Meng. Photo: Zhidong Zhang. Image 2: Livien Yin (b. 1990, Boston, Massachusetts; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY), *Coaching Notes IV*, 2024. Oil on wood panel. Courtesy of the artist and Micki Meng. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

EXHIBITION CREDITS:

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VISIT THE MUSEUM:

Cantor Arts Center
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Stanford, CA
T: 650-723-4177
<https://museum.stanford.edu/>

Wednesday – Sunday
11:00am – 5:00pm
FREE ADMISSION

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