

PODIUM

皿家 · Min-jia ·
World of 世界
生生 Interiors

OPENING: 20 SEP 2025, SAT, 2-7 PM

DATE: 20 SEP—15 NOV 2025

開幕: 2025 年 9 月 20 日 (星期六) 下午 2 至 7 時

展期: 2025 年 9 月 20 日至 11 月 15 日



MIN-JIA. *Growing Laughing Living Body*, 2024 - 2025,
Hand-carved vellum, mineral pigments, stainless steel, fly screen, 300 x 450 cm (118 x 177 in).
© Min-Jia (2025), Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong

PODIUM is proud to present 'World of Interiors', Urumqi-born, Berlin-based artist **Min-Jia**'s first solo exhibition in their career and with the gallery. Built upon their apprenticeship in *Shaanxi Huaxian* shadow puppetry under master **Wang Tianwen** in Xi'an, China, this body of work samples and remixes traditional techniques, materials, and ornamental forms across cultures, creating an enigmatic site from which to investigate the interior life of the migrant. Drawing from the analysis of how economic and migratory cycles construct subjectivities in Chinese-Australian writer **Aurelia Guo**'s eponymous book, as well as the artist's experience in the transnational Asian diaspora, the exhibition fractures and recycles narratives of transformation to destabilise myths of origin and identity. The exhibition opens on 20 September (Saturday) from 2 to 7 pm and is on view until 15 November (Saturday).

Min-Jia draws from a rich library of ornamental references, including Chinese folk art, orientalist kitsch, Art Nouveau works by queer and women artists, and Boys' Love and Girls' Love anime. In Chinese, the term for ornament, encompassing both disguise (裝) and enhancement (飾), carries dual meanings—to make believe and to camouflage one's identity. Their practice mobilises the artificial and ornamental as tactics to traverse hostile environments, amping up the intensity of traditional forms—a botanical motif, a domestic interior—till they are eroticised, threatening, and writhing with

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life. In pace with the artist's literary touchstones **Aurelia Guo** and **Hiromi Ito**, vitality and artificiality are in a constant dialectic, and neither is original: the idea of 'nature' is meaningless here. Following the words of **Anne Anlin Cheng** in her book *Ornamentalism*, their interchange drives healing: 'the flesh that passed through objecthood needs ornament as a way back to itself.'

This reciprocity between flesh and objecthood is inherent to the processes of shadow puppetry. The artist revives vellum—chemically treated cow skin—into a pliable, temperamental material that reacts to its environment like living flesh. Thousands of cuts and punctures reveal the motif before it is painted, dried, and assembled into a puppet substantial enough to endure performance. Like the artist **Guo Fengyi**, who drew as a practical exercise to guide energy through the meridians of her sick body, **Min-Jia**'s practice rhymes with their experience living with chronic illness. Puppetry forces the rhythms of the studio to take a methodical pace, starting and stopping to let the material dry, hydrate, stretch, or shrink. It involves both an intuitive sensitivity to the conditions of work and a confident willingness to distort and reshape flesh.

The resultant puppet is a ghostly fantasy whose material nevertheless continues to reassert itself. As it is disassembled and reassembled for transit, it bends and changes dimension in response to heat and humidity, its ornamental, translucent joints (mirroring the artist's painful joints) holding the juxtaposition between strength and fragility. *Shaanxi* shadow puppetry is a migratory art form which has fallen on both sides of the centre and periphery distinction throughout its history. Its narratives originate in the imperial court, where it was produced by and for concubines, and later proliferated and regionalised by travelling troupes who told local stories alongside court operas. Today, the remaining practitioners are being integrated into a new myth of national cultural heritage, as China seeks to reconstruct its post-Cultural Revolution history. Simultaneously, it has left traces throughout the Western world and beyond stemming from the trafficking of Orientalist design traditions.



