

Kiang Malingue Play Gravity

馬凌畫廊
kiangmalingue.com

10 Sik On Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong
50 Eldridge St., New York, NY 10002

(Artist) Yirui Jia

(Opening)
Thur, 15 January, 6 – 8 PM

(Date)
16 January – 14 March 2025

(Gallery Hours)
Tue to Sat, 12 – 6 PM

(Location)
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Kiang Malingue is pleased to present at its Hong Kong location “Play Gravity”, Yirui Jia’s first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Yirui Jia was born in China in 1997 and moved to the US in 2015. She graduated with a BFA from Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania in 2019 and an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York in 2022. In the last five years, Jia has presented a series of boisterous, multilayered paintings driven by unplanned cadenza and relentless overpainting, building a highly theatricalised world that is colourful and exuberant, communicating between intuition and lived experience. She understands painting as a process of impulse and detour, commanding recurring characters such as an alien-like skeleton and a heroic one-eyed bride who freely changes into a warrior, an astronaut, or an untamed femme fatale.

Jia has created for the current exhibition more than twenty paintings that dilate on the spirited, volatile, and playfully expressive aspects of her art. A dozen paintings in “Play Gravity” depict an owl, or an assembly of the nocturnal bird soaring and perching against a vehemently vibrant backdrop. A giant and a small owl can be found in *Picnic* (2025); these cross-eyed, comical raptors bisect—effectively dismember—a reclining female figure who is seen playing a flute. The painting’s mottled surface accentuates the dishevelled, strewn feathers, nesting a slapdash reality that defies gravity, where one collides and intertwines haphazardly with another. *Storm Eye* (2025), along with a smaller version of it that incorporates a layer of painted newspaper, vertically divides the composition into two, leaving a fluttering owl to the right side of the picture. The highly deformed human figure next to it is the red-haired heroine that Jia has portrayed in many of her works; the artist’s frenzied brushstrokes transforms her into a fiery, cyclopean monument-figure, whose gaping maw resembles a violent volcanic crater.

Informed by the history of birds in art and literature—such as, most notably, Georg Baselitz’s bird paintings and Haruki Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*—Jia introduces birds into her practice as a vehicle to explore non-anatomical, non-representational possibilities. The playfully constructed, economically coloured owls dart and weave in curious gestures, scattering their plumage onto other things, landscapes, and skies, gnawing open a weightless, disorienting world. *Owl γ* (2025) and *Atlas 1* (2025) are similar in composition: the former gathering a flock of owls around an ice cube, and the latter a bloody piece of meat. Jia’s depiction of encirclement and references to Chaïm Soutine’s carcass paintings intensify a kind of vitalist ferocity that has for long permeated her art.

“Play Gravity” also includes a selection of paintings that revisit some of Jia’s favourite subjects, such as skeletons: *Front and Back* (2025) features a reclining flute player as in *Picnic*; this time, her body is divided by and entangled with the front and rear sides of the same winged skeleton. Traffic cones, Jia’s prominent signifier of grounded-ness and gravity, also return in *Storm Eye* and *Bones and Cones* (2025); the latter, along with the densely layered *To Be or Not To Be* (2025), incorporates found vintage maps and gel-devices Jia employs to create and encase additional layers

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of space in painting. The three “Legendary La Rose Noire” works, which clearly reference the Hong Kong film *92 Legendary La Rose Noire* directed by Jeffrey Lau, provide space for Jia’s shapeshifting femme fatale to take over and perform a nocturnal vitality that is spontaneous, uninhibited, mischievous, and victorious.

(About Yirui Jia)

Within Jia’s work resides a cast of characters—many of whom are derived from popular culture and cartoon influences to anthropomorphic objects and animals. Each character has their own complex identity within the childlike worlds in which they are portrayed, empowered by the reinvention of the ordinary. Jia embraces the idea of her paintings serving as visualized narratives to the sculptures and vice-versa. The first of her family to become an artist, Jia is inspired by daily life—the personal and shared experiences, “the undifferentiated universality of objects,” and, perhaps most importantly, the humor of it all.

Jia’s work has been featured in previous solo and group exhibitions at Kiang Malingue, Hong Kong; Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York; Historic Hampton House, Miami; COMA, Sydney; Jupiter Contemporary, Miami Beach; LKIF Gallery, Seoul; Bill Brady Gallery, Los Angeles; PM/AM Gallery, London; Each Modern, Taipei; Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing; Latitude Gallery, New York; We Space, Shanghai; WerkStadt, Berlin; and Hive Art Center, Beijing. Yirui currently lives and works in New York.