



PHYLLIS YAO
UN SOSPIRO

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER, 6-8 PM
14 NOVEMBER – 20 DECEMBER, 2025

27 WARREN STREET
W1T 5NB LONDON

Alice Amati is pleased to present *Un Sospiro*, the first exhibition in the UK of New York based artist Phyllis Yao (b. 1994), accompanied by a newly commissioned essay by curator and writer Jessica Wan.

“Phyllis Yao paints in the register of a sigh — the quiet span between exhale and silence. ‘Un Sospiro’, the title of her exhibition, borrows from Hungarian composer Franz Liszt’s étude of the same name, meaning a sigh, and captures her painting’s peculiar rhythm: poised between gesture and stillness, presence and disappearance. Like a chord fading into air, Yao’s work inhabits that in-between space — a breath between worlds where emotion, recollection and paint itself dissolve into one another.

Her paintings often emerge from memory and psychological resonance rather than direct depiction. In ‘Bedtime’ (2024), Yao captures her mother preparing for sleep in her apartment in China: a summer breeze stirs sheer curtains, the distant hum of the city filters in, and a baby resting in the middle of the bed. Walls and objects are suffused with warm burgundy tones to evoke a sense of safety and care. Here, the quotidian becomes emotional terrain: a moment of domestic ritual transforms into a meditation on memory, presence and affect.

The hushed, reflective quality of Yao’s interiors recalls Vilhelm Hammershøi, whose restrained palette and meditative spaces imbue silence with weight. Yet Yao’s rooms are permeable, occupying a space between observation and recollection, where paint texture carries the blurring of memories. In ‘Crying with My Student’ (2024), the dripping paintings on the background cabinets, the overlapping shadows, and the pastel pink hue spreading across the floor from the clothes of a crying child together create a dreamlike effect. The artist recalls, “She was crying and then it made me cry. We had this connection between us and we were complete strangers. I don’t teach her and we had so much difference, but it was incredible that we could have this moment.”

In the studio, Yao’s process foregrounds tactility and the serendipity of materials by allowing paint to flow, pool, and collide on the canvas, embracing the accidental textures that emerge from gesture rather than premeditated rendering. Drawing inspirations from a variety of sources from manga, comics, classical music, film to fictions, her painterly style has a fluid effect in a process of superimposing layers of objects and figures. In ‘Winter’s First Snow’ (2024), the juxtaposition of delicate branches and a bold geometric snowflake manifest as softness and clumsiness, intuition and deliberation that cohabit the surface. While the child wearing a chunky winter jacket is placed next to the exposed waste collection point, hinting at the imperfections and organic chaos in human existence and the natural world.



Alongside these domestic and exterior meditations, Yao engages with objects that carry humour, desire, and social resonance. In 'Currently Trending' (2025), a series of paintings centred on shoes and stencilled fashion motifs, black shoulder bags and boots rise against the forms of tree branches, their glossy surfaces colliding with gestural natural forms. These works explore consumer culture and gendered aspiration with a quiet irony: they are at once alluring and absurd, fetishised yet exposed, playful yet critically aware.

In 'Un Sospiro', Yao gently renders the mundane environments into rich emotional pictorial space through reconstructing the interior and exterior, object and idea. Her works invite contemplation of the ways memory, emotion, and sensation coalesce in time, articulated through a practice that embraces chance, texture, and colour as expressive agents. Through focusing on the visual and conceptual centre of a painting, Yao offers a vision of painting as both a repository of feeling and a site where the ephemeral breath of lived experience can be apprehended, fleeting yet resonant."

— Jessica Wan

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Phyllis Yao (b. 1994, Queens, NY) currently lives and works in New York City. Yao holds a BFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design (2016). Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include: 'Where is this hope on Earth?', MARCH, New York NY (2023); 'Feelings' – Chinese American Arts Council (CAAC)/Gallery 456, New York NY (2021); 'An Anemone Smiles at Me', Ed. Varie, New York NY (2018). Her work has been exhibited in group shows at The Spite Haus, Philadelphia PA; Personal Space, Vallejo CA; Hales Gallery, New York NY; King's Leap, New York NY, among others. She is a recipient of the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program Award 2024-25, and previously she has been an artist-in-residence at Shandaken: Storm King (New Windsor, NY) and Lijiang Studio (Yunnan Province, China).

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Alice Amati is a contemporary art gallery established in Fitzrovia in June 2023. The gallery is committed to fostering artists at the early stages of their career by often providing the opportunity for their first solo show in the city and a supportive context for artistic explorations and career development. Concerned with encouraging transnational dialogues around topical questions within society and art, Alice Amati brings together British and International artists through a challenging, experimental and rigorous exhibitions programme. Joining a cohort of young and established galleries in the burgeoning artistic scene of Fitzrovia, Alice Amati operates as a platform for new voices in the contemporary global artistic scene with a strong commitment to research, collaboration and diverse practices.

For more information, sales enquiries, interview and image requests please contact: info@aliceamati.com