MIN-JIA. *Mother I*, 2024 - 2025,
Hand-carved vellum, mineral pigments, stainless steel,
plexiglass, 3D printed resin, motor, hardware
110 x 120 x 111 cm (43.3 x 47.2 x 43.7 in)
With mechanical engineering by Salvador Marino.
© Min-Jia (2025),
Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong

The history of *Shaanxi* puppetry reveals the insufficiency of discourses regarding authenticity, 'high art', appropriation, and national culture. It resonates with the exhibition's titular source, **Aurelia Guo**'s *World of Interiors*, which tracks how the work of survival for those on the margins engenders an aesthetic mixture of poverty and opulence, bringing together traditions which otherwise define themselves in opposition to one another. In turn, its title is borrowed from the British design magazine which made its name off the promise of exclusive access to the domestic lives of the world's bourgeoisie and pedigreed. It revealed interiors imbued with porcelain, folk art, and imported furniture. Despite their supposed tradition and antiquity, the status of these spaces was constructed by a distinctly modern global interchange dependent on the labour of the abject and excluded—rural people, migrants, and queers. This exhibition draws on the temporary interiors of travelling puppetry troupes to reconstruct a parallel domestic sphere, where the vitality of these aesthetic forces can be let loose to play.

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MIN-JIA. *The Seed III*, 2024,
Oil and mineral pigments on canvas, 70 x 180 cm each (27.6 x 70.9 in each).
© Min-Jia (2025), Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong

The Seed I-III's (2024) composition is adapted from a Japanese concept, 'Kusōzu' (九相図)—the 'Paintings of the Nine Stages of Decay', a genre of Buddhist art dating from the Kamakura Period. By painting the gradual decomposition of a dead body—usually a beautiful woman who dies, rots, is eaten by wild animals, then vanishes into dust—the practitioners detach from their earthly desires, specifically sexual appetites, through the contemplation of impermanence. If a monk felt he was being tempted by bodily desires, he would go to a cemetery and observe a rotting body. Min-Jia's reimagination is a ferocious rendition that refuses the repudiation of sensuality intended by the original.

In the first canvas, the reclining female subject is consumed by her branchlike hair. The cessation of life does not at all disrupt her elegant stance, with no trace of blood, withering, or decay. Still erotically potent, her nipples and vulva glisten on the canvas. In the next frame, the space has darkened and the subject is encased in a stylised bondage cocoon. Her clitoris has become a stem-like, two-faced creature, weeping under the stress of transformation. Finally, the subject metamorphoses into a whimsical landscape as her clitoris bursts into anthropomorphic flowers locked in intense conflict and riotous celebration. Echoing the Buddhist understanding of emptiness and rebirth, **Min-Jia** employs the subject of chrysalis to illustrate how one's existence continues cyclically without a permanent self, conditioned by karmic forces and mental states from preceding lives.



MIN-JIA. *Wild Grass on the Riverbank*, 2024-2025,
Oil and mineral pigments on canvas, 70 x 180 cm each (27.6 x 70.9 in each).
© Min-Jia (2025), Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong

Wild Grass on the Riverbank (2024-2025) continues the artist's exploration of **Hitomi Itō's** eponymous book-length poem, which tracks the life of children who migrate between the California wasteland and the Japanese riverbank. Traversing mythologised landscapes of volatile proliferation, the children contend with shape-shifting mothers, living father-corpses, and weeds that tangle with reproductive

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organs. Here, the artist channels the uncanniness of migrant life with a portrait of a subject becoming-landscape. Extraordinary sunrays illuminate a jarringly flaming expanse of soil, while the horsetails rise like hands that dress and strip, bind and release, reshaping the migrant's body into a part of the land.



MIN-JIA.
Falling Goose and Flying Goose, 2023,
Graphite on paper
42 x 59.4 cm (16.5 x 23.4 in)
© Min-Jia (2025), Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong

When **Min-Jia** was first diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 2023, they created three works of graphite on paper, including *Falling Goose and Flying Goose* (2023), *Dreaming Turtle and Farting Rabbit* (2023), and *White Peacock and Shadow* (2023), reflecting the artist's experience of chronic pain. Constructed with intricate wheel joints and meticulous anatomies, these hybrid trickster characters represent the artist's experimentations with translating shadow puppetry to drawing, allowing the puppets' skeletal sutures and joints (骨縫) to operate as motifs free of the physical requirements of puppetry. As drawings, the puppets contort into positions that would stress their delicate joints, which require the same care and attention the artist must give to their own body.

Min-Jia's latest drawings, *Living Body* (2025) and *Growing Laughing Living Body* (2025), serve as the conceptual foundation for their large-scale installation featured in this solo exhibition. They build on the explorations into bodily distortion and character in the artists' earlier drawings, incorporating the influence of fetish manga and queer anime such as *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (which themselves borrow motifs from **Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh** and **Aubrey Beardsley**). In the latter work, the artist first depicts an androgynous nude on the left, forcing their body into a tense bridge pose, meanwhile, their face contorted into an agonised yet triumphant scream. In the adjacent drawing, their body is encased in a braided bondage suit, sprouting impish beings seemingly blasted by a strong wind. This inseparable reciprocity of pleasure and suffering, bondage and freedom, self and world is foundational to the artist's reading of queer, migrant, and disabled interiority.

Growing Laughing Living Body (2024-2025) is an architectural shadow puppet depicting a body in mummification bondage. Measuring 3 meters high by 4.5 meters wide, the work belongs to the traditional genre of 'large scene': a stationary puppet enclosing and defining the stage area, often depicting an archetypal setting like an emperor's palace or a monster's cave. As the large scene activates the gallery space as a shadow play, viewers join the performance as living puppets alongside the monstrous beings that appear elsewhere in the exhibition. The weed-like figures that sprout from the limb-like columns appropriate the role of flags in traditional large scenes, twisting their bodies and hair into flag poles and flags respectively. Like its traditional predecessors, this work activates the contradiction between the enclosed domestic space it portrays and its ephemeral, portable substance. Its body strains in perpetual tension as it sets the stage for an interior realm of intermorphic bodies and shifting landscapes.

Mother I-IV (2024-2025) is a series of four kinetic shadow puppets calling to mind the four seasons. Backlit and translucent like spirits or apparitions, they spread their legs, perpetually giving birth to spinning, membrane-like wheels. Modelled after hubcaps found on the streets of Berlin, the wheels resurrect a discarded ornament and repurpose it as a representation of the Buddhist wheel of life, as the birthing mothers take the role of the God of Death. The puppets move slowly and deliberately,

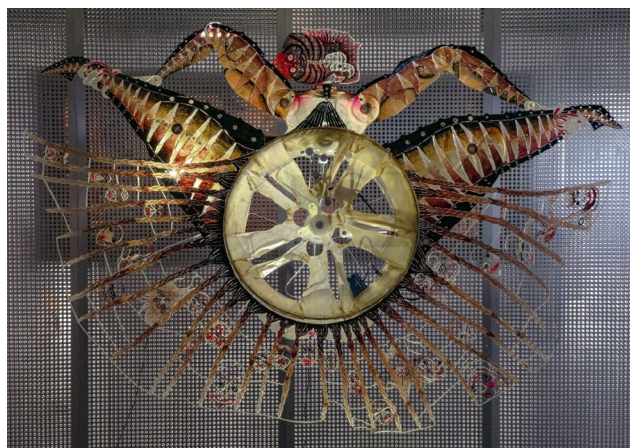
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pausing and resuming at random moments, oscillating between life and lifelessness. Pinned on the wall like butterfly specimens in a collection, their mechanical skeletons cast an eerie, enlarged shadow of their silhouettes on the wall.



MIN-JIA. *Mother IV*, 2024 - 2025,
Hand-carved vellum, mineral pigments, stainless steel,
plexiglass, 3D printed resin, motor, hardware
80 x 100 x 113 cm (31.5 x 39.4 x 44.5 in)
With mechanical engineering by Salvador Marino.
© Min-Jia (2025), Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong

In *Mother III* of Autumn, tints of sepia osmose across the puppet's body. She spreads open her vulva and fans out an array of cascading faces that remind one of the decaying leaves of the season. Rather than being a grim reminder of cessation, the detaching faces display animated expressions that symbolise a vigour of life, as if they were just borne by the Mother. By interweaving birth and death into the puppets, where the spinning hubcaps into each of their vaginas resemble the Buddhist wheel of life, the Mothers have become sole adjudicators in propelling samsara—the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. As the ornamented wheel continues to drive and loop, the artist conveys their faith not in liberation from suffering, but in a perpetual revolution that transforms, unsettles, and reshapes the thresholds of bondage and pain.



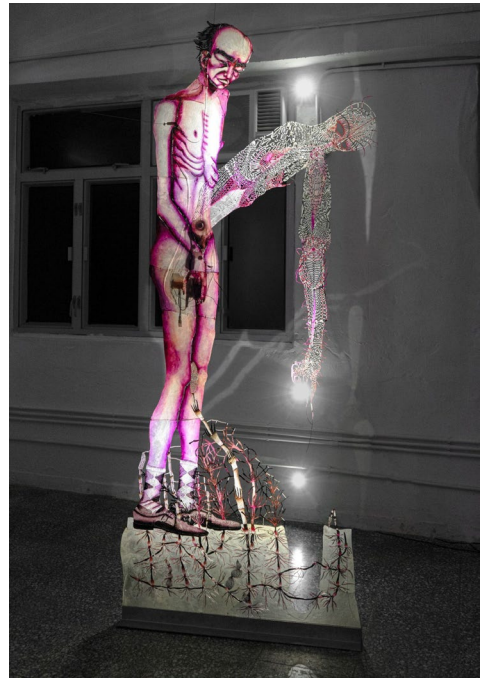
MIN-JIA. *Mother III*, 2024 - 2025,
Hand-carved vellum, mineral pigments, stainless steel,
plexiglass, 3D printed resin, motor, hardware
136 x 188 x 111 cm (53.5 x 74 x 43.7 in)
With mechanical engineering by Salvador Marino.
© Min-Jia (2025), Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong

Chilling tones of blue approach upon *Mother II* of Winter, where she firmly pulls the two long braids that branch out from the centre towards oppositional ends, warping them into gyrating forms. Here, the mirrored motifs of aeroplanes and serpents—planes tracing the arcs of migration, snakes embodying the shedding of skin—channel the parallel between migratory and biological cycles. Diasporic life becomes a rhythm of departure and renewal, where even winter gestures toward the arrival of a new beginning.

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The 2-meter-tall *Father* (2024-2025) is derived from the character of Father in **Hiromi Ito's** *Wild Grass on the Riverbank*. Trapped by the pull of gravity, he stands in naked exhaustion; his meridians and veins separate from his body, forming a ghost that compulsively and continually roots and uproots itself into the earth. Surrounding the Father is a landscape of proliferating horsetails by his feet—an invasive weed widespread across North America, Europe, and Asia that is known to be highly resilient to natural disasters and herbicides. Such adaptability, however, may work against the unwanted vegetation if they are not in keeping with the larger plan envisioned by others. The Father embodies this contradiction: Sisyphus-like, he is defined by the cycle that confines him, becoming himself through endless return.

MIN-JIA. *Father*, 2024 - 2025,
Hand-carved vellum, mineral pigments, stainless steel, plexiglass, 3D printed resin,
motor, hardware, 208 x 83.5 x 10 cm (81.9 x 32.9 x 3.9 in).
With mechanical engineering by Salvador Marino.
© Min-Jia (2025), Courtesy of the artist and PODIUM, Hong Kong



About Min-Jia

Min-Jia (b. 2001, lives and works in Berlin) destabilises the myths of origin and identity through narratives of transformation. Their work samples and remixes folk and ornamental arts and their global transformations—from Orientalist kitsch to Art Nouveau to manga—to re-examine fantasies of the Other across canonical and outsider art histories. They have completed a *Shaanxi Huaxian* shadow puppetry apprenticeship under **Master Wang Tianwen** in Xi'an, China, and graduated from Berlin University of the Arts (UdK). They have exhibited in group exhibitions at ACUD Galerie, Berlin (2025), Tofu Space, Copenhagen (2025), PODIUM, Hong Kong (2024), James Fuentes Gallery, New York (2024), Franz Kaka, Toronto (2024), Bernheim, London (2023), A.I. Gallery with Linseed Projects, London (2023), X Museum, Beijing (2023), Hunt Gallery, Toronto (2022), among others. Their works can be found in the collection of the Royal Bank of Canada. They are currently completing their forthcoming novel, *Mechanical Tail*.

Please contact **Cusson Cheng**, *Co-founder and Curatorial Director*, at cusson@podiumgallery.com, or call +852 3165 1452 for further information.

About PODIUM

Founded in 2023, Hong Kong-based contemporary art gallery PODIUM operates as a robust platform for underrepresented emerging and mid-career artists whose creative practices reflect idiosyncratic aesthetics and resonate with current social discourses. Through dynamic exhibition programmes, publications, and institutional collaborations, the gallery remains steadfast in fostering transnational dialogues and synergic and experimental growth among the international artistic community.

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